FROM STAGE TO SCREEN:
EARLY FILMMAKING OF INDIGENOUS PERFORMERS IN HIGHLAND CENTRAL JAVA

Tito Imanda
Universitas Bina Nusantara, Jakarta
timanda@binus.edu

Abstract
This paper is based on an empirical study that explores issues around the process of a traditional performance art group in a village in highland Central Java adapting to film production. *Wayang orang*—or loosely translated human puppet—is a traditional opera-like performance rooted in Central and East Java, Indonesia. As part of a traditional society living in a rural area, members of the group discuss their productions mostly without written documents. Storylines were experienced through performing and watching different shows. Technical skills were built through lifelong intimate practices.

The project explores a general explorative question: how does a traditional oral and aural art group adapt to electronic apparatuses of cinema and create their films? In answering this question, the research uses ethnography or participant observation followed by filmmaking collaborations that involve these artists, the writer and different filmmakers from the industry. The writer positions himself as the producer for the films, supporting and managing the members of the group to explore their own artistic decisions. This paper focuses on one particular production at the early stage of the project.

Keywords
collaborative filmmaking, indigenous media, Javanese performance art
About the Author
Tito Imanda obtained a master’s degree from the Department of Media, Culture and Communication in New York University in 2007, funded by a Fulbright Scholarship. In 2008, he joined Universitas Bina Nusantara in Jakarta, where he later served as its first Head of School of Media and Communication and founded the film program in 2010—back then this was only the second film school in Indonesia that offers a bachelor degree. At the moment, he is mostly working in Yogyakarta and London, doing fieldwork, and finishing his PhD program at the Department of Media and Communication, Goldsmiths, University of London.
INTRODUCTION

This work explores the process and results of a Javanese traditional performance art group that adapts to filmmaking and argues that choreography, the methods of dancing/performing on stage and artistic arrangements, must adapt to different requirements in filmmaking. The group, Tjipta Boedaja (which literally means “creating culture”) is involved in many forms of art, but their speciality is wayang wong, a traditional dance drama/opera-like performance. The group is one of the few wayang wong troupes that are still active in Java. It is special because while wayang wong is known as an urban art and wayang wong performances are usually located in urban areas, the group is situated in a village at the highland of Central Java. Beside its reputation for traditions and rituals, the group is well-known for innovations and creative energy.

To look at the importance of verbal and aural communication in maintaining the villagers’ communal identities, I argue that the group is in the stage of aural/oral society in the Marshall McLuhan theory about the evolution of cultures and media technology. McLuhan believes that literacy prepares people for visual and electronic media. He argues that the aural/oral society that still depends on face-to-face communications would fail to focus on a film’s storyline or message (106-126, 131-133). While most of the group members are literate, and some even have university education, people of the village still depend heavily on face-to-face communications. The group mainly prepares their shows without scripts or other written documents. They do not develop their identities from the books or newspapers they read, as they only use reading and writing abilities for daily practicalities. Social meetings, correct gestures, and body contacts are still crucial in shaping personal connections, and these connections are preconditions for making collaborations. Visitors who work with the group or those who visit the village often, would get invitations from families to have lunch or dinner at their houses. Failing to address these invitations properly, or to be seen objecting to eat the food could jeopardize the rapport.

Meanwhile, there are views suggesting that people from aural/oral societies might express themselves in unique and interesting ways using electronic visual technology. In an exploration of indigenous Australians’ media, Eric Michaels notes that the Warlpiri people of Central Australia mostly used realist/direct cinema style and used less standardized plot structures that were taught by their media mentors (30). Michaels believes that delete particular sociocultural conditions might create unique visual storytelling. In this case, the group has different norms for exchanging and storing oral traditions that affect the way they produce their films (30-32). In the case of Tjipta Boedaja, these early filmmaking experiences had made members realize aesthetic differences between stage and camera, and they
are trying to develop new choreographies, dancing styles, and artistic approaches to fit better with the camera and editing process.

