Identifying Sounds: Comparing interpretations of Sonic Histories of East Javanese Ludruk Folk Theater Performances

Condro Lukitosari, Sonya

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Sonya Condro Lukitosari

As you walk along the dusty, windy roads of an East Javanese village, the blare of twin sound systems resonates in your chest, competing with the incessant noise of hundreds of scooters buzzing along packed roads. *Cek . . . cek . . . 'ji . . . 'ro . . . lu* . . . Amateur sound engineers test the microphones while setting up two massive speakers, each framing a large wooden platform that has been built to span the village road in anticipation of a *ludruk* folk theater performance.[1] Come nightfall, the streets will fill with new sounds: the melodies of traditional Javanese Gamelan, the sonorous singing of performers, several overlapping strands of dialogue vying for dominance, the shouts of vendors and laughter of excited villagers, and the jokes of a comedian who doubles as the emcee welcoming everyone to the show.[2]

[1] *Ludruk* is a folk performing art that is believed to have developed in the villages near the East Javanese port city of Surabaya roughly around the 12th or 13th centuries (fig. 1). Although it has experienced multiple iterations over time, it is arguably most well-known for the version performed on a raised stage, with Gamelan musicians spread across the front of the stage (on a lower platform). The live theater performance is preceded by various opening acts (fig. 2) including traditional welcoming dances (*remo*) with live singing accompaniment, followed by a mix of traditional and popular songs performed by transgender performers, as well as men in drag. This is subsequently followed by an interlude by comedians, warming up the crowd, before the theater performance properly begins, lasting several hours (fig. 3).

[2] This is an example of how societies across Indonesia are extremely sound-saturated. As explored by Novak in *Keywords in Sound* (2015), the word *ramé* in Bahasa Indonesia refers to ". . . the clamorous noisiness of social life in festivals and marketplaces and imply a healthy and lively atmosphere." (126)

Figure 1: Map of East Java, Indonesia. 15 January, 2010, Wikimedia.

Figure 2: A Ludruk performance by Taruna Budaya in Malang, East Java. Photograph courtesy of Karen Elizabeth Schrieber.

Figure 3: Five comedians on stage at a Taruna Budaya ludruk performance. This comedic interlude is known as dagelan. Photograph courtesy of Karen Elizabeth Schrieber.

East Javanese folk theater, known as *ludruk*, has a long and storied history within the region. Its fame has invited scholars from around the world to analyze its richly layered performances through the lenses of history, semiotics, political science, ethnography, and anthropology. Although its appearances are humble, with a stage decorated with simple plywood painted backdrops, the sonic environment of *ludruk* is rich and has deep roots in the culture of the region. This article will explore the history of scholarship on *ludruk* through five differing authors, selected to give a sense of the evolving focus of the scholarly field between 1960 and the 2020s. Despite *ludruk* having been studied by numerous scholars from different disciplinary perspectives, this work has typically not centered its investigations specifically on the sounds that are inherent, and unique, to individual *ludruk* performances.[3] As much as movements, plot, costumes, and visuals make a *ludruk* performance, so do songs, ambient audience noise, call-and-response between performers and audience, and music. I therefore aim to examine the concept of movement through space in relation to *ludruk*. I do so by identifying the sonic resonances emanating from the stage, the shifting interplays between performer and audience, as well as the types of listening—such as passive or active—that audiences are noted to employ in five writings on *ludruk*. By cataloguing these sounds, or indeed their absence, I aim to emphasize that while analyzing *sound* is significant to ensuring a deeper understanding of the art medium, it has not yet been given the due it is owed in current scholarship.

The field of sound studies explores how concepts such as sound, music, noise, and listening can be understood as relational to space, especially within specific cultural and societal contexts. A significant contribution to the field is David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny's *Keywords in Sound*.[4] In chapter 6 of this text, Jonathan Sterne investigates the concept of 'hearing' and argues that, "[t]o

[3] This concern is not unique to *ludruk*, but also theater in a broader sense. See: *Theater Noise: the Sound of Performance*, edited by Lynne Kendrick and David Roesner, for explorations of sound and its lack of notice in scholarly analysis. The authors included in the collection expand on several case studies within 'Western' theatrical contexts.

