Visual Takes on Dance in Java

[**eCompanion at www.oraltradition.org*]

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Introduction

This article addresses the questions of how performances have been represented in physical form (as verbal and visual texts) and of the role of indigenous concepts of performance. Rather than discuss historical examples of texts/products as others have done, I present some of my own "physical" forms of dance from my film and video work in Java. I argue that film is a valuable research tool as well as a mode of representing performance, with reference to the literature on the contribution of film/video to the development of cross-cultural understanding, in particular the writings of filmmaker David MacDougall (1995, 1997, and 1998). The examples are two film projects completed during twenty years of research into Javanese dance. *The Dancer and the Dance* is a personal view of women's dance in Yogyakarta in the style associated with the sultan's palace, filmed on 16mm with a proper budget in 1987 during a fellowship at the National Film and Television School, Beaconsfield. *Tayuban: Dancing the Spirit in Java* is a video document of a village ritual and its performances, filmed on Hi-8 video with no budget in 1994 during a two-month field trip to Java supported by the British Academy. Both performances—and a collection of stills—are available in the eCompanion to this article at www.oraltradition. org.

Using extreme contrasts of female performance I argue that a visual text—represented here by dance, film, and dance on film—offers different sorts of information from a verbal one. Rather than representing performance as a text, film is particularly helpful for representing performance as action or practice, as a phenomenological object that is contingent on historical and social factors and constructions, inseparable from the stuff of social events and action, and constituted by the contexts of practice and understanding. Film can reveal/represent dancing as the physical dimension of human existence that both embodies and imagines

social values, which addresses ethical and aesthetic aspects of social life. This article also raises questions about interpretation and reception: how much can we expect to understand from a film? Is it feasible to use images to challenge assumptions about cultural practices and to go beyond appearances?

An Approach to Film

Filmmakers have been capturing dance on film for over one hundred years, but the potential of film and video to both document and represent dance research continues to be neglected in favor of other representational systems such as dance notation. Film and video have a valuable role in performance studies, but their role needs to be understood in the context of debates about cross-cultural understanding.

That most lucid writer on anthropology and film, the filmmaker and author David MacDougall, has suggested that we think of a film as an "arena of inquiry" rather than as an aesthetic or scientific performance (1995:128). He asks us to consider a film as "a human product and not a transparent window on reality" (1998:86). Anthropological film in these terms is not "a pictorial representation of anthropological knowledge, but a form of knowledge that emerges through the grain of film-making" (*ibid*.:76). Filmmaking in anthropology itself is "performing culture" instead of what Talal Asad has called "the representational discourse of ethnography," and provides a means to explore issues of power and representation in the discipline (Asad 1986:159).

If filmmaking "performs culture," it aspires to capture in its images something of the style and ethos of the society being represented. This requires the audience to modify its expectations of such visual documents: they should not be looking for beautiful camerawork associated with Hollywood fiction or television travelogues; nor should they expect a film to be stuffed with information superimposed by means of the so-called "voice-of-God" commentary. The sound-images, which are the substance of a film, constitute an interpretation that is produced as part of a complex process of research, collaboration, learning, thinking, understanding, feeling, realizing, prioritizing, selecting, and crafting, all of which is the result of seeing and selecting. But the anthropological sound-images, while bearing the message of the film, have the possibility of incorporating ambiguity and incompleteness into that message. Rather than delivering clear-cut lessons or stories, films may instead become "sites of meaning-potential rather than sets of meanings sent and received, or the outside world seen through

representations" (MacDougall 1998:77, writing about Jean Rouch). Their content is open-ended, their sense emergent, and their meanings multiple, produced by the audience as they interact with the sound-images. To this extent then, watching a film is like watching a performance because it requires participation to close the loop of signification.

My Approach to Dance and Performance

My approach to film rests on some of the principles I found in Javanese dance. I have been wary of treating dance as text, rather than as action or practice, because such treatment runs the risk of reification, producing a homogenizing and essentialized account of culture (see Ness 1992 and Day's critique, 1995:130). Instead of assuming that dance is about meaning, and exploring dance-as-language, dance-as-symbol, or even dance-as-dance (the existing alternatives in the late 1970's), I have prioritized local categories and connections about what movement is and what it means (or not) under particular circumstances.