Moreover, film scholar Rachel Moore revisits early film theories that observe early cinema experiences in Europe, rearticulating the clash between modernity and the “primitives” (6). This might resonate with McLuhan’s view of pre-literate society’s interaction with electronic medium. However, Moore argues, instead of seeing the “clash” as failure, that early film theorists such as Vachel Lindsay, Béla Balázs, and Sergei Eisenstein believe that albeit being traumatic, these experiences led producers and audiences to adapt to further technologies, procedures, and new visual language. She also argues that early filmmaker, Jean Epstein, and theorist, Walter Benjamin, see that this clash has built cinema’s power to allow expressive content, while other theorists Sigfried Kracauer and André Bazin perceive that this process has developed film capacity to fulfill the desire to reproduce reality (Moore 20-24).

These different thoughts inspire the main research questions for this work: How do the dancers in Tjipta Boedaja adapt to filmmaking? This question puts together a few more specific questions: How do stage traditions affect the film adaptation process and vice versa? What are the biggest differences from stage that hinder the dancers to create films the way they want? How do technology, procedures, and film become challenges and how do these dancers overcome these challenges? In the end, there is also a question on how these dancers choose the strategy to adapt to cinema, between creating expressive contents and reproducing reality. However, as this article focuses in the beginning part of a project that is still in progress, there is a limit on how we can deal with the last question. Months after this production was done, the dancers are still exploring different strategies of cinema—observational to haptic, objective to expressive, or formulaic narratives versus all other storytelling traditions, and they are also in need to retrospect their performance traditions. However, we can start answering the last question by exploring the group’s process to decide on the social/cultural statement of the film.

**TJIPTA BOEDAJA ARTS COMPANY**

I met Padepokan Seni (Arts Company) Tjipta Boedaja when I visited their village in 2008, after reading articles about them in a Jakarta newspaper. Upon learning that they did not have any visual documentation of the performances, I offered them to produce documentaries, to train them to use video equipment, and later to conduct collaborative filmmaking with them. The group accepted the offers enthusiastically, as by then the members already realized the importance of
visual documentation. The group is a dance company well-known for their arts and traditions, especially in wayang wong or wayang orang. The group is located in a small village called Tutup Ngisor, 9.3 km from the crater of Mount Merapi, one of the most active volcanoes in the world, erupting every 7.5 years in average, supplying the area with natural fertilizer from its volcanic ashes. When the volcano erupts, the whole village must evacuate, along with all other villages in radius 10–15 km. from the crater, depending on the strength of the eruption. Mount Merapi is also one of the most sacred mountains in the Javanese cosmology. It used to be called Mount Candramuka or Candradimuka, the sacred mountain in the wayang stories.

In this little village, farmers stage wayang wong as part of their rituals for safety as well as farming cycle. There are different kinds of ritual throughout the year, but the biggest ones are a wayang wong performance at the celebration night of the Javanese New Year and a field dance called Jathilan in the following morning. In these particular occasions, prayers and offerings become part of the performance itself. Although the group accepts members from outside the village, and some members have moved out the village, we can say that all of the 215 people, which is the population of the village, who are related by lineage or marriage, are members or affiliates of the group; many of them have danced at one stage of their life or helped the group’s performances. When the group is showing their ritual performances, everyone in the village would either perform or watch, with no ticket or entrance fee. There are about thirty active adult dancers, two-third of them are male. There are more than fifty non-active dancers and affiliates who can step up to the stage whenever needed, and the group also has a wayang bocah (child wayang) troop that consists of more than twenty dancers. Moreover, there are about twenty active non-dancer gamelan musicians and another twenty in their reserve.

Villages around Merapi Mountain have plenty of rites and traditions (Triyoga 147-149). Peasants of Merapi routinely perform different safety and agriculture rituals. The first sacred wayang wong performance was done in the Javanese/Islamic New Year in 1937 to be part of these rituals. That event became the birth of the group, and from then on they also perform on the village’s stage at the end of the Ramadan month, Prophet Mohammad’s birthday, and the Indonesian Independence Day. This cycle of performing four times a year still remains until today. The group has a home stage in the middle of the village, but about once or twice a month they get an invitation to perform outside the village, for weddings, village celebrations, or even for official ceremonies in towns around the village. While there is no official rate in hiring them to dance, the dancers are happy even if they do not get paid. Surely, from these invitations, dancers can get about 150.000 rupiah (US $10), while musicians can get about half this amount. However, the dancers and musicians are not supposed to depend on the income from performances. To make sure that
the group can maintain their arts and traditions, Yoso Sudarmo, the founder of the group required all members of the group to keep their profession as farmers, arguably designed to make sure that they keep their art as an aesthetic expression and not as their main source of income.