[4] Novak and Sakakeeny, *Keywords in Sound*.

study hearing is to study the making of subjects, which means it is also to study the denigration and unmaking of subjects."[5] By this logic, scholars have inadvertently ignored a key element in the creation or unmaking of certain subjects within this art form in failing to give significant attention to the sounds that are at the heart of *ludruk*. In chapter 17, Andrew J. Eisenberg writes about notions of 'space.' In discussing the phenomenological and ontological interweaving of sound and space, he argues that "[s]ounds, after all, are always in motion; they emanate, radiate, reflect, canalize, get blocked, leak out, and so on."[6] Therefore, the movements of sound as tied to the interactions of performers on stage, as well as audience members, create a "spatial narrative" that must be considered in comprehensive analyses of *ludruk*.[7]

No *ludruk* performance is complete without the vast and competing sounds elicited by performers, musicians, and attendees alike.[8] The myriad sounds and noises of a *ludruk* performance are diverse and can be divided into several categories: commercial noises, sounds associated with the movement of bodies in differently textured spaces (both on and offstage), musical sounds, and dialogue. *Ludruk* performances typically begin in early evening, pausing to accommodate the calls to prayer; peddlers come from near and far to sell snacks such as steamed peanuts or light-up and musical toys, as well as hawkers selling steaming bowls of noodles and meatballs from their wheeled, movable stalls. Throughout the performance, people are up and about buying and eating snacks, while children play with their toys, and performers on stage continue their practiced production. By understanding the types of sounds that are elicited during any individual *ludruk* performance, readers can better appreciate how refocusing current scholarship around *ludruk*'s

[5] Sterne, "Hearing," 73.

[6] Eisenberg, "Space," 193; Phenomenology, according to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, refers to the "study of 'phenomena'": appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience."; Ontology refers to the branch of metaphysics dealing with the 'nature of being.' (See: Smith on Phenomenology.)

[7] Altman, "Sound Theory," 19 in Eisenberg, "Space," 193.

[8] The following paragraph's observations are based on my own experiences as the daughter of two traditional Javanese arts practitioners. I regularly attended music, dance, and *ludruk* performances growing up in Tumpang, Malang, East Java.

sonic landscapes adds meaning and context essential to a true understanding of this traditional art form.

This article takes a comparative and analytical approach to understanding how sound has been discussed in scholarship. Through highlighting five perspectives on *ludruk*, it offers insights into the difficulties scholars may face in not only writing about local cultural heritage, but also given the depth of context needed concerning not only the art form, the peoples, the nation, and its histories.[9] This paper puts existing visually-rooted scholarship into a dialogue with sound as a way of exploring the field's elisions and to point towards an approach that will emphasize sound as an important focus for scholarly analysis on the same level as the visual, cultural, and lyrical elements of this folk theater.

Scan the QR code to see an example of a ludruk performance by the Armada troupe based out of Malang. By skipping through the video, a few seconds or minutes at a time, the audience can get a sense of the structure, as well as visual and sonic elements, of a typical ludruk performance.[10]

The History of Scholarship on *Ludruk*

The following section of this article is broken down into three parts, each respective division offering: a brief biographical introduction to the authors chosen, contextualizing the time periods within which they were writing, as well as analyzing their approaches to the study of *ludruk*. The first division analyzes James Peacock's work, based on his anthropological observations from the 1960s.[11] The second, in turn, focuses on the 2009 work of Malaysian scholar Muhammad Febriansyah, discussing *ludruk*'s political history.[12] Given similarities in discussing the lyrics and song structures unique to *ludruk*, Febriansyah's work will be analyzed in conjunction with a chapter

[9] Typical plotlines and jokes performed on stage may reference: Indonesia's long history with colonization under Portuguese, Dutch, British, and Japanese occupation; concepts of freedom and self-sovereignty; as well as various contemporary political and socioeconomic situations experienced by the 'common man.'

[10] Kesenian Indonesia. "Ludruk Armada Malang—Walikukun."

[11] Peacock, "Comedy and Centralization," 345–56.

