

**Asia Research Institute
Working Paper Series No. 108**

**Cross-Dressing Across Cultures:
Genre and Gender in the Dances of *Didik Nini Thowok***

Felicia Hughes-Freeland

School of the Environment and Society, Swansea University, UK
Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, Singapore

F.Hughes-Freeland@swansea.ac.uk

November 2008



The **ARI Working Paper Series** is published electronically by the Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore.

© Copyright is held by the author or authors of each Working Paper.

ARI Working Papers cannot be republished, reprinted, or reproduced in any format without the permission of the paper's author or authors.

Note: The views expressed in each paper are those of the author or authors of the paper. They do not necessarily represent or reflect the views of the Asia Research Institute, its Editorial Committee or of the National University of Singapore.

Citations of this electronic publication should be made in the following manner: Author, "Title," ARI Working Paper, No. #, Date, www.nus.ari.edu.sg/pub/wps.htm. For instance, Smith, John, "Ethnic Relations in Singapore," ARI Working Paper, No. 1, June 2003, www.ari.nus.edu.sg/pub/wps.htm.

Asia Research Institute Editorial Committee

Maznah Binti Mohamad - Editor

Geoff Wade

Venni Venkata Krishna

Michelle Miller

Roy Anjali Gera

Zaide Joyce

Valerie Yeo

Asia Research Institute

National University of Singapore

469A Tower Block #10-01,

Bukit Timah Road,

Singapore 259770

Tel: (65) 6516 3810

Fax: (65) 6779 1428

Website: www.ari.nus.edu.sg

Email: arisec@nus.edu.sg

The Asia Research Institute (ARI) was established as a university-level institute in July 2001 as one of the strategic initiatives of the National University of Singapore (NUS). The mission of the Institute is to provide a world-class focus and resource for research on the Asian region, located at one of its communications hubs. ARI engages the social sciences broadly defined, and especially interdisciplinary frontiers between and beyond disciplines. Through frequent provision of short-term research appointments it seeks to be a place of encounters between the region and the world. Within NUS it works particularly with the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Business, Law and Design, to support conferences, lectures, and graduate study at the highest level.

Didik Nini Thowok is a high-profile Indonesian choreographer and performer. This article discusses his trajectory as a cross-gendered, cross-cultural cosmopolitan, and examines his work in relation to broader analysis of cross-cultural collaboration and gender in performance culture. I explore these issues in relation to two very different dance projects from the early 2000s, which originate in Didik's transnational engagement with Japanese performance culture sponsored by the Japan Foundation.

The *Bedhaya Hagoromo* project (2001) combined a classical Javanese court dance form with performance elements from Japanese *Noh* drama. 'In Gesture and Glance. The Female Role Player in Asian Dance and Theatre' (2003) was an international dance tour for four male cross-dressed dancers from India, Japan, China and Indonesia, in which Didik represented Indonesia. I discuss these projects to generate insights into the process of both inter-Asian and east-to-west cultural flows (Kuan-Hsing and Chua 2007), and how gender culture is represented and negotiated in transnational performance contexts. Cultural contrasts from a western perspective have long been represented in sexual metaphors, and in this system Asia has tended to be represented as feminine. This is an example of the a-historical reification of difference which produces stereotyped dichotomies at the level of both gender *and* culture. So while although this article is based on examples of Didik's particular performance interests and practices, it elaborates broader cultural issues about innovation, collaboration, gender, the location of culture in performance, and the politics of representation.

INTRODUCING DIDIK NINI THOWOK

Didik Nini Thowok, the performing name and dance brand of Didik Hadiprayitno, is arguably the most popular and successful professional performing artist-cum-entertainer in Indonesia. His success and popularity as an idiosyncratic innovator rest on his skills as an entertainer and comedian, particularly as a female impersonator in popular *ketoprak* plays, and in his humorous choreographic creations. He performs in a wide range of venues: at civic events, on the streets, on Indonesian television, and on stages around the world. He is versatile and has a constantly developing creative dynamism. He is always looking out for new ideas and new opportunities to develop them, through his own network in Java, or with artists from other societies.

I first met Didik during my PhD research in 1982. Since then I have seen him perform as a dancer and as a comedian in many contexts and countries. I have also had many conversations with him about his own work and about Indonesian performance cultures. I first saw him perform in 1983 in 'One Night in Tokyo', a revue produced in the city of Yogyakarta by the troupe, Glass and Dolls, directed by the dance enthusiast and entrepreneur, Hamzah. The dances were performed on a set consisting of a long flight of white steps inspired by Japanese cabaret, itself inspired by 1930s Hollywood Deco. Didik's clown dance opened with his red-nosed face peering from behind a Japanese kimono stretched across the top of the steps (fig 1).



Fig 1 Clown Dance, 'One Night in Tokyo', Purna Budaya, Yogyakarta, 1983.

This entrance was a small example of complex cultural references: an Indonesian dancer wearing a western clown signifier (red nose) and using the kimono as a Balinese dancer uses a curtain in *topeng*, *arja*, *drama gong*, dancing behind it before making an entrance on to the stage. So in the early 1980s, Didik was already combining a Javanese love of comedy with a western clown persona in a Japanese-inspired version of modern theatrical spectacle.

Clowning has been central to his performance work, in many different ways. For instance, in July 1989 I saw his 'Sandal dance' (*Tari Teklek*), when a cavalcade of pupils, wearing wigs and sunglasses, clattered hilariously along the street in the wooden sandals traditionally worn in Java at bath time in the opening carnival for the Yogya Arts Festival. Later that year, as part of a concert for tourists in his home, I saw him perform his famous *Dwimuka* dance in which the masked dancer turns round to reveal a grimacing Didik (figs 2 and 3).¹ In 1999 at Yogya Town Hall after the local elections, he performed *Walang Kekek* ('Grasshopper', named after the melody), first unmasked as a beautiful woman (Fig 4), and then masked, as a gauche young woman, and as an elderly woman. In addition to his high-profile professional work, Didik also raises money for ongoing causes and specific disasters dances, using a range of strategies, from the long-established practice of *ngamen* (performing on the streets for money), to employing formal institutions such as charitable trusts. I last saw him perform in the Special Region of Yogyakarta in July 2006, a month after a major earthquake had caused devastation in the Province. Didik was one of many local performers who participated in a free *gamelan* and *ketoprak* concert to raise the morale of homeless and hungry people in the district of Bantul. He also accepted my offer to provide a free concert to entertain the hamlet of Bulu which had been almost completely destroyed by an earthquake. It turned into a long night, as volunteers in the hamlet had organised performances by different groups of local children. Didik had also brought along his friends from the well-known TV comedy troupe, Lawak Angkringan, including the singer Kristina. Lawak Angkringan performed comical sketches with audience participation by children. A sketch about a *jaipongan* dance class with

¹ The inspiration for *Tari Dwimuka* was a detective film where the killer hides behind models. The first version was called *Tari Salome*; the final version was choreographed in 1987 (Janarto 2005: 112-3).