A number of theoretical approaches from anthropology and philosophy support the analytical distinctiveness of performance, seeing it as being equal to or even having priority over text, and also as undermining any simple distinction between the symbolic and the real as a way of explaining the many different styles of human and social behavior. Bodily techniques, long overlooked by social science despite Marcel Mauss's early writings (1973), have now been restored to the intellectual agenda. In philosophy, Wittgenstinians and phenomenologists alike have reaffirmed the relevance of embodied practices, and radically questioned the notion that humanity can only be understood rationally with reference to language as the work of the mind. David Best, for instance, has argued against the reduction of dance to meaning associated with the "text" model. Dancing is real action, not virtual or symbolic. Human movement "does not symbolize reality: it is reality" (Best 1978:137). Michel Foucault's work (1984) on procedures in discipline, surveillance, and classification that center on the body—with power suffusing the capillaries of the body politic rather than being imposed by a state apparatus—has helped to rupture the distinction between the symbolic and the real. Foucault's power-centered thinking has been complemented by a return to the ludic. The anthropologist Victor Turner started out analyzing physical performance functionally as "ritual process" (1969), but later became interested in the actuality of dance and theater as play and performance (1982). Turner inspired a number of scholars and performers, and for the past twenty years a general interest in performance from different

cultures has developed, and research into embodied forms of communication and not just language is now more acceptable than it once was (Hughes-Freeland 2001).

As a result of those developments, the analysis of action has been given a more holistic dimension and a breakdown has occurred in categories of objectivity and subjectivity. Take, for example, the attention given to metaphor in the 1980's. "Perhaps one reason the social sciences have been so bad at analyzing culture is because of the role of body metaphors . . . to move is to measure," wrote the British sociologist George MacRae (1975: 64).[1] Subsequently, the body has been identified as the key generator of metaphors. Indeed, it has been claimed that metaphors tend to come *from the body*, with cognitive maps and abstract schemata being oriented spatially with reference to the body (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). This perspective has also blurred the boundary between putting on a show and "real" action, revealing the constructedness of everyday life and the world of "facts." Making sense of the world is a performance expressed through symbolic schemes referring back to the body. In fact, philosopher Mark Johnson has argued for embodiment as the precondition for a realist philosophy (1987:204).

A Moment on Metaphors

As a participant in the "literature and performance" project listening to papers from many disciplines and from many parts of the world, I have been reconsidering the extent to which the relationship between performance and text has of necessity been an embattled one. Thirty years ago there was a battle because embodied performance was deemed marginal and not worthy of serious scholarship. Now that performance has gained respectability, it suffers from problems of overgeneralization. This situation in part arises due to the logocentrism that still prevails in western thinking despite strong arguments that communication is "a multiple, relative and emergent process" (Finnegan 2002:28). This is partly due to a failure to recognize how particular semantic contexts produce particular metaphors. The problem of overgeneralization is also due to constructing generalized models of action and behavior that fail to allow for variations in how particular groups of

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[1] As John Blacking observed in the introduction to his pioneering book, *The Anthropology of the Body*, "from the dance of language and thought we are moved into thinking . . . body and mind are one" (1977:22-23).

people explain the relationship of different kinds of embodied performances to other forms of experience and representation and the "reality" that these constitute.

Metaphors operate at different levels. As Edward Schieffelin (1998) has reminded us, performance is a concept with a past in western thought. It is heavy with presuppositions that connect it to illusion, manipulation, and deceit. Performance is often used as a metaphor for disingenuousness, for action that is untrue. But as Schieffelin and others have demonstrated, what is true, what is false, and where performance sits is by no means clear-cut. Cultural factors determine proper forms of action, and in many cases being yourself or "behaving naturally" is socially inappropriate. The boundary between performance as an act in a circumscribed domain and action in particular social contexts, as the sociologist Erving Goffman taught us long ago, is highly permeable (Hughes-Freeland 2001).

Though recognizing that the body yields metaphorical expressions of cultural value, I have tried to avoid universalizing the performing body, the metaphors it generates, and the social effects that these produce by attending to the difficulty of translation.[2] For example, the English word "dance" is at once too specific and too general to translate Javanese categories.[3] The status connotations of Javanese language codes make it impossible to give a neutral and general translation of the English word "dance." The word that describes palace dance movement is the polite Javanese word *běksa*. The low Javanese word *joged* means "dance" but is not usually considered appropriate for palace practices. Javanese speakers refer to specific forms and their performers (thus the Bědhaya is performed by a *bědhaya*, or by "the one who does dance movement" (*ingkang běksa*), or the character being danced. Such semantic niceties are familiar to those who contributed to these special issues, but they are often lost in performance and cultural studies.