[12] Febriansyah, *Performing Arts and Politics*.

from a 2024 book focusing on insular Southeast Asia, titled *Oral Traditions*, written by Tom Hoogervorst and Rully Aprilia Zandra.[13] Finally, the article concludes with a discussion of Riksa Afiaty's interview with artist Moelyono, offering insider perspectives on how arts practitioners themselves view and write about *ludruk*.[14]

All of these authors wrote for an English-speaking audience, therefore allowing for a comparison in approaches in language use, descriptions, and topics of focus within *ludruk* performances. The subheadings utilized in this paper signify how these authors offer differing perspectives on the art form (observer, lyrical, and dialogic), offering the reader different approaches to how sound may, or has not yet been, referenced in their scholarship. Throughout each analysis, I direct attention to where sound and sound-related interactions are noted and where they could have been further highlighted. By doing so, I aim to show how this information already exists in many scholars' field notes, though perhaps not yet sufficiently identified or featured in their main writing.

An Observer's Perspective on *Ludruk*

James Peacock is an American psychologist and anthropologist whose academic career began in the 1950s.[15] His work predominantly focused on the anthropology of religion, studying Southeast Asia and southeastern United States. His work on *ludruk*, which he frames as "Indonesian Proletarian Drama," is based on his own anthropological work in Java in 1962-1963.[16] He focused on noting observations as a self-proclaimed 'outsider' to the performances, utilizing local informants to aid in note-taking and translation.[17] In addition to unpacking the plots of a series of *ludruk* performances, Peacock was also interested in the relationships these performances had to society.[18] Therefore, Peacock has contributed to scholarly

[13] Hoogervorst and Zandra, "Humor, Irreverence, Plurilingualism," In *Oral Traditions*.
[14] Afiaty and Moelyono, "Reklindling the Spirit."
[15] Carolina Story: Virtual Museum of University History, "James L. Peacock III."
[16] Peacock, *Rites of Modernization*.
[17] In the field of anthropology, this is considered as an 'etic' perspective of a culture, offering the viewpoint of an outsider looking in on a culture without taking part in it (reliance on observation instead of participation). (See: "Etic and Emic" by Study.com.)
[18] Junus, "Review: Rites of Modernization," 171–82.

writings on a sonic heritage of *ludruk* by focusing on language and performer-audience interaction, with his main contribution to scholarship on the art form being his in-depth explorations of plotlines.

In his 1967 article, "Comedy and Centralization in Java: the *Ludruk* Plays," Peacock offers descriptions of what he and his fieldwork informants observed over the course of eighty performances.[19] Peacock alternates between describing movements and rhythms of stories in broad strokes, to very detailed unpackings of the theatrical structure of a *ludruk* performance. Halfway through the article, Peacock spends time discussing the use of space within the theatrical performance and how the pacing and sounds used by the performers aid the audience in being transported into distinct environments. These environments reflect the daily lives of working people, harking back to *ludruk*'s humble origins and popular use of local vernacular that has made this art form (largely) stand the test of time.

> The rhythm of the dialogue parallels the rhythm of Surabaja commercial encounters rather than that of domestic visits. Domestic visits, among Javanese, are marked by a slow, smooth, crooning kind of rhythm. The rapid-fire thrusts and retreats of the duel are much more like the rhythm of bargaining in the marketplace.[20]

The previous passage demonstrates Peacock's efforts to describe his conceptions of space-making during a particular theatrical performance, highlighting how sound and rhythms are inherently tied to space. Due to this relationship, space therefore shapes individuals' or communities' actions and interactions with one another. This includes the pacing and volume of conversations, highlighting how certain outside factors relate to Sterne's subject-making.[21] Peacock also makes note of the impact of sound in helping engage with and create an empathetic audience through the

[19] Peacock, "Comedy and Centralization," 345–56.
[20] *Id.*, 350; Surabaya is a large port city in the northeast of Java.
[21] Sterne, "Hearing," 73.

evocation of familiar sound sensibilities.[22] In other words, by using pacing, a quick change in backdrop, as well as interspersions of musical hits to emphasize comedic moments, the audience is encouraged to use their imaginations to fill in additional sensory information from their own experiences. This allows each audience member to visualize, auralize, and thereby create a more personal connection to what is said on stage.[23]

What Peacock's passage most prominently highlights is how *ludruk* is created by and meant to appeal to the working classes. Elites would not be going to the markets themselves, as the market is dominated by the working class. The locality of the market-place and the sounds inherent to money-making in these specific spaces emphasize how cultural awareness is not only utilized, but also monetized, by hawkers in order to gain access to their targeted consumer-listeners.[24] This is reflected via market-scene or dialogue on-stage, where performers make the assumption that the listeners are aware of the cultural implications and sonic environments of the simulated, theatrical marketplace.