As one of the closest villages to the Mount Merapi crater, Tutup Ngisor is quite remote, but today we can get there in two hours from Yogyakarta. Not very long ago the only way to reach the village was by a dirt path. A small asphalt road that goes directly to the village today was built only about 10 years ago, connecting the village to the closest market about 3 kilometers away, and a slightly bigger road connects the market to Muntilan, a small town 7 kilometers further. Just like most traditional performance, the group prepares their performance without scripts and with limited written documents. Tjipta Boedaja performances attracted journalists from big cities, university students, and academics. This great public attention is very likely attained from the exotic image of its remoteness and strong sense of tradition, as well as resistance towards commercialism or professionalism of the performing arts. However, Nurmanda's study about this group suggests that one of the group's biggest strength is their adaptive attitude to changes (158), and they became very creative and contemporary especially under the last son of Yoso Sudarmo, Sitras Anjilin.

This remote and exotic location in some ways had built the group’s reputation as the “authentic” Javanese performance art. Surely, in the everyday life, there is no “authentic” arts, even for the traditional ones: Surakarta and Yogyakarta styles of wayang wong are very different, every wayang wong group has some detail moves or stage protocols that make it different from one another, and interactions between artists from different locations make flows of influences between groups possible. The presence of dancers from cities in the village, along with Tjipto Boedojo dancers’ mobility, have caused some changes in the group’s dance move details, and these changes are particularly visible when we closely compare old and young dance moves side by side. However, in general, dancers in Tutup Ngisor see this as something natural, and it does not affect the ritual traditions. Moreover, there have been new social, economic, and technological developments in the past several years that are unthinkable for older generations. The decision to record shows and to build a visual archive is important so younger generations can always look back to the ways previous generations perform in the past. In 2013, the group legalized its organization to make it easier for them to conduct business with government or to get commercial funding after decades of being a family-bound organization. There is a continuous increase in performance orders from different villages around the area, and many dancers and gamelan players get income to maintain their households. Almost every family has access to satellite television at home. Young dancers open their Facebook accounts from their cell phones. At the same
time, there are several strategies done by Tjipta Boedaja to maintain the traditions. The company established the wayang bocah group to make sure that more children learn early how to dance wayang. Lately they staged an all-women show to bring back many female dancers who retired early from the stage for marriage and several other shows for senior dancers to make sure younger generations can watch the moves from older generations. There is a weekly gamelan orchestra recital “ritual” to make sure members keep playing the musical instruments. Meanwhile, as mentioned above, the founding father of the group required all of his family and the members of the group to continue farming in order to maintain the spirit to live for the arts, instead of doing arts to make a living.

Anjilin have plenty of experiences in performing in front of different kinds of audiences. He realizes that nowadays spectators have different experiences and that younger generations are more familiar with television and other electronic gadgets. For this, the group under his leadership came out with decisions to make the show last shorter or to adopt electronic equipment into the show, for example using a digital projector to create dynamic backdrops for performances. The group realizes the danger from the lack of documentation, as they start to notice differences of the dance styles and gestures between dancers from older and younger generations. Anjilin is starting to write plays, especially for contemporary drama. Meanwhile, some things persist during his time. As mentioned above, while practically everyone in Tjipta Boedaja is literate, the group still prepares most of their wayang wong performances without scripts or written production documents. The group is always strict about some basic rules in their stage: no percussion instrument and no killing scene on stage, unless for a giant character called Cakil, a symbol of temptation who always disturbs the protagonist’s meditation.