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[2] Dance anthropologist Adrienne Kaeppler argues that context determines whether or not something is dance, as in the case of three "danced" forms in Japan (1978:47): "anthropologically they are not even part of the same activity systems. They are not 'art' or 'reflection,' and anthropologically they should be looked at as the movement dimensions of separate activities."

[3] Similarly there is no general word for "music," sound being identified according to its source: *gamělan* music is the product of *gamělan* instruments; vocal music is named for the singers (*pěsindhen*; *gerong*). The Indonesian term *karawitan* implies the practice of playing in such an orchestra. Similar observations have also been made of the Venda of South Africa (Blacking 1976:6, 27) and the Temiar of Malaysia (Roseman 1991:85).

To pursue the possibility of a truce between text and performance, metaphors could be understood as texts in miniature. Metaphors are of course language-specific, but my Javanese respondents enjoyed tussling with the problem of how to verbalize the materiality of action without resorting to metaphors of mind quite as much as any Anglo-American philosopher would do. During research I discovered that gestures in dance movement are not denotational. Although movement is accompanied by songs drawn from or referencing narrative texts, the dance movement had a minimal connection to the songs and texts. When movements did appear to mimic actions, such as putting on earrings and so forth, those movements normally did not represent that action but were interpreted as metaphors for something else, usually spiritual preparation (Hughes-Freeland 1991). Such metaphorical deductions follow the performance, they do not inform or motivate it. Asad has described how text came to be privileged over the corporeal in Christian ritual, once constituted by "apt performance . . . abilities to be *acquired,* not *symbols* to be interpreted" (1988:74-79). It would be futile to watch a Bĕdhaya performance in order to appreciate its textual sources or to identify what gesture corresponds to which key moment. The aptness of the performance of the movement is what is being observed. In regard to observers in research, there was a gendered response to the kinds of discourse produced by dancing. Women tended to focus on the aesthetic minutiae of physical execution, while men engaged in playful exegesis and puns, making metaphors out of movement.

Take for example, a metaphoric extension that comes from the well-known Javanese dancer and commentator Prince Soerjobrongto, who is often quoted by dance scholars for saying that rhythm is a measure of cultural competence (1970). The perception of extreme slowness of the rhythms of certain forms of Javanese palace dance have been perceived as quintessential to their cultural ethos. During the filming of a Bĕdhaya rehearsal for *The Dancer and the Dance* (Hughes-Freeland 1988), I wanted to represent the nature of that protracted rhythm, the slow inhalations and exhalations of the movement and music, and also the moments in the form when speed is of the essence, in complex transitions between floor patterns. Soerjobrongto's concern with measure is a concern with evaluation and distinction. As a royal scion and a performer of the most prestigious dance-drama at its heyday in the 1920's and 1930's, his metaphor imbues dance with the power of the Javanese courts and their rulers. Dance is powerful because it belongs to those in power and sustains their power. The use of metaphors to generate identifications out of dance enhances the power of dance as a cultural resource. As Lakoff and Johnson also remind us, "people

in power get to impose their metaphors" (1980:157). And in Java, as noted, these people tend to be male.

As a cultural resource, however, dancing means different things to different interested parties and individuals. Even within the sphere of palace performance there are other experiences that may not become powerful metaphors enshrined in cultural truisms, that in turn segue into slogans selling holidays in the region as part of the packaging of Yogyakarta's heritage attractions. To move may be "to measure," but the mover does not have to know what is being measured or be able to talk about embodied understanding. Take, for example, the prize-winning female dancer, Susindahati, who is the subject of the first part of *The Dancer and the Dance*. In 1999 she was credited with excellent embodiment of dancing skills by the jury of local dancers, artists, and connoisseurs. But how did Susindahati "know" this excellence? In the film, she explains the hardest techniques of dancing, in particular *ngoyog*, the slow shift of weight from one foot onto the other when the body's center of gravity is low, knees turned out, hips aligned beneath the shoulders, an almost imperceptible shift for an entire gong cycle of eight beats. She was able to transmit her "understanding" in terms of physical knowledge, as shown in the film—a literal measure of body-weight shift in relation to a specific measure of musical time. In a scene not included in the final version, Susindahati said that she knew that a dance philosophy existed, but laughingly said that she did not "understand" it. That understanding is for older people—or, to be more precise, normally for older men. My female dance teachers who were interested in the metaphysics of dance tended to quote Soerjobrongto rather than create their own metaphorical stories.