Didik as a child, wearing hilarious gigantic green spectacles, provided the link for Didik's own performance in *Walang Kekek*.² On this occasion he refreshed the dance by dropping short bursts of techno music into the sound track and responding according in his dance, the jerky movements triggering new and unexpected laughs for the audience.³ Didik often refreshes his established dances in this way: I have rarely seen him perform the same dance in an identical manner, and he also generates new dances out of a previous idea. For instance, he developed the 'Two Face' dance concept into the '*Jepindo*' dance and later the 'Four Face' dance (*Pancamuka*) which was developed collaboratively using masks from China, India, Java and Japan.⁴



Figs 2 and 3 *Dwimuka* Mask and Face, Didik's Home, 1989

² *Jaipongan* was a new dance form created in the 1980s in west Java which became extremely popular due to its lively choreographies, virtuoso drumming and, occasionally, its risqué songs.

³ A short section from *Walang Kekek* is available on my Indonesian performance website: <http://www.swan.ac.uk/sssid/indonesianperformance/newtraditions.htm>

⁴ *Pancamuka* was performed at the *Kala Kina Kini* concert in which *Bedhaya Hagoromo* was premiered in 2001.



Fig 4 Walang Kekek, Yogya Town Hall 1999

It is still rare for a performer to live by his or her art in Indonesia, but Didik has succeeded through a combination of strategy and necessity (Hughes-Freeland 2001). He is socially marginal in a number of ways, being part Chinese,⁵ Protestant, and performing as a cross-dresser, although he dresses as a man in everyday life. Astutely professional in his self-promotion and business, he runs a thriving chain of dance schools, and has taken a leading role in developing stage make-up in Indonesia. Networking is one of his many professional skills. In Indonesia he has been the subject of much popular journalism, such as the women's magazine *Femina*'s 6-part online series in 2007, and also an authorized biography (Janarto 2005). He is one of four Indonesian 'Artists' Voices' in Burrridge's edited collection about dance in Asia and the Pacific, where he is described as an 'internationally acclaimed comedic cross-gender performer and teacher (2006: 114).⁶ His assiduousness in maintaining relations with overseas scholars has resulted in a number of academics referring to his work and words (Hughes-Freeland 2001; Mrazek 2005; Ross 2005).

Didik may remind some regional specialists of the distinctive economic entrepreneurship of the Chinese in Java, but he takes care to balance his modern professional work by responding to social needs in the Javanese 'mutual help' (*gotong royong*) manner. His work can be appreciated and enjoyed because he operates out of a populist central Javanese cultural framework, but although he has a sense of obligation to Yogyakarta, the region of Java where he trained and now lives, he also uses choreographic practices from other cultural regions of Indonesia, and can be appreciated outside central Java. This is evidence that tradition, in the sense of established socio-cultural expectations, legitimises innovation in more than purely

⁵ Didik's father has some Chinese blood, but this is probably less than has been claimed. Indeed, Didik maybe only be 1/16th Chinese (Alex Dea, email 14 September 2008).

⁶ Surprisingly, Didik's choreographic skills are not mentioned. The other Indonesia dancers discussed are Retno Maruti, Sardono, and Boi Sakti.

staged and performative ways. His work also shows how unhelpful a simple contrast between past ‘tradition’ and ‘innovation’ is. Performance traditions are rarely static repetitions of established practice. Didik differs from choreographers of Javanese court dance forms which now form part of the classical Indonesian dance canon, because these choreographies aim to conceal signs of newness even though they are highly innovative (Hughes-Freeland 2007: 212-216). Creativity is not simply the work of private individuals working from a blank sheet but occurs contextually and collaboratively, within frameworks or fields of references. Creative innovations have to be recognizable for audiences to be able to accept what is new, otherwise they will fail to establish a niche through recognition, and remain as gimmicky one-offs. The matrix of the socio-cultural context in which the choreographer works with tradition and precedent ultimately determines whether a work will be ephemeral, or whether it will ‘stick’ (Barber 2007), and change the future of traditions.

Didik’s performance practice exemplifies the relationship between tradition and innovation in the creative process, and he is a popular mainstream entertainer in Indonesia precisely because his work can be understood from the local Indonesian Javanese cultural frame of reference, even though it is constantly innovative and surprising. Didik’s creative work usually begins with a close collaboration with a master of whatever form he is interested in. It is because he innovates by building on established practice that his work is so popular. As well as playing with combinations of old and new, he also plays with many different choreographic and performative practices in his work to produce original and entertaining choreographic and theatrical performances. Although his work is playful, it is firmly grounded in a particular cultural framework, even though it pushes at the cultural boundaries and goes beyond them. We can see this process at work in the creation of *Bedhaya Hagoromo*, a transnational collaboration with Japan that combines the classical Javanese *bedhaya* dance form with elements from Japanese *Noh* drama. It is revealing that this dance was premiered at a concert entitled ‘The Time of Then and Now’ (*Kala Kina Kini*) – a theme which sums up Didik’s creative approach in general and in this particular project.

Bedhaya Hagoromo: The Dance

Bedhaya Hagoromo is an evidently new and authored dance based on the conventions of the classical Javanese court *bedhaya* dance form as it developed in the court of the sultan of Yogyakarta (Hughes-Freeland 2008). The first performances took place in 2001, at Taman Ismail Marzuki in Jakarta on 28 and 29 October, and then at the Purna Budaya Hall in Yogyakarta on 5 November. I heard about the dance when Didik was in London on tour with ‘In Gesture and Glance’ in February 2003. Didik’s innovations in this dance are two-fold. He incorporates aspects of Japanese performance, and he alters the gendered conventions of *bedhaya*. Didik explained that he had received a grant from the Japan Foundation to study *nihon buyo* with a female impersonator, the master Gojo Masanosuke from October to December 2000. We subsequently discussed *Bedhaya Hagoromo* by email and when I was in Indonesia, and he later sent me a DVD recording of the performance on 12 October 2004 in the prestigious Jakarta Arts Hall (Gedung Kesenian Jakarta) to help me develop the account that follows.⁷ I will first discuss the cross-cultural aspects of the dance, and then consider its gendering in relation to Didik’s second cross-cultural project.

⁷ The *Bedhaya Hagoromo* project is also discussed by Janarto (2005: 179-185).

Bedhaya and *Noh* are high art forms which require their audiences to be connoisseurs to a certain degree. *Bedhaya* used to be exclusive to the royal courts of Java. A dance school was opened by two Yogyakarta princes in 1918, and since then the dance has been taught in state and private venues, including the Indonesian Academy of Arts (ISI) which provided eight of the dancers for *Bedhaya Hagoromo*. Following Indonesian independence, *bedhaya* conventions as practised in the Yogya sultanate style can be generalised as follows. Nine female dancers perform a dance which normally lasts from 60-90 minutes. It is normally divided into two distinct sections, flanked by entrance and exit marches. In the first part, the *lajuran*, the dancers' movements are synchronized in patterns which are subtly differentiated and extremely slow when performed on the spot, and relatively swift when changing floor patterns. In the second part, there is a duet which refers to a 'story' which may include a fight.