Wayang wong have existed in Java at least from the eighth century AD, mainly to perform the Javanese version of the stories from the Indian ancient books Ramayana and Mahabharata. The Javanese watch wayang shows in different forms (wayang wong, shadow puppet, wooden puppet, etc.) for its moral and daily wisdom. The group’s wayang performance can take up to five hours. Until twenty years ago, the group’s dance movements and arts methods were relatively similar with what Yoso Soedarmo taught them since 1937. Every dancer has regular characters to perform based on their charisma and body shape. However, access to the outside world increased the younger generations’ exposure to outside influence. Nine young dancers have finished or are currently doing their studies in dance schools or in other arts at the university level, and more students are to come. These young dancers are used to perform very different characters required by their schools or by urban stage directors. The group’s styles and art methods are increasingly mixed with the styles and methods from the outside. Anjilin explained that his interactions with outsiders actually shaped his arts to be more cosmopolitan, and
he prefers the group to be able to perform different kinds of dances. One of the best examples was when in March 2013 Tjipta Boedaja performed William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer’s Night Dream* (Javanese title: “Night Dream in Merapi”) with a Javanese traditional look and taste, a directorial collaboration between Anjilin and a French anthropologist-performer Catherine (Kati) Basset.

**THE INTIMATE AND FUN TO THE STRICT AND TIRESOME: FROM STAGE TO FILM PRODUCTION**

A stage performance is usually initiated by a group meeting, which mostly happens after eight o’clock in the evening when everyone who wants to perform night prayer has finished doing it. Ten to twenty available members sit together on a plastic mat at the stage or on the hall floor where the spectators usually sit during the shows. These meetings typically start with Anjilin or other “officials” opening the meetings by explaining the motivation for having the performance, the kind of performance, and the story that these group officials propose for the show, the style, and the casts. Then the discussion goes to the more technical matters: the persons-in-charge for different production tasks, the style of choreography, costumes, makeup, decoration, and lighting, the production plan, transportation (if the show is outside of the village), and (if applicable) the show fees. In a culture with seniority-oriented values like Java, members under 30 years are usually quiet. These meetings can go on for hours, but when the time is running out, the group can schedule another night to discuss about the remaining issues. No one takes notes of the discussions, except for the list of the cast and crew. Smaller meetings would follow, usually between the director and different key production crews. Most of the time, Anjilin directs the shows, but he is also often performing, just like most of the production crews who also perform on stage.

There are several reasons for a performance. Scheduled annual shows are usually held inside the village. The group can also perform outside the village for regional events. There are different events in the Magelang district that invite different art communities to participate in different village carnivals. There are performances with fees, which are done for invitation from government agencies or from individuals or families. The last ones are usually for weddings or other family celebrations.

The meetings are usually quite formal in the opening, but they become more relaxed toward the end. As *wayang* characters are predominantly male and Tjipta Boedaja today rarely puts dancers playing for opposite sex characters, the participants of the meeting are mostly men. Almost everyone smokes clove
cigarettes, while older members smoke self-rolled cigarettes. Laughter and jokes fill most of the production meetings. The ambience is more serious when a meeting discusses an invitation the dancers are not comfortable with. A show for a local agriculture office in 2010 ended up with a performance with a strong statement about the farmers’ poor condition. An invitation from an annual villages’ performance festival becomes a burden as the group members think that the festival has become more commercially oriented.

After the meeting, the group prepares the rehearsals. Some shows need more rehearsals than others. In 2015, they came up with ideas to play basic *wayang* plots without preparation. Watching this kind of performances feels like watching jazz musicians doing a jam session, as the dancers exchange their usual casts to have fresh experiences. Most dancers stick to playing several characters all their lives inside the group. Children of Tutup Ngisor grow up mimicking adults dancing. Since they started to practice together, they experience different characters, so trainers and elders can see what casts suit best with their postures and personalities.

Still, rehearsals are important to exercise new choreographies, to practice dialogues (especially when the group wants to make statements), to feel fit with musicians (more often with the drummer who provides rhythm), to practice vocal ability (particularly when the director asks the characters to sing), to get used to new décor design, etc. However, some performances are more important than others. A show can have ten rehearsals, while others can have only one with many dancers absent because they already have commitments for other shows or are teaching dance in other places.

During serious rehearsals, the hall is full of dancers and musicians. Training of different scenes can take place at different parts of the hall. The choreographer—when he or she is not exercising—moves around these different groups, consulting and showing gestures to whoever is in charge for each group. The costume manager comes with a pile of wardrobes, and some dancers look at them and try to fit them. The music director consults with the drummer. The *dalang* practices his narration. The director sits and watches everything, making sure everything runs just like his/her visions. When production crews are already involved in the dance practice, whoever needs to consult with them must interrupt their sessions. These interruptions do not really matter, as the rehearsal atmosphere is very fluid and intimate.