Metaphorical extrapolations provide one sense of "text," but it is a text that is not commonly shared. Each individual may not understand the totality of the culture that may reveal itself to outsiders having the benefit of distance. Knowledge is partial because one is too close as well as too far. Dancing is powerful because it is a cultural practice situated in the self and revealed through the actions of the body. In Java, the complex but seamless choreographic patterns of group dances such as Bĕdhaya provide metaphors for social harmony that feed back into the significance of the dancing. The effect has both aesthetic and political power. Unlike other symbols, the body is itself "instrumental" (Ness 1992:10).

Dancing is embodied in the moment of action, whether in rehearsal or performance. But that performed movement is not simply of-the-moment, lived outside of time, without history and without a future. Performance is situated in relation to texts that may precede or follow it, depending on the context and the commentator. These kinds of performance are not versions

of texts alone. They simultaneously resist and generate interpretation. But performances generate other texts, or products, or works, inter-referentially or by bricolage. Javanese dance drama, for instance, references the shadow play, and other dramatic genres are identified by the source of stories from the Pañji and Damarwulan cycles, and *Sĕrat Menak*. We could consider the pattern of relations between texts and performances as genealogical, but such a genealogy is itself subject to someone having the power to define. Definition and taxonomies themselves become phenomena to be accounted for (Hughes-Freeland 1997).

In the Javanese case there are manuscripts called *Sĕrat Kandha*. These normally contain accounts of grand ceremonial occasions during the colonial period when distinguished visitors were honored by dances, which were prefaced by an oration explaining the nature of the circumstances, the names of the guests, the dance to be performed, and the song lyrics. In one instance, there is an attempt to identify the dance movement sequences on pages opposite the song lyrics, which themselves are related to the musical cycle (Hughes-Freeland n.d.). These manuscripts are housed in court libraries and are only accessible under the close scrutiny of the court librarians. During the colonial period, a number of "Programmes" were issued for *wayang wong* ("dance dramas"), which included photographs of key scenes and summaries of each scene with diagrams of floor patterns.

In Indonesia during President Suharto's New Order (1966-98), books were published to celebrate and record prestigious dance events sponsored by the provincial government. These were "not for sale" and were distributed as special gifts. They included accounts of the performance as well as expert overviews by writers such as Soerjobrongto and Professor Soedarsono that became particularly powerful versions or statements about what Javanese dance is. In the past few years, since the accession of the tenth sultan (1999), the court itself has published commemorative booklets about key anniversary performances. Apart from these manuscripts and printed texts, the local government has also funded a program of video documentation in which old dances are reconstructed with the help of old manuscripts and filed for posterity. These texts feed into what people can say about palace dance, sustain a traffic in expertise and skill, and inform materials produced by state academies and private associations for the purposes of dance pedagogy.

Thus we can say that dancing extends beyond the moment of movement: it is a producer of movement and context. It is embodied action, and it is action that is referred to. It is way of making a world because it extends beyond movement, beyond the body, through the responses of actor-

dancers in relation to memory and expectations. Dancing dance and inscribing dance, whether in talking, writing, or visual forms, are both situated social practices. Dance is something that Javanese people *do*, and something Javanese people do things *with*.

Dancing is a significant embodied practice with metaphorical force in Java, but it has been underestimated, for example, in Anderson's analysis of the construction of national identities, in which he dismisses dance as "folk dance" with the emblematic status of flags, costumes, "and the rest," and credits languages with the power to generate "imagined communities building in effect *particular solidarities*" (1983:122). The disembodiment of national identities is of course central to the idea that nations are *imagined* communities, but surely dancing and other kinds of performance are more powerful signs of social identity than emblems and icons such as flags and anthems. Not only is dance a symbol of belonging but a form of social action performed by social actors, combining personal and social identity with national identity. Javanese court dance appears exemplary and enduring partly because of analytical distance and partly due to successful management by its practitioners: the process of making it happen is one of dispute, competition, and chance. It is produced by and produces a process that generates sense for particular people in particular situations. It is more than the sum of its parts. It is embodied practice that goes beyond itself, producing other kinds of social practices and understandings. It is constituted by different perspectives—of performers, experts, novices, audiences, insiders, and outsiders.[4] Court dancing is a social practice that provides a site for the exploration of control and selfhood, and the dynamics of variously situated codes of value, from the local to the national. Javanese often express their approval of a performance or a social situation in terms of "flowing water" (*toya mili*) and we are interested in exploring how dance *flows* from physical movement into a value system that then feeds back into dance and other styles of behavior.

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[4] Susan Leigh Foster notes that dance is "bodily reality" and "corporeal play," as well as "a tangible and substantial category of cultural experience . . . which is vital to cultural production and to theoretical formulations of cultural process" (1996:xi). However, as Helena Wulff argues of ballet, the significance of dancing goes beyond the body, and is the effect of a series of framings (1998).