Didik introduced the dance to me as follows:

'In *Bedhaya (Hagoromo)* there are three parts. First there is *ladrang* (a musical form) used for the opening dancing in *bedhaya* 'format' [used in the original Indonesian]' (Fig 5).⁸ The choreography and music retain the structural elements of court *bedhaya*: entrance march, dance accompanied by a *ladrang*; pause for a song; dance with *ketawang*, and exit march.⁹ But these are compressed, temporally, so the entire dance lasts about 36 minutes, instead of 60-90 minutes,¹⁰ and the musical ensemble is much smaller than is for usual *bedhaya* dances. The costumes are the usual velvet jerkins, wrapped *bathik* skirts, elaborate hair ornaments, and ostrich feathers, used since the 1920s in Yogya, but the dancers wear fans at their waists instead of dance daggers, and the two lead dancers wear kimonos and extra hair ornaments. The dance movement in the opening section is like classical feminine dance, except for a gesture in which the outstretched right arm at shoulder with the hand holding a fan flat, closed or open. There is less dance sash work than usual with the left hand, which instead is held in *ngruji*, palm facing forward with the thumb across it and the other fingers straight and close together. This movement still conforms to the square shape of the arms which is a feature of *bedhaya* movement in Yogya dance, except that the square is normally defined by the position of the lowered elbows, not by outstretched arms.

⁸ Didik Nini Thowok email, 22 May 2007, translated by the author.

⁹ The music is more complex than this; for instance, the *ladrang* is preceded by *gendhing kethuk 2* and *minggah kethuk 4* (Alex Dea email 14 Sept 2008), but in this discussion, I follow the choreographers's perspective, rather than that of the composer.

¹⁰ The first section lasts for 15 minutes, the second for about 13 minutes.



Fig 5 *Bedhaya Hagoromo*: *bedhaya* ‘format’ *lajuran* formation

Didik’s explanation continues:

‘... then , before the story begins, in part two, i.e. with *ketawang* music, all the dancers use masks to indicate (*menunjukkan*) the collaboration between *Noh* drama and *bedhaya*. So as well as masks, the dancers also carry fans. Then in the dance movement I mix (*memadukan*) the two movements as well’ (Fig 6).



Fig 6 *Bedhaya Hagoromo* mixing *bedhaya* and *noh*

So the innovation on classical *bedhaya* intensifies at the end of the *ladrang* section, when the dancers turn to face backstage and put on their masks for the remainder of the performance. These masks are deliberately designed not to look like *Noh* masks; Didik’s mask references the *Noh* Hagoromo maiden mask (Fig 7), but in this performance has brightly painted features, in keeping with the style of Central Javanese masks (Fig 8).¹¹ After a short women’s

¹¹ There has been some debate about the whether these masks should be altered to be more in keeping with the Japanese aesthetic (see Coldiron 2004). When I raised this with Didik, he explained that the original *Noh* masks are too expensive – for his farewell solo performance in Japan, he had to pay 100,000 yen – around £550 -- ‘a special rate for students’, to hire a costume for a performance of the Japanese *Hagoromo* dance (fig 7). The masks for *Bedhaya Hagoromo* were designed to represent a synthesis between Java and Japan, not a *Noh* aesthetic.

song, male vocalists make Japanese *hayashi* calls. These resemble male *alok* calls which are used in *bedhaya* in *bedhaya* dances in Surakarta but not in Yogyakarta, where they are associated with women's dances outside the court considered to be the opposite of *bedhaya*'s refined elegance. There is drumming on a *Noh* shoulder drum (*tsutsumi*) which evokes the sound of the Javanese *keprak*, a tapping on a wooden box, used to signal to the dancers that it is time to stand up, or that the rhythm will change.



Fig 7 Original *Hagoromo* mask



Fig 8 Mask for *Bedhaya Hagoromo*

The original inspiration for the composition which makes the cultural encounter more convincing and motivated is the resemblance of the old *Noh* story, *Hagoromo* ('the Heavenly Mantle') to the Javanese folk story of *Jaka Tarub*. Both tales centre on an earthly man who steals a heavenly nymph's wings to keep her on earth, but finally returns them to her, so she can fly back to heaven.¹² *Jaka Tarub* would not normally be used for high-art Javanese court *bedhaya* because culturally it belongs to the domain of folklore, but the high status of the Japanese version makes it appropriate for its representation as a *bedhaya* dance.

Didik writes:

'In this *ketawang* part we enter the story, which is when Jaka Tarub gives the wings [back to Nawang Wulang, the nymph from whom he has stolen them out of love for her]; in Japanese this is known as *Hagoromo*, then the nymphs dance as they fly back to the sky. In this part the collaboration and 'blending' [sic] is really lovely (*apik*) the music and the dance I take from the *Noh* style *Hagoromo* dance when the nymphs dance as they fly back to the sky. After that we go into the third part and return to *ladrang* until the end.'

¹² There are many regional versions of *Hagoromo*, which is one of the oldest *Noh* stories. An online translation by Pound and Fennollosa is available on the University of Virginia's 'Japanese text initiative' website. The *Jaka Tarub* story also has many versions (Brakel-Papenhijzen 2006).

In the *ketawangan* section there is a very short duet using the flat fan movement by the dancers who perform the leading roles of Batak and Endhel (danced by Hardiono and Didik), who always represent the main characters in *bedhaya* stories. Here Batak portrays Jaka Tarub, and Endhel the nymph Nawangwulan (Fig 9). After the duet, Batak fetches the mantle, and returns it to Endhel who puts it on. The lighting then changes to pink, and Javanese *kemanak* instruments accompany a song sung by Didik based on the *noh Hagoromo* text. This segues into a Japanese-style chorus which accompanies Didik's solo 'Angel dance' (*tari Hagoromo*) (Fig 10). This dance has been described as an 'ethereal solo section in *Noh* style... [which] really went to the heart of *Noh*, and showed how well it worked with Yogyanese dance'.¹³ Didik's dance movements here become more 'Japanese' looking, chiefly due to the shallow angle of the elbows which are held lower than is usual in the feminine Javanese dance mode, the raised arm holding the fan, and the upright stance instead of the usual low centre of gravity.



**Fig 9 Batak (standing),
Endhel (centre front)**



Fig 10 The 'Angel dance'

Court *bedhaya* choreographies normally emphasise collectivity, and the dancers are dressed identically, including Batak and Endhel who dance a duet in the second section. *Bedhaya Hagoromo* emphasises individual virtuosity more than classical *bedhaya*, and this section showcases Didik's solo dance instead of the usual duet. The disruption of collective uniformity also occurs near the close of the dance, when the dancers return to the 'three by three formation' (*rakit tiga*) and perform the usual *bedhaya* dance movements, in this case *kicat nyangkol*, stepping first to the left and then to the right, with one side of the dance scarf wrapped round the elbow and the other held out to the side. Didik alone remains motionless in the centre of the front row except for a slight movement of his fan slightly, just keeping in formation with little steps (Fig 11).

¹³ Garrett Kam, email to Didik Nini Thowok, copied to me 5 Sept 2007.