Approaching the performance day, everyone in the group gets busier. The whole Tutup Ngisor village residents are involved in the preparation if it is a ritual performance. The elderly takes care of ritual organization, the youth prepares offerings and decorations, housewives prepare food, small children put offerings in
peculiar spots, everyone must get involved. When doing non-ritual performances, the size of people involved can be a lot smaller, even though late night performances like *wayang wong* still require housewives to cook for all the spectators. There are two dinner meals distributed among spectators during the show. For spectators from big cities or those who are invited by the group, Anjilin would ask them to eat dinner in his house before the show starts.

Meanwhile, film production meetings start in the same manner, or maybe even more informally because the team from the city prefers to get rid of formalities as soon as possible. The fun stops when the cinematographer explains about his vision, “we need to find a walk path in the middle of a wet unplanted rice field with mount Merapi in the background, face east, so we can capture sunrise,” and all the dancers seem to think very hard whether such a place really exists or not. In the following meetings, the fun and fluid atmosphere that just started for five minutes in the meeting is gone when these film crews start to ask the dancers to do the impossible: “we must have the source of electricity up there on the location” or “we need the snack to be available for the whole crews and casts before dawn on that specific rice field, everyone must stand by with costume and makeup by then,” or the most basic thing: “everyone must follow the shooting schedule made by the production manager.”

The situation also becomes awkward when someone older from the group must brainstorm with a young film crew, a stranger who is only half his age. It must be not easy for a local senior that these strangers can talk back. Meanwhile, the line producer from the city might ask everyone in charge to take note of the smallest things because he/she does not want anyone to miss anything. The production meetings seem to happen constantly during the pre-production and production periods, as problems keep coming and the process runs with minimum stability.

The team from the city also brought subversive ideas that turn the *wayang* universe or village cosmology upside down. It is really hard for the polite dancers to explain that the royal servant character, however good his heart and intentions, have no such power to conquer the knights, however corrupt they are. It is difficult to make these urban kids understand that Hanuman the King of Apes must walk in certain dance moves (and it happens that all local dancers who learned dancing from when they were children started performing as ape trooper). It is really hard to explain that helping a brother-in-law to build his house in the neighboring village is still more important than this afternoon dance rehearsal. It is more complicated since these college graduates think they know everything.

Another challenge is to enlighten the group from the city that their working methods are not always applicable with the traditional art performers, or that the
open and free atmosphere in the rural area does not necessarily mean that they can do everything they want. Older dancers get used to re-enact wayang stories on stage by improvising, so expecting them to memorize every word from film scripts is useless. Recce process, or location visit to work out its suitability for shooting, is already hard to do in an urban setting with its clear property law and regulations, but an open access scenery in the village does not mean that the film crew has permission to shoot everywhere. Putting cameras and measuring the light in someone’s rice field without permission can cause complicated problems, especially when the field belongs to someone from another village without prior knowledge of film equipment.

THE FILMMAKING PROCESS

The production of the film in this paper is not the first experience for the group to make film. The first film productions happened in 2008-2009 when I conducted a film workshop that was initially intended to provide skills to make visual documentation of their arts. With minimum support, these artists created five simple short films, each made with a very small production team. These films show the dancers’ life as villagers, as traditional performers, and as farmers. My conversations with group members after the workshop show that the general group members do not have real problems in adapting to the film’s observational visuality, probably since both stage and camera see the action from the same “fourth wall.” The workshop had asked these dancers to explore how different camera angles can have different strengths and purposes. When after the workshop I jokingly tested them with simple questions, such as levels of camera angles (high, eye level, low) when the characters involved have different authorities, they could easily fulfill the challenges. Surprisingly the five films done in 2009 had produced films with different kinds of visual narratives. One film covers the whole plot with one take and a subjective angle. There are films with a single perspective, putting the camera as stage audience and with continuous shot, but there are also films with multiple angles and cut-to-cut editing. However, the whole workshop and its productions are only introductory, and the bigger film production in 2014 intensifies these dancers’ film experience.