Two Films

My two examples show two different contexts of performance recognized by Javanese people. The first film, *The Dancer and the Dance*, is about dance in the sultan's palace in the city of Yogyakarta, and uses the device of the portrait. The second film, *Tayuban: Dancing the Spirit in Java*, is structured around an event in a highland village of the province of Yogyakarta at which female performance takes place. Both films give some —if not all—of the context whereby certain forms of human behavior and skill become identified as dance, as art, as performance (Hughes-Freeland 1997). The films are built from long developing shots and a minimal use of interventionist commentary; the idea is to expose the audience to an event as a sound-image construct, not as pictures with explanatory words relentlessly superimposed. In addition to this basic approach, the first film also uses "talking heads" to provide information that guides the audience through the action sequences, and the second film has a long verbal introduction with photographs to preview the filmed action. But both films aim to keep the balance of actuality and artifice on the side of actuality, and refrain from intervening between the filmed sound-image and the audience response. I try to let others speak—the dancers, the experts, the observers—in order to give students of anthropology or dance the chance to acknowledge that objects of study are not constructed out of purely theoretical projects, defined clearly (and scientifically) in advance. Rather, they emerge in the research process, a situation that may or may not enable certain situations to be observed and responded to.

Bĕdhaya Gandakusuma in Rehearsal at Siswa Among Bĕksa

In making *The Dancer and the Dance* I wanted to convey the experience of female dance in Java as performed in the Bĕdhaya, an elaborate ceremonial dance with origin stories referring back to the sixteenth century. The challenge was to move from the "word-and-sentence-base" of my doctoral research to "image-and-sequence-based anthropological thought" (MacDougall 1997:292), and to "bring it back alive," as Herb DiGioia, the documentary tutor at NFTS (The National Film and Television School) instructed his students—or, to quote Richard Bauman's remark when this paper was presented, to create "the illusion of real presence." After a series of plans and accidents (see Hughes-Freeland 1999) the finished film presented dancing through two characters: Susindahati, a

young dancer who is interested in physical technique and the action of dance, and Pak Sena, a former court scribe who has an interest in philosophy and meaning. During research, I had worked extensively with Pak Sena, but did not meet Susindahati until I was researching the film.

Table 1: Outline of Narrative: The Dancer and the Dance

1. Preparing for a performance
2. The love dance at a wedding
3. Susindahati at home
4. Susindahati at school
5. Susindahati explains the difficulties of dance
6. Pak Sena sings and talks about dance philosophy
7. Dance training at Siswa among Běksa
8. Pak Sena explains learning to dance
9. Bědhaya sample in rehearsal
10. Pak Sena interprets Bědhaya
11. Susindahati rides a motor cycle

The first part of the film is a portrait of Susindahati at home at the secondary school for performing arts. The focus is on her everyday life and her skill as a performer, along with her insights into what dancing means for her. In contrast to Susindahati's emphasis on the physical, a short interview with Pak Sena sets up the metaphysical perspective on performance. This stage establishes the second part of the film where the viewer loses the individual dancer in the dance and its abstractions. This passage opens with a sequence of dance training with a voice-over by Bu Yuda, a senior palace choreographer of female dance forms, and explains the aesthetics and the importance of "flowing water." Then we return to Pak Sena, who has been brought along to the rehearsal to provide an indigenous commentary on the dancing. He reminisces about how he learned to dance and gives instructions to western viewers on how to watch Javanese dance, using the sensibilities (*rasa*) not the eyes.

The dance rehearsal itself was filmed over four evenings. Bědhaya Gandakusuma lasted 90 minutes in real time. In the film we see ten minutes of the performance, intercut with close-ups of singers and musicians, filmed on the evening of the first rehearsal. Because of the cyclical nature of the music, it was possible to cut these in at the appropriate phase of the cycle, if not at the exact moment when the phases occur in the dance sequence. Bědhaya is structured as follows: a short oration (*kandha*); an entrance march, shown almost in its entirety in the film; a sung section; and the first section (*lajuran*), of which part is shown in the film, followed by a pause

when the dancers sit in a three-by-three formation *(rakit tiga)* and a song is sung. The second part includes a fight between the two lead dancers. The film shows a section of the fight, and then cuts, using the musical transition from the up-tempo rhythms for the confrontation back to the slower pace of the main theme when the fight comes to a close and one party surrenders.