Peacock goes on to emphasize a character (a comedian) who best encapsulates, and employs, this connection with the audience. The author does so while also making brief notes of the call-and-response nature inherent to *ludruk*, especially in the portion of these performances that most closely resembles what a 'Western' audience may understand to be a stand-up comedian routine.

> He [the lone clown-comedian] sings a song which laments the plight of the common man: the government is corrupt, prices are rising, wages are dropping. While the clown sings, spectators, who address him by nick-name or other familiar term, tell him that they agree with what he sings: 'True, brother,' 'That's the way it is, Pak [Sir].'[25]

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[22] Eisenberg, "Space," 193-207.
[23] 'Auralize' and 'auralization' can be understood as counterparts to 'visualize' or 'visualization,' used to describe the imagining(s) of sound.
[24] Stevens, "Irasshai! Sonic Practice," 82–99.
[25] Peacock, "Comedy and Centralization," 345-56.

Continuing this analysis, Peacock provides a few more examples of the types of responses he heard and observed. The frequency and almost universality of audience interactions with the comedian at *ludruk* performances is reflected; the exclamations not quite harsh enough (and often too joyous) to be considered heckling. This audience participation is often humorous in nature, not only coming from the performer on stage, but also from the audience calling out. "He says he looked for work and found no vacancies. A listener tells him, 'Go on out, pal. Stop by my place. Not enough workers there to kill the mosquitoes.'"[26] After the performer further bemoans his low salary, which is meant to feed a family with four children, Peacock notes that a "listener responds sarcastically, 'Just buy an ounce [of rice] and eat it a grain at a time...'" Soon after, another listener "says cynically, 'Just eat *bubur* [porridge given to children] and drink a lot, then you'll be full.'"[27] This informal call-and-response reads as a cathartic experience where several audience members can not only air grievances, but also feel a sense of kinship and community with fellow audience members.

Peacock's inclusion of these conversations helps readers understand a few of the significant vocal elements of a *ludruk* performance, occurring on- and off-stage. However, what remains unmentioned is how the musicians, who are always listening and looking for moments to add to the comedic effect, may introduce sound effects and musical accompaniment signifying a joke that landed particularly well or shifts in topic and 'scene.' Additionally, despite the time period during which Peacock observed and wrote this article on *ludruk*, there is very little mention of the politics of the time, which is unusual for this comedic portion of the performance. [28] Given the secrecy and real consequences surrounding the events of the mid-1960s, the researcher likely

[26] *Id.*, 347.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] The mid-1960s signified a shift from the so-called 'Old Order' led by President Sukarno, to the rise of strongman President Suharto and his 'New Order' Indonesia. The main event attributing to this change in leadership is known as the September 30th Movement (*Gerakan September 30, G30s)*, which resulted in mass anti-Communist violence that began in 1965 and whose legacies reach into the present day. For more information, see Robinson, *The Killing Season* and Roosa, *Buried Histories*.

omitted this commentary for practical and safety reasons.[29] In summation, Peacock's fieldnotes consist of many mentions of sound-related elements of *ludruk*. However, although referenced, these sounds are not given the same level of attention as his descriptions and explanations of ludruk plotlines and characters.

Scan this QR code to see an example clip of the musical interplay between musicians, performers, and audience: around 19:15-21:57.[30]

A Lyrical Perspective of *Ludruk*

Muhammad Febriansyah, a political science senior lecturer at the Universiti Sains Malaysia in Pulau Pinang, introduces a broad history of Indonesian performing arts, including *ludruk*, under Suharto's New Order period.[31] In his 2009 working paper titled *Performing Arts and Politics in New Order Indonesia: Compromise and Resistance*, Febriansyah focuses on the impacts of politics on society, including analyses of their influence on song lyrics.[32] This article can be usefully read in tandem with Tom Hoogervorst and Rully Aprilia Zandra's chapter in Aone van Engelenhoven's 2024 book, *Oral Traditions in Insular Southeast Asia*, as each focuses on the lyrics and song structures unique to *ludruk* known as *parikan*.[33] Their differing perspectives on *parikan*—Febriansyah taking a more political history stance, while Hoogervorst and Zandra unpack the structure and impacts of these songs—allow readers to develop a deeper understanding of *ludruk* as a multi-layered performance art, with sound at its heart.