In August 2014, with the help of a production team both from Jakarta, the group is prepared to make the next film, with the initial plan to let the members of the group experience different processes and decisions taken by a professional or semi-professional film crew. From Jakarta, we brought Nosa Nurmanda to be the director for this project. Besides him, I brought a cinematographer, a lighting man, two producers and one unit manager from Jakarta. However, in the first meeting, a
local dancer asked if Anjilin could be a co-director with Nurmanda. I did not think about this possibility before, but this would not obstruct my plan. It is perfectly fine if the group members feel that they are ready to get involved in artistic and technical decisions. We decided to produce a dance film, a film in which dance is a major element of the story. I believe that producing a dance film would be the group’s strength. Before we talked about the concept of the film, I brought with me many copies of dance films to introduce the dancers to the genre. It turned out that they were already familiar with dance films, as they adore *Opera Jawa* (2006), a film that utilizes contemporary-traditional dance and fine arts by an Indonesian filmmaker from Yogyakarta, Garin Nugroho.

From the group, we had two local producers, a choreographer, musicians, and fourteen dancers. The locals mainly did the storyline, choreography, music, wardrobe, and arts; while the film crew from the city mainly did recording, cinematography and editing. Direction and management are two shared jobs between people from the two places. Naturally, Anjilin started to position himself to be in-charge with the performance, and left Nurmanda with directing tasks that deal more with cinematography and other film technicalities. Our first decision was appointing Surawan, one of the locals who graduated from a dance academy, as the choreographer. My role as one of the producers enabled me to support and observe the adaptation and the decision-making process.

The original idea we proposed to the group was to film a performance we saw several years earlier. In this performance, agriculture officer characters order farmer characters to use specific seeds and fertilizers, the rice products become abundant, the price of paddy rice goes down, the agriculture officers and rice traders laugh and the farmers get depressed. After this, the earth (played by many dancers covered by mud) gets mad and swallows everything, and at the end, a new paddy seed appear as a new beginning. The group preferred to do a completely different story, even though it has similarities in the plot. Farmers are the antagonists in this story, killing animals when they work with their land, provoking the earth to get mad and to swallow them, until the appearance of Mother Earth or Ibu Pertiwi or Dewi Sri or the Goddess of agriculture, the Javanese mythology figure who regulates the balance between humans and nature. She resolves the conflict and everyone live harmoniously. There is no dialogue in the film, but song lyrics can be heard as narration.

The new story made the team from Jakarta change several plans. Nurmanda had to discard the storyboard he made based on the first story (that he was involved in the performance) and decided to capture the dance with static cameras capturing in medium and long shots, since there was only little time to study the new dance for close ups and camera movements. The other significant thing that changed from
the initial production plan was the number of dancers involved, which changed from about ten dancers to fourteen dancers.

Then we appointed a line producer and a production manager from the available dancers. We talked about the requirements and the person-in-charge for wardrobe, makeup, music, the dance recitals, and we reminded ourselves that we only had two days left before the shooting days. Then we talked about the location. To be efficient, we decided to use one location but use different angles to capture different scenes. Nurmanda and our cameraperson showed the result of their hunting, pitching pictures of different outdoor locations, mostly with a view of Mount Merapi. The locals looked confused, and after getting answers from Nurmanda on where he took each picture, it was concluded that it would be very difficult if we start with the best locations, and we have to find out who owns them. Then we started by making a list of what we own, and then choosing the best from there. The discussion ended after we have chosen a land close to the village owned by a senior group member, which still has a good view of Mount Merapi.

After the meeting, everyone started to work fast: Surawan the choreographer started to work with the dancers. The assistant producer and person-in-charge of the wardrobe went to the town to purchase makeup and fabrics for costume. The production manager started to assign more people to help him: a talent coordinator, and persons-in-charge for consumption, property, and set dressers. Meanwhile, as we planned to have night shootings, the line producer dealt with the operator of the group's electric generators and mediated me with the owner of that land to sort out the amount of rent money I had to pay him. In terms of the management of the shooting, the members of the group knew exactly what to do.

In the next two days, all of the preproduction process ran smoothly. The remaining team from Jakarta got there by car the day after, bringing all the gears for camera, lighting, and sound. The dancers finished the choreography process and started to do recitals. One day before the production started, every supporting element like wardrobe, properties, set, makeup, electricity, and everything else were ready. Anjilin watched the exercises closely, and from time to time Surawan the choreographer came and consulted him. The night before shooting, we made the last production meeting and decided for crew call at 4 a.m. and talent call at 5 a.m.