My intention in filming the performance was to select samples that represent the different kinds of events that occur in a Bĕdhaya while giving an overview of the structure of the form. The audience is left to experience the dancing without any assistance from a commentary. Instead, at the close of the fight, I cut to Pak Sena's interpretation of it. I then return to the "flying" movement that always closes the second section of the dance and is followed by an exit march (not shown). The film ends with a night sequence of Susindahati riding pillion on her boyfriend's motorcycle along Yogyakarta's main thoroughfare.

The film is not intended to serve as a document of a Bĕdhaya choreography. It aimed to provide an experience of Javanese dance, and also to go beyond the appearances of the performance in order to communicate something of how Javanese people understand the dancing. Pak Sena gives an account of his version of different cultural references, drawing on the *Mahābhārata* and Islamic mysticism. He explains the fight through puns on the names of the main characters: "Janaka" (the young Arjuna in the *Mahābhārata*) symbolizing life in this world and "Supraba" (a nymph) symbolizing divine inspiration (from *praba*, meaning "light"). This is a personal account, and one of Pak Sena's own daughter is called Prabawati. Pak Sena's story is given not as a definitive account of what this Bĕdhaya means. (During research in Java respondents never prioritized the story reference when explaining the significance of the dance, and it is telling that the title of the choreography is named for the main musical theme, not the story.) The lyrics for this dance, written by Dinusatama, who is head of the dance association that produced it, are allusions to the sexual union between Arjuna and the nymph Supraba, which follows a successful attack on the disruptive demonic king, Niwatakawaca. The story occurs in a number of number of texts: in the Old Javanese *Arjunawiwaha* (Zoetmulder 1974:234-37) and also in three "detached" *(sĕmpalan)* dance drama stories, *Ciptaning Mintarago*, *Samba Sĕbit*, and *Srikandhi Mĕguru Manah*, performed during the reign of the eighth sultan (Soedarsono 1984:362-63, 367-69).

Because textual interreferentiality in Bĕdhaya is as elusive as it is complex, it was not the central focus of my research. After this initial doctoral fieldwork, however, I have observed that a different model is used, one more closely modeled on the way storytelling works in the shadow play,

with a puppeteer or narrator telling a story. This had been introduced into modern dance ballet (*sendratari*) and is influencing contemporary treatments of Bĕdhaya, with dancers enacting a story that is sung/chanted by a narrator or chorus. This development brings the dance movement and the sung references closer together in a more denotative scheme than was normal in the past. We can say that the relationship between performance and text is altering: the verbal text is influencing the choreography more directly than before, when the two ran mostly parallel, colliding only in the fight scene. This is the model wherein performance is brushed forward gently by the text and gains its own momentum. To put it differently, as Oliver Taplin said in discussion, "you don't need to know the story to appreciate the performance"; or as Gerstle remarks, "the written text is only an aid to producing the blossom on stage" (2000:47).

Tayuban on Hi-8 Video

My second example includes a female performance style, which to a non-Javanese appears very similar to the movement in the Bĕdhaya. In Java, however, the two are regarded as extreme opposites of female performance. Javanese people distinguish between the polite femininity embodied in court dance and the performance of professional dancers called *ledhek*. These women perform at village events called *tayuban*, often part of annual harvest festivals: food is distributed, and then men take turns dancing with the *ledhek*. The event is a series of transactions: between the dancers and clients, between the elders and the village spirit (*dhanyang*), between individuals and the community, between individuals and the spirit, and between the whole community and the invisible world. There is no word (yet) for this dancing as a genre. It is performed as a gift to the protective spirit in exchange for well-being, and is closely associated with the community identity that is represented by the coming together of villagers at these events, including those who have migrated to the city.

In this film I decided to give the audience more help. The film opens with a five-minute commentary that describes the research process and how the film came to be made, while a montage of photographs of fieldwork taken five years earlier provides the visual dimension. Thereafter, the film is shot observationally, with a few explanatory captions. There are also three interviews. The local religious expert explains the apparent inconsistency of spirit worship and Islam by noting different contexts: the village spirit helps you sort out problems in this life, while Islam helps you sort out your eternal salvation. The youngest dancer tries to answer questions about her

experiences in performance, while her mother and the dance troupe leader do their best to interrupt with their opinions. Finally, I interview my research assistant about his insights into *tayuban* gained from helping me with the research in 1989 and 1994. The intention is to show the different kinds of knowledge and understanding that can accrue to a single event.