Although Febriansyah includes references to how performers utilized lyrics of traditional songs to resist or push back against authority, unfortunately, no audio of the performances of these

[29] Benedict Anderson, renowned scholar on Indonesia, was himself banned from entering Indonesia (from 1975 until the fall of Suharto in 1998) for his role in discussing the coup in the "Cornell Paper" (1971).
[30] Movie Multimedia, "Ludruk Armada Lawak."
[31] This New Order regime lasted from 1966 until Suharto's fall in 1998. This regime was one of authoritarian leadership, military dominance, economic stability, and socio-cultural censorship.; "ORC*ID*."
[32] Febriansyah, "Performing Arts and Politics," 1-38.
[33] Hoogervorst and Zandra, "Humor, Irreverence, Plurilingualism."

songs is provided. It is notable that an article focusing on performing arts, especially ones that heavily rely on sound to create connections with audiences, does not include lyrics or sound clips from any of the theater performances discussed. This is likely a result or by-product of the types of technology commonly available during the time period of his writing. This is in direct contrast to Hoogervorst and Zandra's "Humor, Irreverence, and Plurilingualism," where lyrics to particular performances have been included in the text and then analyzed for the meanings, language, and structure of this sung poetry.[34] In this latter text, it is a rather missed opportunity to provide readers and listeners with access to sound clips of these songs and lyrics performed within or even outside the context of *ludruk*. Although, again, this may be due to limitations regarding access or availability of performers and/or recordings of these specific *parikan*.

Ludruk songs and sung poetry, known as *parikan* and *kidungan*, follow a prescribed rhythmic and melodic scheme.[35] Bringing contextual knowledge into the study of these songs allows the reader to envision how (improvised) lyrics may be performed on top of this same melody. This allows for the creation of new sonic narratives, such as the musical conversations with the troupe's Gamelan musicians performing the traditional song *Jula Juli* in tandem with the singers, as well as with the reader who is auralizing their experiences in reaction to what they are reading. This ability to bring additional contextual knowledge is certainly not a universal experience among readers, further confirming the benefits of providing examples of audio, accessible through sites such as YouTube.[36]

Scan the QR code for an example of these song forms and their respective accompanying music. For an example of 'Parikan', see clip 0:17 to 1:00. For an example of 'Kidungan', see clip 1:16-2:15.[37]

[34] *Id.,* 28-9.
[35] *Ibid.*
[36] Follow this YouTube link to see a playlist of a variety of *ludruk* performances: "Ludruk Compliation," https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLsZgyq5eDgm749mIDcJ7_tdT57lF-TdEY&si=LDwX3rfllb06-JMrh.
[37] Budaya Kita, "Jula Juli Jawa Timuran—Cak Yudho Bakiak—Sekar Budaya."

A difficulty in highlighting sonic histories is the reality that recordings of performances of the particular songs noted in the sources may not exist or were poorly recorded, rendering them unusable to the authors. This possibility in itself is not addressed in Hoogervorst and Zander's article, which is likely due to the text's overarching focus on semiotics rather than sound studies. What is emphasized in both these sources, however, is *parikan*'s inclusion of socio-political commentary, sexual innuendos, and in certain historical instances, critiques of colonization and the state. For example, both Fabriansyah and Hoogervorst and Zandra discuss one of the so-called 'founding fathers' of *ludruk*, Cak Durasim, and his now famous one-liner, "*Pagupon Omahe Doro. Melok Nippon Tambah Sengsoro*" ("Pagupon is a box where pigeons live. Working for the Japanese fills [our] own lives with more suffering").[38]

Durasim's verse is an excellent example of how Indonesian politics coincide with the metaphorical language of *ludruk parikan*. By framing Japanese occupation of the Javanese, during the early to mid 1940s, as a dove in a cage, this sentence references issues of freedom and agency.[39] However, this is not the only context or translation of this lyric that exists. Each translation often varies in levels of clarity, in part due to differing levels of language fluency in translating from one language into another. For example, Hoogervorst and Zandra translate Durasim's line differently as well as using the phrase to conclude their chapter.