Everyone was ready on the set on time. Breakfast was served on the set. Dancers started to practice again. The technical crew prepared everything so we could start to shoot before sunrise. When the time came, we captured the sun for a while before clouds covered it for the remaining of the day. We planned to shoot all of the seven scenes in one day, and even though we prepared another day for back up, the
scenes were done one by one just as scheduled. While Anjilin was strict in directing dancing and performances, Nurmanda proved himself prepared for technicalities: discussing and deciding angles, camera movements, and playing with the tempo. Between shootings, Anjilin called the choreographer for discussions. Nurmanda also went to Anjilin when he needed to make a crucial decision. Nurmanda initiated to improvise with the shooting schedule so we could get the dusk to add options for the sunrise, and to take a new scene that later was edited to run backward. The dancers were ready for strict schedule as well as sudden improvisation. The shooting went well until the end and everyone was happy.

The next task is to create music based on the dance, which turned out not to be the best way to do it. The main reason behind the decision to record music after the shooting was that we did not have time before the shooting, and nobody previously thought about the disadvantage of this process. No one in the crew—both from the locals and the team from Jakarta—had experience about this before. I knew a lot of films that did it this way, but I did not think much about the consequences of following the same process in a dance film. I was surprised that all the dancers could synchronize their dance without music, as everyone must count their steps in their minds, but it was harder for the musicians to follow the dance steps than the other way around. Moreover, while sometimes these dancers dance with recorded music, the best way to play both live, and it would be better when the musicians and the dancers know and understand each other’s tempo, so they can accentuate each other. We conducted the gamelan recording in the stage hall and must stop every time a motorcycle went by. The process started with the musicians composing each song and then followed by the recording. The group’s soundman borrowed a good mixer from a neighboring village, and Nurmanda—who is also an indie band player with two albums—taught the soundman his version to do proper recording. We finished all the recordings before midnight. The production was wrapped up and Nurmanda offered to edit the film himself, and I agreed with him.

The film starts with a scene showing four dancers acting as four different animals and doing activities outdoor followed by a scene of three male and two female farmers cultivating the land. In the next scene, the two groups meet and the male farmers kill the animals. The next scene is a dance party in the village. In the heat of the party, three earth/mud men suddenly appear, and they bury all of the male villagers. In the last part, Mother Earth emerges and restores the balance. The farmers and the animals were brought back to life, and everyone salutes her. The story comes as a statement to respect nature, and especially as a statement to an illegal mining company that was extracting volcanic sand from the nearest river, damaging the area around it.
While the directors and dancers looked happy with the shooting, the mood became gloomier during the rough-cut screening in mid-January. Anjilin was upset for the quality of the dance on screen. He believes that the dances were performed without feeling. He felt, after contemplating, that he failed to build good communication with the choreographer. His older brother reminded him that the time constraint did not give many choices on the result. Meanwhile, Nurmanda introduced some special effects in the edited version: the first one is to do reverse action in the scene where the earth swallows the farmers and use it for the scene where the Mother Earth restores the harmony. The dancers are very happy with this one. The second is to add digital smoke for the scene where the farmers are working in their land. The dancers felt the smoke was too much and they asked Nurmanda to reduce it. Then the discussion went on to evaluate the production by identifying problems that hopefully can be avoided in future productions. Nurmanda proposed to make the duration shorter by all bad movements and compositions. We discussed how camera and editing should contribute in improving the dance, by emphasizing the good parts and hiding the bad ones.

**DISCUSSING ADAPTATION TO FILM**

Similar to Eric Michaels’s argument that different sociocultural conditions might affect the way people adapt to new media, Tjipta Boedaja dancers find different customs and protocols in their arts both advantageous and disadvantageous in doing film. For instance, they use an observational film approach that treats the camera as a proscenium stage audience. Meanwhile, similarities between procedures for production in stage and film also provide them fundamental film production management skills. On the other hand, the new technology’s ability to capture details requires a higher degree of discipline and adaptation in the performance itself. As early film theorists believe that adapting to new media means adjusting to new technological, procedural, and aesthetical requirements, there is a number of things in a dance performance and a film production that these dancers must adapt to make a good film.