Fig 11 The Three-by-three Formation (*rakit tiga*)

When Didik kneels, the other dancers follow, and perform the conventional '*nglayang*' or gliding movement which signals the end of the dance. When the other dancers perform the '*sembah*' salutation of palms joined and raised to the nose, used conventionally in the court as a sign of respect to the sultan, Didik just tucks his fan into his waist band and organises his kimono sleeves. The dancers then all perform the courtly 'sitting walk' (*mlampah dodok*) and regroup into the body formation used for the original entrance in order to make their exit.

Didik is clearly identified as the author of this dance, in contrast to normal court *bedhaya* conventions which deny authorship. Every new court *bedhaya* choreography is a 'new creation' but crucially, each dance is anonymous, and attributed to the reigning sultan, not its actual creator(s) (Hughes-Freeland 2007). Although creativity is commonly associated with personal effort, other forms of creative innovation involve the loss of the person in a greater collective tradition, a process which can be thought of as collaboration with the agency of the dead (Archer 1995). The collective theory of creativity goes against the status associated with personal authorship and ownership which is central to the game of individual capitalist artistic status system: games which people in new capitalist societies, in Asia and elsewhere, are now playing in a new style. Didik has been at pains to choreograph *Bedhaya Hagoromo* and to contextualise it within *bedhaya* traditions in other ways. He had offerings made before the performance in a keeping with ritual practices before performances of special hereditary court *bedhaya* dances such as *Bedhaya Ketawang* and *Bedhaya Semang*. He also spoke about *Bedhaya Hagoromo* in terms of the discourses normally used about the oldest court *bedhaya* dances:

'It felt sacral: a white bird flew with the dance [the building is open sided], and a student from Sulawesi saw a white girl wearing a long white dance scarf' (pers. comm. 21 Feb 2003).

Didik's interest in the spiritual aspect of embodied performance also extends to gender representations on stage (see below), but in the context of *Bedhaya Hagoromo*, these statements and practices show a deliberate intention to identify this new *bedhaya* dance as high and noble (*adiluhung*) Javanese court performance which has now become Indonesian

classicism or art (Hughes-Freeland 1997a). Despite the novelty of the Japanese elements, Didik made a dance that was recognizable to other Indonesians *in those terms*: as a historically grounded genre.

Didik places *Bedhaya Hagoromo* in a tradition, but will it stick as a composition? At the time of writing, *Bedhaya Hagoromo* has been performed three times in Indonesia, and was sufficiently recognisable for Indonesians to appreciate its foundation and the skill in marrying elements of *bedhaya* structure, movements, formations, and music with elements from *Noh*. It is however less accessible than Didik's other works, including his own popular solo performances and the choreographies taught in his school, which do stick beyond the performance event. *Bedhaya* dances by contrast remain in the high art category, and often depend on court patronage. They are expensive to produce because of the need for nine very skilled dancers, a live orchestra and chorus. Some court *bedhaya* choreographies, such as *Bedhaya Ketawang*, are repeated annually as political ritual; others are performed regularly but lapse due to a new sultan commissioning new dances or other reasons until they are later 'revived' by the courts or dance associations. After Indonesian independence since the 1950s named choreographers outside the court choreographed new *bedhayas* on different scales and themes, including revolution, the Virgin Mary, and state philosophy; since the 1970s, very short versions have also been created. Court-style *bedhaya* dances have also been created by choreographers in state academies for performance in and outside the Javanese courts, and some of these newer dances are still performed. With its need for nine accomplished dancers, a prima donna to perform the solo 'Angel dance', and further specialist expertise discussed below, it is uncertain whether *Bedhaya Hagoromo* will be repeatable without Didik's management and participation. Its use of cultural borrowing to make the traditional new is, however, likely to influence other choreographers and performance culture in Indonesia. Whether the innovations in *Bedhaya Hagoromo* as high art form dance will make more impact in the field of art dance than other cross-cultural collaborations using contemporary dance or folk-based styles is a question which would be interesting to examine in the longer term.

'BEDHAYA HAGOROMO: A JAPAN-INDONESIA COLLABORATION'?¹⁴

Apart from the contradictions between the consciousness and intentions of the individual performer in relation to the collective theory of creativity in general and Javanese collectivism in particular, the process of making *Bedhaya Hagoromo* turned out to be more complex than its ascription as a Japan-Indonesian collaboration suggests.

When he explained the dance to me, Didik always emphasized the choreography, costumes and story. In particular he identified the fans and masks as the visible signs of *Noh*, and his 'Angel dance' solo as the epitome of his synthesis of *Noh* and *bedhaya* dance movement, and he referred in passing to a 'Japanese song' during the three-by-three formation. In our first conversation about this dance project in 2003, he said that his Japanese grant had been to study *nihon buyo*; he just mentioned *Noh* in passing. The collaboration he emphasised was with Bu Yudanegara, the leading female *bedhaya* choreographer in the Yogya court until her death in 2004, and he mentioned that he worked with her on to draw on the *Bedhaya Sinom* choreography as a foundation for *Bedhaya Hagoromo*. This gave me the impression that Didik had been the gate-keeper and choreographer of *Bedhaya Hagoromo*, which was created

¹⁴ This is the title of the DVD of the dance.

as a result of Didik's personal skill and reputation, which earned him the funding to study in Japan, and his ability to learn from teachers from outside the region of his birth, which allowed him to collaborate to make something new.

The collaboration turned out to have been much more collective and culturally complex than it had at first appeared. Further email conversations, initially with Didik and Garrett Kam, the art historian and Javanese dancer, clarified the role of a crucial figure in the dance's creation:

'I studied with Prof Richard Emmert who I met through my friend Alex Dea [of whom more anon]. He's lived in Japan for over 30 years, and has a deep understanding of *Noh* drama in the KITA school or clan. I studied with him with a Fellowship from the Japan Foundation Jakarta in from October to December 2000. The dances I learn were Yuya, Momijigari and Hagaromo... Emmert has translated many *Noh* manuscripts into English.'¹⁵

Richard Emmert is one of the few certified non-Japanese performer of *Noh*. He has translated *Noh* plays and also written about *Noh* for theatre practitioners. An important figure in the KITA school, he is also developing a new form called *Nohgaku*.¹⁶ As the newest and most open of the *Noh* schools, the KITA school is more likely to admit foreigners to learn the form, be they American or Indonesian.¹⁷ Even so, it would have been difficult for Didik to be able to study in this particular *Noh* school without an intermediary because of the overall conservatism associated with the form.

Apart from acting as a gate-keeper for Didik's access to *Noh* training, the relationship between Didik and Rick Emmert is clearly important for harmonizing *bedhaya* and *Noh* movement conventions. Emmert also participated as a dancer in the 2004 performance recorded on DVD. Wearing a *bathik* kimono tucked into a Japanese style sarong, Javanese headdress (*blangkon*), carrying a fan, and dancing in *Noh* style, Emmert leads the dancers in for the entrance march (*kapang-kapang majeng*) (Fig 12).¹⁸ When the dancers sit down, and he chants the introduction and story (*maca kandha*) in Javanese but in a Japanese vocal style, so that it is hard to hear which language it is in. Emmert accompanies the duet and Didik's solo dance with a *Noh* shoulder drum (*tsutsumi*), plays the *Noh* flute, and sings with the chorus, including the *hayashi* calls which are performed where normally there would be a Javanese male vocal chorus. When the second section ends, he sits next to Didik (Fig 13). He then follows the dancers' exit (*kapang-kapang mundur*, so the last dance we see is the same *Noh* movements that we saw at the beginning. It is evident that Emmert's role in the performance itself as a carrier of Japanese elements, dancer, singer and musician, is very important. It also places limitations of the dance's performance, which requires specialist Japanese performance skills, although Emmert did not dance in the first performances.