> Certain one-liners—such as *Pegupon omahe dara, melok Nippon tambah sara* "A dovecote is where the pigeons live, joining the Japanese leads to more misery"—have become so iconic that many contemporary

[38] Febriansyah, "Performing Arts and Politics," 10.; Hoogervorst and Zandra, "Humor, Irreverance, Plurilingualism."

[39] The Japanese occupation of Indonesia began during World War II, beginning in 1942 and ending in 1945. The Japanese were initially welcomed as they claimed to be creating an "Asia for Asians," offering support in overthrowing Dutch colonization. However, it soon became clear that this occupation was not for the benefit of the Indonesians themselves, but as a means of meeting the Japanese Empire's ambitions.

> speakers still remember them, even without knowing their historical trajectory.[40]

Unfortunately for Durasim, he made the political subject of the lyrics undeniable and resultantly faced severe consequences. Febriansyah uses the phrase to highlight the potential dangers of challenging authority under Japanese occupation while Hoogervorst and Zandra position this phrase to highlight the impact of language on history and vice versa. Both texts overarchingly emphasize the political ramifications and bravery required of Durasim to speak the above words on a public stage, but no mention is made of the sonic quality or impact of the words themselves on a live audience. Given how *ludruk* performers, especially its comedians, rely on audience interaction (as shown through Peacock's work), it is difficult to imagine that there would have been no audience reaction to this phrase. This again exemplifies how—despite the reality that a true understanding of *ludruk* must include the reactions of audiences, musicians, instruments, as well as the ambient noise of the event at large—most scholarship on *ludruk* has not sufficiently given sound its due. By not acknowledging the wider intertwining of sound with subject-making, particularly among audience-members, the reader is not provided the chance to fully immerse themselves in the noisy decadence of this art form.[41]

A Dialogic Perspective on *Ludruk*

After considering outside perspectives on *ludruk* and how this folk theater is addressed in more scholarly contexts, it is important to consider the views and discussions of a few Indonesian arts practitioners themselves. In contrast to the two previous case studies, *Rekindling the spirit of resistance in Ludruk folk art* is an article structured around an interview between self-named "arts worker" Riksa Afiaty and artist-activist Moelyono.[42] This article was published in 2023; its interview, thus dialogic, structure unique as it spotlights the voice of an actual artist and his work supporting *ludruk* performances in local communities. It is also the most overtly

[40] Hoogervorst and Zandra, "Humor, Irreverance, Plurilingualism," 48.
[41] Eisenberg, "Space," 193.
[42] Afiaty and Moelyono, "Rekindling the Spirit."

sonically driven, given its format. However, despite providing a brief biography of Moelyono and his own artistic pursuits (focusing on his work with the *Ludruk Budhi Wijaya* theater group in Jombang, East Java), there is very little included in the article about the sounds, music, and vocals inherent in the art form.

Afiaty's interview is rather ambitious, covering several topics such as the traditional inclusion of transgender women (known by the portmanteau of *transpuan*) in these theater productions and community engagement.[43] It also discusses the creation of scripts, touching on various social and political histories of Indonesia (Java in particular), as well as Moelyono's community consultation with the *Budhi Wijaya ludruk* troupe.[44] However, despite the focus on performers' identities and performance of identities, neither interviewer nor interviewee discusses how identity may affect the timbre or sonic quality of a singing voice. These qualities are significant for *ludruk* performers: female-identifying voices typically sing in high registers, with the near-operatic vocals both including set pieces as well as improvised lyrics overlaid on strict melodic parameters. The vocal and word-choice variations also showcase how regionality plays a significant role in shaping the choices of individual singers in approaching certain improvisations.[45] Although this source contains a bounty of anecdotes and the identification of significant stakeholders in *ludruk* today, it does, however, require the reader to have some knowledge of Indonesian history and Javanese socio-cultural dynamics. As a written recording and translation of a spoken exchange, this article additionally offers a distinct voice (although not in the literal sense, in the case of *ludruk* performers themselves) to the exploration of the sonic history of *ludruk*.