Something that these artists are able to adapt before they get shooting experience is a specific artistic strategy for film. In film, all dancers only wear a one-piece cloth and minimum makeup. Anjilin took this extreme decision as he believes that this would make the audience not get distracted by wardrobes and focus on the quality of the dance. In different occasions, Anjilin stated his belief that wayang wong costumes were too distracting when used for film. When Anjilin mentioned his excitement to make film, he also mentioned his artistic preferences: natural lighting, realist makeup, and wardrobe. He cannot imagine that a figure of the Bima
character in real life would look anything like Bima on stage. To get this natural and realist look in film, he prefers to get actors/dancers that look closest with how he pictures her in his mind. I believe that previous experience in watching television and films has given him necessary knowledge for this decision.

Meanwhile, dancing for the camera turned out to be very different from dancing on stage, and the disappointment in watching the quality of the dance in the rough cut version tells a lot about this. One dancer admits that he was struggling to perform for multiple takes and shots, something that he does not necessarily do when he performs on stage. This adds to the fact that he must do repeated actions exactly the same way, as improvisation can be problematic in the editing room. Another dancer highlights the camera's requirement for a more realistic acting, and a senior dancer notes the camera’s ability to capture detail movements, reminding him to focus on the smallest gestures. Another explained the absence of spectators’ emotion while watching them, making the performance for film affect the emotion of his dancing. In general, everybody agrees that film might need a more detailed choreography, especially since the camera's ability for close-up can capture these details, raise the performers when they are doing it right, and make them fall if they are not. In different discussions on different filming strategies and aesthetics during and after the production, they discovered many things about their arts and their practice that are useful not only for film but also for the stage. At one point, the dancers realize that they now have lesser standards in their performance. The founding father of the group was very strict in training the older generation dancers and pushed them to do detail movements or better acting, but this kind of training is no longer offered to the younger dancers who do not get that pressure.

In the preproduction process for the following projects, the dancers realize that a good visual for a dance film requires a long and close work between the choreographer, the dancers, and the director of photography. When working as a cameraman for a documentary focusing on elderly performance, a young dancer, Saparno, explained about his visual plan when covering the recitals. He basically shot one person doing the same gesture over and over with different types of shot, starting with the widest followed by more detail shots after that.

One of the biggest problems for these dancers in the film production is the procedure, especially compared to their traditionally lenient management style when working on their previous stage productions. The detail of work in film production, the time management, and the degree of discipline as well as the details of planning are things that they consider to be very valuable lessons. The dancers were not familiar with some basic procedures in administration like keeping bills and written plans for each stage of the work, and they think that these things would be useful for the evaluation process and planning for the next project.
Another observation perceives that film has a more egalitarian job description, responsibilities, and system of authorities.

The dancers realized that the new media also potentially widen their audience, and they spent significant time in the pre-production, deciding about specific statements of this film. They also explored other concerns—economic, political, ideological, social, environmental, etc. The idea of making a statement about the relationship between humans and nature was based on their social situation. The river that is close to the village brings volcanic sand, and with this the illegal mining companies extract the sand and create damage around the area. Some residents of the village were working as bulldozer or truck driver for these mining companies. When the group performed similar stories on stage several times, there were hopes that particular members of community get the clear message: “respect nature, quit your job!” The film version extends this message and the dancers hope that the film reaches and gets the attention of the company owner, government officials, residents of towns that the river runs through, students, and activists. Even if they were disappointed about the quality of the dance, they are very positive about the statement of the film. Moreover, they also talk about strategy: how the audience can relate their film with everyday life and actually get their statement, especially considering that dance film is not a familiar genre for most audience. There were also discussions whether dance scenes in the film would convey or obstruct the message. On the other hand, in the spirit of a good dance film, the dancers also question post-production decisions to do special effect for reverse action or the addition of smoke to the rice field scene: A dance film is weird enough for most audience, do special effects not make the film feel fake and put even more distance?
Note

1. In a shadow puppet or a wooden puppet wayang performance, the dalang usually act as a narrator, puppet master, director, producer, and the leader of the group. In more complicated performances like wayang wong, the director might ask someone else to do the dalang task to narrate the show.
Works Cited