Table 2: Narrative Outline for Tayuban*: Dancing the Spirit in Java*

1. Reflexive introduction with photographs
2. Afternoon: food distribution; interview with the religious official
3. Nighttime *tayuban*
4. Daytime *tayuban*
5. Visit to the home of the youngest dancer for an interview
6. Research assistant tells the anthropologist about his experiences
    at the *tayuban*
7. Commentary on the transformation of these village practices

The daytime *tayuban* scene is filmed to show the close link between performance and offerings to the spirit. It illustrates the rhythms of the proceedings and the different kinds of interaction that constitute the *tayuban* event. A sample of requests and dances is shown. The viewer sees the dancers kissing babies and powdering their faces as a means of protection and healing. Tethering ropes taken from sick animals are also brought to the event, and receive their own dose of face-powder.

This particular *tayuban* also had a non-ritual political dimension. Tensions between the young men of the community and the elders had been mounting the previous evening when the medium had cut short a karaoke session so that the *tayuban* could begin. As a result, the young men's tempers were running high, and a number of placative measures had been taken, including a shortened period of time for the elders to dance. The next morning the same thing happened, and as the familiar troublemakers stepped into the clearing to dance, the music changed to popular *gamelan* tunes, with a beat associated with more informal social dancing. The men pressed in on the women as is customary at *tayubans*, and we see an experienced dancer using a graceful hand gesture to fend off an ardent partner. We also see how the youngest dancer's movements alter from the acceptable style for women: she starts to move her hips, breaking the prescribed alignment with the shoulders that is also found in the palace styles, a moment described as "disco" by my companions at the event.

Visual records excel at communicating atmosphere and pace. The contrast between the rhythms of the different contexts and the fields of interaction prevalent during and around performance events can be

documented directly: the audience can get a sense of what it was like. In *tayuban* the "movement dimension" (Kaeppler 1978) is of a different order from that of court dance. After dancing until 4:00 in the morning, and with only a few hours' sleep, by noon the dancers' movements are so minimal and unenthusiastic as to barely constitute performance. The energy-expending performers are the villagers who pay money to the local religious expert and the young men who use the occasion for a bit of social display and sexual bravado. But in this film I wanted to provide some information that would provoke further questions among audiences. I closed the film with an interview with my research assistant about the research and how we had "danced the village spirit" by paying money and making a vow so that his son would recover from a continuing cold. The broader context for the event was summed up in a closing section of commentary. It explains how governmental repression of *tayuban*, due to its sexual ethos, is giving way to its revival as part of the heritage preservation program that is also linked to development of the tourist industry. When state-sanctioned *tayuban* take place, the performers are graduates of dance schools and academies.

The films' contexts also refer to gender relations, and I wish to comment briefly on the role of the gaze in the construction of the text. In feminist film criticism it has become a truism to speak of the male gaze. In the first film the all-female crew aimed to work with what we thought of as a "tactile camera." During the opening sequences of the rehearsal, the camera is not *looking at* the formations—it is participating in them. We cannot *see* what the choreographic floor plans *look like*, because we are *in the dance*. The style of shooting was to use development shots, to follow the action rather than constructing elegant frames and, in so doing, the gaze ceases to objectify the women performers and instead affirms a shared movement with them. This was possible only because the performance was a rehearsal: had we been filming a finished performance with an audience, the camera could not have participated in this way in the dance.

The second film is shot differently and keeps a distance because of the nature of the event and of my role in it: for instance, during the night *tayuban*, I was required to sit with the high-status male guests. Of relevance here is an analysis of an Indonesian feature film, *Nji Ronggeng*, about a professional female dancer in West Java whose work involves her in a dynamic of attraction and repulsion similar to that of *ledhek* in the Yogyakartan highlands. It has been argued that the filmic gaze here does not conform to the masculinist look of Hollywood, which sees the female as the image of male desire. Instead, it gives agency to the woman, allowing her to "drive a wedge . . . between her body and male desire" (Hanan 1993:105). Though this argument could be said to overstate the impermeability of the

cultural boundary around Indonesian cinema, it is an interesting example of another kind of textual field that can be generated out of filmic performances when they travel across cultures. This argument, like my films, is produced for audiences outside of the society that produced the original performances. But whereas my films start from concepts based in the society of origin, Hanan starts with film theory concepts. This is where anthropology and other disciplines differ, and why both "text" and "performance" have to be questioned and used critically.