Although able to follow along with a transcription of the interview, the reader is not offered the opportunity, via link or QR code, to listen in on the conversation, thus creating a distance between interview and audience. In seeking to understand the sonic landscape of contemporary *ludruk* performers, it would have been helpful to actually hear the conversation between the two in addition

[43] *Id.*, 2-3.
[44] *Id.,* 3-7.
[45] Belinda, "Singing On."

to reading the transcript, as explored in the following paragraph. There is additionally no mention of how the interview was edited or spliced together from the recordings of the conversation between Afiaty and Moelyono. This, therefore, speaks to Afiaty and Moelyono's focus on the artists themselves, rather than the artform, which is a compelling perspective, but arguably is narrow in scope.

Even more broadly speaking, there is very little description and language associated with sound, noise, or recording within this interview. Having access to the actual recording would have shed more light on the sonic environment of the interview itself, such as whether or not it was interspersed with pauses, breaths and inhalations, or background noises. There is, however, an inclusion of several visuals: photographs of Moelyono's paintings and a screenshot from a related video of Moelyono speaking. This highlights certain sound study scholars' arguments about the supremacy of sight over the other senses in academia, especially over sound.[46] This perhaps caters to Moelyono's preferred artistic medium, as a visual artist. There is a moment, towards the end of the article, where brief mention is made of how artists were able to adapt and utilize the medium of video in order to capture not just the visuals but aural intricacies of their performances and to share them with an audience, even if from a distance. Unlike the previous sources, Afiaty's article is able to bring the reader into the present day experiences of several arts workers. Yet, it is another example how sound is treated as mere background in the study of *ludruk*, rather than an integral element of the lives of *ludruk* performers and the art form that is worthy of analysis in its own right.

Conclusion

The structure and purpose of a publication plays a significant role in whether or not the sonic heritage of a performing arts tradition is highlighted or even acknowledged. In the sources selected for this paper, there is a range of recognition— but predominantly subtle— references to *ludruk*'s sonic heritage and its significance to Indonesian, particularly East Javanese, history. A general takeaway

[46] "The hierarchy of senses, and of authoritative sources, that positions sight at the top—epistemically and morally—is not neutral . . ." in Lorea, "Sonic Matters," 849.

derived from these sources is how dominant visual descriptions and linguistic analyses of a performance art have been in scholarship. In a positive turn, however, as of the 2010s, new technological developments have aided in popularizing and easing access to sonic materials; hopefully soon making their way into broader scholarship.

Beginning in the 1960s, James Peacock's work provides an insight into *ludruk* via an anthropological lens, completed during a time when *ludruk* was facing an uptick in popularity. This work also most directly includes an analysis of how sound and space are evoked by *ludruk* performers to create empathetic audiences who are open to receiving the messages of the plotlines and commentary. Febrainsyah's work, read together with Hoogervorst and Zandra's 2024 analysis of East Javanese sung poetry (*parikan*), highlights the tense political and social turmoil of the intervening decades, leading *ludruk* to be placed on a scholarly backburner. By being introduced to the last source from 2023, a conversation between two Indonesian arts workers, readers are provided with a somewhat insider perspective into the life of an artist and how *ludruk* has long intersected with key social justice issues of gender, sexuality, and freedom of expression. However, the fact that sound is treated as a 'given' in all the sources, rather than an incredibly significant part of any *ludruk* performance, means that the audience never actually hears—in a literal sense—from *ludruk* practitioners themselves.

Ludruk performers have used the art form as a means of expression, resistance, and agency through history; the rich sonic environments of specific performances shaping, and in turn used, as a means of community-building and collective catharsis. These sounds, spaces, and individuals have, up to this point, not been the key focus of academic scholarship, to the detriment of the fields of history, area studies, and sound studies. The unfortunate reality is that there has been waning interest in this particular form of live theater over the past several decades, as well as in the traditional arts more generally speaking. This is particularly the case among Indonesian youth and *ludruk*'s continued success was made even more difficult by the realities and constraints of COVID-19. However, given the growing availability of new sonically-related technological developments, this is perhaps the moment to help move this scholarship into new sensory spaces. By adding this key sonic layer to

the current visually- and politically-focused academic scholarship on this tradition and its resilient practitioners, researchers may continue to support the conservation and continuation of *ludruk* folk theater into the future. Although sounds may be ephemeral, the impacts of their resonances continue to echo today.

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