¹⁵ Didik Hadiprayitno, email 27 July, 2007.

¹⁶ Garrett Kam, email 5 Sept 2007.

¹⁷ Margaret Coldiron pers. comm. 21 July 2008.

¹⁸ This appears to be the end of the Hagaromo dance or a *shamai* 'demonstration' dance (Margaret Coldiron pers. comm. 21 July 2008). Emmert's role evokes the largely lapsed practice of female court attendants (in Yogyakarta) or two male 'clowns' (*canthung balung*) (in Surakarta) escorting the *bedhaya* dancers in and out of the dance hall.



**Fig 12 Rick Emmert
in the Entrance March**



Fig 13 Rick Emmert with Didik

This makes it clear that *Bedhaya Hagoromo* was not a straightforward Javanese-Japanese collaboration. It was an encounter between two cultures, mediated by an American expatriot who is a *Noh* expert. But the story becomes even more complex. Didik was originally introduced to Rick Emmert by Alex Dea, a Chinese-American gamelan musician partly based in Yogyakarta. Alex has been involved with *bedhaya* performance since 1976 in Surakarta, and has worked closely with the leading Yogyakarta musician, the late Pak Cokro Wasitodiningrat (KPH Notoprojo). He is a highly skilled performer and is admitted to the most exclusive Javanese musical circles. For instance, he participates in the playing of the ancient court gamelans in the mosque courtyard during the month of Mulud (Fig 14). He also sings in the male chorus in the annual performance of the *Bedhaya Ketawang* in the Kasunanan court in Surakarta. In performances of *Bedhaya Hagoromo*, he played in the gamelan, (Fig 15), sang the songs, and performed the *hayashi* calls with Emmert.¹⁹ Although his name comes after that of Didik and Emmert in the film credits, Dea was centrally involved in the creation of the dance and the musical composition.



**Fig 14: Alex Dea
plays at Sekaten**



**Fig 15: Rick Emmert and Alex Dea
perform in *Bedhaya Hagoromo* (centre back)**

¹⁹ Emmert and Dea are co-founders of Teater Cahaya which produced the multicultural *Siddharta* in 2003 (<http://www.kakiseni.com/articles/reviews/MDQwMg.html#top>).

The structural and musical composition was done by Dea and Didik.²⁰ After returning from Tokyo, Didik approached Dea, who had also studied *Noh* with Emmert the previous year, explained his idea and asked him to help with the music and production. While Didik consulted with Bu Yuda on the choreography and also looked for a text, Dea consulted with Pak Cokro on the musical structure. Dea chose *Gendhing Widasari* as befitting the story and not being too flirtatious or seductive (*genit, kemayu*), but with Pak Cokro's approval he changed the 'key' (*pathet*) from *slendro manyura* to *pelog barang*, the key often used for Yogyakarta *bedhaya*. Pak Cokro selected *Ladrang Tebusauyun* for the middle section, a piece from Yogyakarta's junior Pakualaman court, while Dea chose the *Ketawang Larasmaya* from the repertoire of the Kasunanan court in Surakarta. For the second section, he also decided to use *kemanaks* instead of the full ensemble. *Kemanaks* give *Bedhaya Ketawang* and other 'archaic' (*kuna*) *bedhaya* compositions an unearthly quality due to their clear, ringing repetitive phrases. They also created what Dea referred to as the 'acoustic space' for the transition to *Noh* tuning in the *Hagoromo* song. Dea also trained Emmert in the opening *kandha* chant, and Emmert taught Didik in how to sing the *Hagoromo* song.

Dea's expertise in both Yogyakarta and Surakarta music and *bedhaya* styles means that what looks like a Yogyakarta *bedhaya* dance with *Noh* elements is accompanied by music from the court traditions of both Yogyakarta and Surakarta. This occasionally produced differences of opinion. For example, for the opening and exit marches, Yogyakarta *bedhaya* use militaristic *Gati* melodies. Dea was keen to use the Surakarta style exit march with the *Noh* flute, but Didik insisted on using the Yogyakarta conventions, so the flute part was moved up into the end of the final *Ketawang* section. Dea also discovered that there were certain elements of Surakarta music which Yogyakarta singers refused to perform, which affected the final composition. This is an important reminder of cultural variations at the heartland of Javanese culture. Despite Java's history of assimilating outside influences into its literary and musical arts (Dea refers to this as its 'assimilative ease'), the persistence of these culturally-bounded variations always mean that the successful completion of a *transnational* collaboration always required complex creative negotiations.

BEDHAYA HAGOROMO AND INTERCULTURALISM

The nature of this collaboration raises further questions about intercultural collaboration, and how we should conceptualise inter-/cross- cultural and transnational performance productions, including the power relations within these processes of creative interaction. Does *Bedhaya Hagoromo* fit the intercultural category? If not, how can we characterise this collaboration?

Interculturalism is a contested concept, and has a complex and controversial range of applications (see Brakel 1996; Pavis 1996, Schechner 2002: ch 8). For example, Pavis (1996) has classed the work of Eugenio Barba, director of Odin Teatret and inventor of 'Theatre Anthropology' which looks for universals based on European and Asian theatrical traditions, as interculturalism.²¹ This is controversial because and of the exclusion of African or Latin

²⁰ Alex Dea helpfully clarified the creative process in emails on 14 and 24 September 2008, and also provided the photograph of him playing at Sekaten. He also advised against using sequins and shiny gold paint and gold fringes on the costumes.

²¹ Pavis distinguishes between intracultural, transcultural, ultracultural, precultural, postcultural, and metacultural (1999: 5-8), and then identifies three kinds of theatre which are Euro-American in motivation (intercultural, multicultural, and cultural collage), and another three forms which are not (1996: 8-9).

American traditions, and also for the relationship between cultural traditions. For example, Odin Teatret's production, *The Million* (1978-1984) borrowed performative features from Bali, including steps from the martial *baris* dance, and elements from the well-known demonic character Rangda to create the terrifying Anabasis, who borrowed Rangda's distinctive vocalizations, mask and hand gestures enhanced by gloves with long fingernails. For Turner (1995) these borrowings reflect Odin's cultural encounters and *misunderstandings* of Balinese performance practices. For Schechner such borrowings are imitations, not the encounter of what he describes as the 'deep structural level' (audience relations, performance duration and extraneous elements, and acting styles) (1996: 43-44). In contrast to Pavis, Schechner regards interculturalism as the encounter of the modern with the modern (1996: 47). These arguments suggest that *Bedhaya Hagoromo* is not an example of interculturalism.