Anthropology can also impose stringent limits on the extent to which an interpretation is admissible. Rethinking my original partisan view against text, I could formulate a longer argument about the contentious relationship of *tayuban* to female court performance. Although polite Javanese aesthetics and *mores* in Indonesia put *tayuban* outside the pale of Javanese culture, particular respondents provided strong evidence to suggest that this exclusion is relatively recent and closely linked to deliberate attempts to differentiate the cultural identity of the Yogyakartan principality from its neighbor, Surakartan. This gives rise to the more speculative view that the performance of women at *tayuban* is the real pretext for what became Javanese palace dance and today's Indonesian classical dance (Hughes-Freeland n.d.). This view, however, is external to the field of local interpretation, and in a sense invokes text here as a metaphorical distancing from the empirical processes and evidence that I normally insist should support what I write. In that sense, text offers a temptation away from the path of anthropological rigor.

Conclusions

Films cannot replace the written word, but they can reveal blind spots in our understandings of different social and cultural situations and practices. In the examples I have described, film presents in a way that words do not the experience of two contexts of female performance in Java, in particular its ethos and tempo. MacDougall reminds us that "the unsaid is the common ground of social relations, communication, and ethnography. It is also the domain of the image" (1998:274). Looking at films and understanding their complex images and visual metaphors involves some of the same problems that arise when regarding culture as a text, particularly the role of such images (and indeed visuality) crossculturally (*ibid.*:266; 268-69). I made my films for western audiences as part of a project to improve their understanding of performance practices in Java. They are not straight

documents of dancing. They do not simply re-present it. They are partly translations, but they also represent forms of knowledge that emerged through the making of the films (and also prior knowledge). They are also autobiographical insofar as they represent my attempts to understand particular practices and events that regularly occur in Java. They are not, of course, the only way to represent performance. New technologies have emerged since those films were made, and I am now exploring ways of providing different kinds of information using both verbal texts about performance and sound-image text representing performance in different modes, starting with an eCompanion at www.oraltradition.org. I hope to develop resources that start from the visual image, rather than from the verbal.

The films I have discussed support my argument that practices such as dance are made real by the ways in which those who are interested in it *engage* with it and *constitute* it. Palace dancing in Java is a resource that provides a set of references that social actors use to create, whether seriously or momentarily, sets of identifications that provide a rationale that may or may not be used to account for another set of actions. Dance itself is situated among cultural references on which it may (or may not) draw. These references include what we might call "texts": the repertoire of forms themselves, the stories associated with those forms, the basic movement sequences, the various interpretive styles for speaking about movement, ranging from practical aesthetics to speculative metaphysics. The trajectory that incarnates the particular range of chosen versions from these resource bases creates a particular reality that results from a set of identifications. They may repeat previous identifications, reconfigure them, or generate new versions. These identifications could be said to originate in the encounter of the individual with the cultural resources available to him or her. Ultimately, some of these identifications contribute to the rhetoric of nation-building, cultural politics, and the politics of identity in which local ethnic groups within the nation-state struggle for survival and recognition. In the context of Indonesia, what is considered Javanese is emergent and dynamic and part of a system of practices, social actions, and relations situated in time and place. Dance is itself a form of social action and a reference within a field of social discourse—available to some, rejected by others, and a single reference point amid a number of others.

I noted above that there are changes in the way embodied performance is constituted in relation to a prior verbal text. In the late 1990's there was an increase in local documentation of classical dance using either a single camera or a three-camera set-up. This was happening at the same time as an increased diversity of performance styles was receiving palace

patronage. There has been more change in the performance culture of the court and its patronage in the past decade than in *tayuban*, despite pessimism about its imminent decline in the late 1980's. Changes are occurring in the local knowledge base and in those places where responsibility lies for determining policy about performance. The strong amateur base for palace performance is being replaced by trained professionals with academic qualifications. Indigenous conceptions of performance are changing—as they always have.

I will end with a couple of general points. First, when we use the word "text," we commit ourselves to a framework of interpretation developed by post-structuralists that excludes motivation and authorship. I have gone against the grain of this approach by discussing my films not as semiotic products but as the result of intentions, in the authorial mode. This is because of the proximity of the production: it is still in personal, not historical, time. If we are to take into account indigenous criteria in text-construction, or the creation of versions using prior references in different ways, we also need to avoid generalizing that creativity as a cultural collectivity and producing a kind of "semiotic orientalism" (Hughes-Freeland 2001:146). Second, following from this, the workshop question about "the relationship of physical texts to performances represented" risks obscuring or compressing the very important processes of production that link performance to its other versions. I have concentrated here specifically on two research films coming out of performance. I would suggest that similar processual data would be central to elucidating more generally how performance is produced out of prior texts and in turn generates subsequent texts.

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