We could instead ask if *Bedhaya Hagoromo* is an example of what Hastrup has termed 'creolisation', when costume, motifs, gestures, musical phrases or instruments are chosen to enhance local ideas of dramatic effectiveness and aesthetics (Hastrup, 'Teatrum Mundi' cited in Turner 1995: 342). This kind of 'creolised' cross-cultural encounter is *partial* and *selective*: steps are borrowed, but not choreographies, in a manner that appeals and is absorbed by eye, not the body. This characterisation appears to be appropriate for the first sections of the dance, where *bedhaya* is modified by the use of Japanese elements, such as costume, movement styles, and props, which are added on to the Javanese foundation. But in the case of the 'Angel dance', there appears to have been a genuine synthesis of sources, resulting in the creation of something new which goes beyond the borrowing of steps to create a new choreography which does achieve a synthesis. Synthesis is also achieved in particular parts of the musical and vocal accompaniments. So creolisation does not encompass the work of *Bedhaya Hagoromo* as a whole.

Alternatively, is *Bedhaya Hagoromo* a form of multiculturalism? And how is this to be distinguished from 'interculturalism' or from cultural collage? The distinction between interculturalism and multiculturalism appears to rest largely on the extent to which hybridization loses the original elements and creates a new synthesis. Multiculturalism includes a diversity of languages in performance and among the audience; cultural collage by contrast is a non-humanistic collection of postmodern fragments or 'pastiche' (Jameson 1991). But the arguments above suggest that interculturalism is less than total hybridization, which make it less different from multiculturalism and cultural collage.

Brandon advocates the use of the term 'multiculturalism' rather than 'intercultural' work (1996: 8) to characterise the performances that result from these processes. Hybrid forms are an effective way of reaching out to the audience, either inter-culturally or intra-culturally, but Brandon (2000) rightfully reminds us that cultures are not homogenous. Interculturalism refers to practices which reproduce and represent relations of cultural domination, rather than balanced dialogues between cultural performance practices. Cultural complexity tends to be lost in the implied homogeneity of phrases like 'interculturalism', in the same way as 'transnationalism' assumes nation to be a coherent whole, rather than a political construct. Internal variation, and the possibility of strangeness and diversity *within*, and not just *between* political entities, should never be forgotten; variations within the Javanese heartland is a case in point. *Bedhaya Hagoromo* may well represent multicultural rather than intercultural processes. Yet the term 'multiculturalism' has become associated with cultural pluralism within a political whole, so this also might not be a satisfactory concept for characterizing exciting creative encounters of artists from different backgrounds. The case of this particular

collaboration highlights our need for caution in reifying the identity of performance elements that are combined as inherently the property of a particular culture.

The cultural complexity of the process by which *Bedhaya Hagoromo* came to be created and performed, grounded in two cultural references with temporal weight, is ill-served by concepts like ‘interculturalism’. The concept seems to have been left behind by cross-cultural experimental performance practices. ‘Multiculturalism’ too carries within it the notion of culture as a bounded entity which becomes plural. Even in cases where classical forms are freighted with elaborate culturally-branded codes of skill and standard, we need to break down where those cultural elements converge and diverge, in the way that I have above, and to establish where tradition is replicated and where it is ruptured to make something new.

The issue of control and ownership of the resulting production is relevant here. The example of *Bedhaya Hagoromo* as a Japanese-Indonesian encounter and an east-east flow initially might appear to refute the argument that ‘interculturalism is western imperialism in another guise’ (Jeyifo 1996; Barker 1996). Apart from anecdotal evidence from Indonesian artists about Japanese cultural appropriation of Indonesian performing arts, putting paid to the illusion that east-east flows are free of cultural imperialism, we now know that this was not just a Japanese-Javanese creative encounter but a cross-cultural collaboration *doubly mediated* by American and American-Chinese performers who work in Japanese and Javanese idioms.

The double mediation by expert expats in both Japan and Java also endorses Brandon’s argument that particular arts cannot be considered the property of a particular culture position. Drawing on his performance experience in Hawai’i, Brandon has made the important point about the role of the ‘dance scholar’ in ‘replicating’ dance forms -- especially ‘high art Eastern forms’ such as *Kabuki*, which has been practiced in Hawai’i for over a century (Brandon 1996:51 ff.). In fact, mediation by expat experts in cross-cultural and transnational work is very common in performance innovations which involve changes within a form and its performance context.²² The creation of *Bedhaya Hagoromo* and its performance demonstrates a more complex collaborative engagement than Didik’s first suggested. Yet Didik’s manifest control over the dance and its dissemination makes me hesitate to class it as an example of cultural imperialism in itself. The account of the creative collaborative process demonstrate that what appear to be east-east flows are more complex than this, and involve other interests, be they creative (as in this case) or political. Theory is hard-pressed to keep up with practice.²³ How individuals within such collaborations claim ownership and carry risk is an under-researched topic which needs to be examined more when exploring the dynamics of

²² In the 1950s French dancers were instrumental in setting up the dance school in Vientiane, Laos after independence, and developing the Thai inflected style of central Laos (author’s field notes 2003). Balinese dance gained a wider international reputation and extended its repertoire following John Coast’s tours in the early 1950s (Coast 1954). A more recent example is the Swiss-French musician Julien Jâlal Eddine Weiss founded the Al-Kindi ensemble in 1983 which has accompanied the Damascus Dervishes on European tours, recently in 2007.

²³ This is clear from Dea’s response to my comment about cultural imperialism: ‘Didik liked what he learned in Noh, saw a similarity in the Jaka Tarub story, and wanted to make a new piece. I, as composer, have always been interested in using elements and techniques from different cultures (starting with my experiments in California in 1972 when I had Balinese kecak with African text, and Indian drone by a chorus supporting an operatic soprano in quartet with two saxes and a trumpet). We just wanted to play. There was no particular consideration that the Java or Japan parts were superior, more (or less) adi luhung, or had more value’ (email to the author 24 Sept 2008).

performance, in the formation of national classical traditions, in experimental work, and in international collaborations.

BEDHAYA HAGOROMO: THE GENDER OF THE PERFORMANCE

I now turn from cross-cultural innovation through the use of Japanese elements in *Bedhaya Hagoromo* to its gendering, and consider how Didik has furthered his collaboration with Japan to situate his own artistic practice in a broader context of Asian performance for audiences outside Asia.

As already noted, Didik Nini Thowok emphasizes the connection between his innovative work and different performance traditions. This is important for understanding the significance of gendering in *Bedhaya Hagoromo*, its second level of innovation. Instead of women dancers, the dance is performed by nine male dancers who wear women's clothes and perform feminine court dance movement (*beksa putri*). The dance references cross-gendering as a feature of the *Noh* tradition, but it is not new to Javanese court performance culture either.

This innovation in gendering is innovative only in relation to what has become established practice in the classical *bedhaya* tradition. In Yogyakarta, *bedhaya* became 'women's dance' after Indonesian independence. Before Indonesian independence was ratified in 1949, *bedhaya* was performed by boys or girls inside the court; court dance theatre was performed solely by men, who also played the female roles. The gender representation in colonial *bedhaya* dances and *Bedhaya Hagoromo* is complex. What we see are men dancing women, one of whom in the case of contemporary *bedhaya* represents a male character. In *Bedhaya Hagoromo*, this character was Jaka Tarub, the man who had stolen the nymph's heavenly mantel, danced by Batak. This means that Didik's innovation actually is a *return* to a tradition which has been a source of considerable embarrassment for 'modern' Indonesians, despite the well-known Indonesian and Asian conventions of males performing in female dress (Hughes-Freeland 1995, and see below). So what appears to be innovation is actually a revival of lapsed performance conventions.

In considering theatrical cross-dressing, it is important to distinguish theoretically between gender as a performative identity, in Butler's sense (1993), and gender as an identity performed in a theatrical context. Academic studies of gender reversals and gender cultures have tended to neglect gender in performance.²⁴ Ramet (1996: 2) describes gender culture as 'a society's understanding of what is possible, proper, and perverse in gender-linked behaviour', while '[G]ender reversal may be understood to be any change, whether "total" or partial, in social behaviour, work, clothing, mannerisms, speech, self-designation or ideology, which brings a person closer to the other (or in polygender systems, *another*) gender'; only the closing parenthesis prevents this slipping into binarism. Ramet's book introduces gender reversals from a historical, western perspective, and largely ignores performance contexts.²⁵ Suthrell (2004) also examines cross-dressing from a western perspective, against which she compares the case of *hijras* in India. Like Ramet she does little to frame artistic performance

²⁴ Morris (1995) provides an overview of anthropological approaches to cross-dressing and performance. Peletz (2007) provides a useful introduction to debates about sex and gender in Southeast Asia, although he considers performance only in passing in relation to ritual tradition.

²⁵ Ramet's introduction only mentions theatrical cross-dressing in 17th century Britain as the result of Puritanism, and examples from 20th century Hollywood cinema (2006: 6-9).

as a special condition of gender representation. An exception in recent research is Shaw and Ardener's edited book (2005), which is genuinely cross-cultural and discusses cross-dressing in performance (Moore, Powell and Ardener) as we will discover. There is however an important difference between the theorisation of the performance of sexuality in the context of social interaction, and expressive performative representations which do not aspire to represent reality in a naturalistic manner or in some cases in *any* manner. Of course there is a relationship between acting gender on stage and its performance in everyday life, but it is also important to recognise and differentiate the specific conditions that obtain for specific staged gender representations, for reasons that will become clear.

I first consider these issues in relation to Didik's second project, 'In Gesture and in Glance'. This project brings together two oppositions: east-west, and male-female. I consider its implications for understanding the representation of cross-gendering cross-culturally and examine whether or not it reifies cross-dressing as Asian-ness though its representation of 'female role players'. I conclude by considering Didik's own attempt to situate his performance practice culturally in relation to academic discourses on cross-gender in performance.

THE 'ONNAGATA TOUR'

The revival of colonial court cross-dressing performance conventions in *Bedhaya Hagoromo* has provided Didik with a historical context for his personal performance practice of cross-dressing. He has since sought a wider frame of reference and participated in a tour which showcased female role players from Indonesia, Japan, China and India. 'In Gesture and Glance. The Female Role Player in Asian Dance and Theatre' was sponsored by the Japan Foundation;²⁶ between February and April 2003 it toured London, Paris, Cairo, Rome, and Kohn. In London two performances were given at The Place, and there were also workshops, led by the performers.

This so-called 'onnagata tour' took its theme from the Japanese *Kabuki* female impersonator. Each performer adopted 'a stylized approach aimed at expressing an underlying concept of femininity' (Yuki 2003: 2). The four performers and their dances were as follows. Zhao Zhigang, a 'star' of *Yueju* women's opera from China, performed extracts from *He Wenxiu* (1930s) and 'The Dream of the Red Chamber' (*Hong Lou Meng*), adapted in the 1940s from the 18th century Qing opera (Fig 16).²⁷ Gopal Dubey, a leading practitioner of *Seraikalla Chhau*, a masked courtly genre from Bihar in East India, performed *Sri Radhika*, representing the love of Radha for Krishna, and *Banobidhya*, representing a virgin pierced by the arrows of emotion (Fig 17). Gojo Masanosuke, a dancer and choreographer of the Gojo school, Japan performed the 'Lion Dance' (*Shishi*), from the traditional *Niwaka-Jishi* dance repertoire of the geishas, and *Kyoganoko Musume Dojoji* from the *Noh* play *Dojoji*, described in the programme notes as a 'masterpiece of the *onnagata* repertoire' (Fig 18).²⁸ Didik Nini

²⁶ This association was founded in Japan in 1972 under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs 'for the purpose of promoting mutual understanding and friendship in the international scene'. (Japan Foundation brochure, n.d: 1; and <http://www.jpff.go.jp>).

²⁷ Figs 16-19 are from the London concert programme for 'In Gesture and Glance', and are reproduced here with the kind permission of the Japan Foundation.

²⁸ These details are from the concert programme, which also included notes by the performer Gojo Masanosuke on his dances and experts such as Richard Emmert who wrote about *Seraikalla Chhau*. The tour is also discussed in Wahyudi and Simatupang (2005).

Thowok, from Indonesia, performed *Golek Lambangsari*, a Yogyakarta court dance from the 1930s which represents a young woman adorning herself, literally and spiritually, and *Beskalan Putri*, which represents a woman warrior performing a ritual dance, based on the East Javanese *Ngremo* dance, traditionally performed at village purification festivals (*bersih desa*) (Fig 19).²⁹ Although some of the dances themselves were extracted and decontextualised, this was a serious project which provided a rare opportunity to witness high quality performances of a particular type.



Fig 16: China: Zhao Zhigang



Fig 17 India: Gopal Dubey

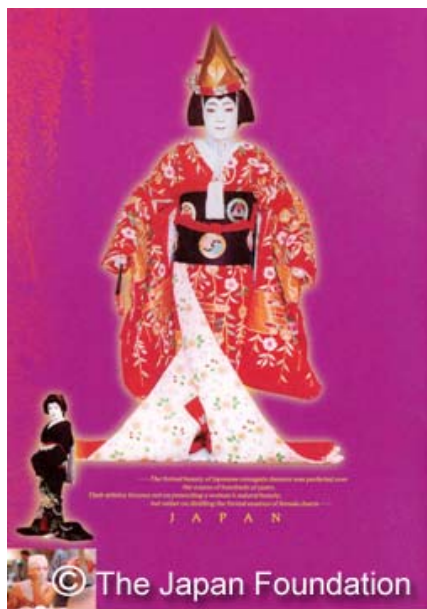


Fig 18 Japan: Gojo Masanosuke



Fig 19 Indonesia: Didik Nini Thowok

²⁹ Didik had studied with the master of this dance, Rasimoen, then 73 years old, and also documented the process on video (Purwolelono 2003). Afterwards he showed me the embroidered costume which was extremely heavy, weighing 7 kilos and also extremely expensive, costing Rp 4 million (c. £240).

Would this tour develop a better understanding of Asian performance practices in cosmopolitan metropolitan Europe -- a noticeable proportion of the audience were young Asians -- or whether it would propagate both orientalist and gender stereotypes? A recurrent theme in writings about Asian female role play is that it contrasts with western theatrical gender representations.³⁰ Abbitt suggests that this 'gender slippage (the oscillation between received ideas of male and female within an individual body) can be used as a strategy to explore issues of cultural otherness' which might entail a process of Occidentalism, but nonetheless offers 'a nondoctrinaire point of entry for the Western scholar to explore issues of gender and culture in the contemporary Japanese theatrical arena' (2001: 249-50).³¹ To test this, I begin with an example of an oppositional approach, and discuss Asian female role players in relation to 'drag' in western theatre. I then consider different forms of theatrical skill in male representations of femininity, and bring in the counter-example of male role players to develop an analysis of what cross-dressing in eastern and western theatres have in common. I then return to Didik own approach to female role play in the Indonesian context.

ASIAN FEMALE ROLE PLAY AND DRAG

In a classic study, Baker has written about drag in the following terms:

'Drag is a showy form of dress worn as a costume or even as a professional requirement. Drag is about many things. It is about clothes and sex. It subverts the dress code that tells us what men and women should look like in our organized society. It creates tension and releases tension, confronts and appeases. It is about role-playing and questions the meaning of both gender and sexual identity. It is about anarchy and defiance. It is about men's fear of women as much as men's love of women, and it is about gay identity' (1994: 17-18).

Although hundreds of men have dressed as women for theatrical roles, Baker thinks of female impersonators as 'male actresses', men who entertain by dressing as a woman using 'real disguise'; this includes Elizabethan boy actors playing a woman who is taken by audience and other actors as a real woman, and Asian performers. In England this practice ended in the 17th century when King Charles II wanted to see 'real women' on the stage. From then on, female impersonators adopted 'false disguise', where men 'play at being a woman', rather than being mistaken for one, and female impersonators became 'comic figures, a creature of burlesque and parody' (Baker 1994: 161), exemplified in the pantomime 'dame', first played by William Chatterly in 1811. The subversive defiance of the drag queen 'who challenges and disturbs', is contrasted with 'other cultures', where precise words are used to describe 'men playing female characters': *katoi*, *tan* (China), *onnagata* (Japan), *ladyboy* (hormonally altered men in Thailand) (1994:18). Unlike the drag queen, *ladyboys*

³⁰ 'Onstage androgyny in *kabuki* and *nō* was a reflection of a society where sexual preference (at least for men) was not a matter of fixed polarity.In the West, the gap between appearance and reality in terms of sex and gender has been a mainstay of theatrical performance'. (Abbitt 2001: 250-51)

³¹ Even in Europe, for thousands of years until the Enlightenment, there was a 'one sex model', with genitals being mutable (Laqueur 1990: 25, cited in Shaw 2005: 3-4).

and *waria* in Indonesia are conformists who wish ‘to live decorously in their created world of beauty and exclusive eroticism’ (1994:12).³²

Baker’s approach has been criticised for opposing conventional Asian cross-dressers to the subversion of western drag, thereby falling into the trap of orientalist misrepresentation and dichotomising eastern collective conformism and western individualism:

‘Roger Baker’s idea of the “Oriental” theatrical female impersonation – the Japanese *onnagata* and the Chinese *dan* – is an imaginary invention of an idealistic oppositional other to the West in his critique of Western culture: “their work bears no resemblance to female impersonation as we have experienced it in the West’ (Baker p. 149)..... the Chinese *dan*, at least, has on this occasion been literally rendered a *pure* Other (“no resemblance”) in a Western discourse that takes no account of the Other’s history’ (Siu 2003: 39-40).

For Baker, what matters in drag are the clothes and the show, but his emphasis on the contrast between ‘real’ and ‘false’ disguise oversimplifies gender representations in both western and Asian theatres. He also underplays the importance of movement and gesture. Significantly, he only refers briefly to ‘drag’ in western ballet: to Frederick Ashton and Robert Helpman’s ugly sisters in Royal Ballet’s *Cinderella* in 1960s, the role of evil fairy, and drag in Lindsay Kemp and Michael Clark’s companies, and the notorious Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo (Baker 1994: 216; see also Hanna 1988).

However, despite the different histories of theatrical gender between west and east, the analysis of drag as one instance of cross-dressing, with reference to how cross-gendered performances represent gender in relation to sexual identity, also reveals points of similarity to female role play in Asia and breaks down the distance of between East and West, as will become clear. Drag artists portray exaggerated femininity of a certain sort: a 1950’s idea of femininity, or singers like Bette Midler, Cher, Barbara Streisand who flout convention and who have an ‘aggressive, even exaggerated air...’ -- but not, interestingly, the lesbian glamour of Billie Holiday or Dusty Springfield. While these performances aim to portray ‘a better woman’, the role models display ‘unmistakably masculine social behaviour of a sort which real women generally eschew.’ (Moore 2005:115). For gay and straight men and drag queens interviewed in Canada, the performance raises tensions about masculinity, ‘but its symbolic nature means that these tensions can be resolved through interpretation’; drag is ‘not so much a site of gender-bending or ritualized denigration of women, as a site of defining masculinity symbolically.’ (Moore 2005: 116-7).

It is possible to link between western drag performances and Asian female role play by thinking of cross-dressing as the skilful production of ‘an unnatural body’ (Barba 1991, in Tian 2000). By recognising the connection of gender iconography and acting, it is possible to explore further the complex non-naturalism which arises from idealization and parody in the ways men play at being women. Cross-dressing in live and televised theatre, rarely means that the actor is gay, or that he *only* performs as a woman. For instance Eddy Izzard, a popular heterosexual transvestite both in real life and on stage, has latterly played male roles

³² Decorum and *waria* are not commonly associated. Baker does not mention *hijras* in India. Suthrell (2004) suggests that although *hijras* perform songs and dances at rites of passage, and recently also in films, they do not perform like drag queens, because they cross-dress in real life.

(for instance in the film, *Oceans Thirteen*). Gender fluidity in performance is also evident in Barry Humphries's characters, such as Dame (sic) Edna Everage, a role he started to play in 1956, based on mother. Dame Edna combines feminine glamour with the grotesque to create a character whose cruelty and complacency are based on self-deception.³³ Humphries makes a critique of human nature through femininity, rather than its idealised embodiment as is the case with many Asian female role players. The heterosexual Humphries also created the disreputable Australian Consul, Sir Les Patterson, a character who is a critique of human nature through masculinity. The complexity of the Dame Edna character differs from purely grotesque female characters, such as in the cult British television series, *Little Britain*, where Matt Lucas and David Walliams perform male and female roles. Matt Lucas is openly homosexuality, and joyously parodies camp style as the 'only gay in the village', but neither sexuality nor gender is the point. When Lucas cross-dresses as the motor-mouth Vickie the role is closer to that of Lauren, the 'Am I bovvered?' teenage girl played by the comedienne Catherine Tate. The skill and the fun are in older people representing those of a younger age, as much as it is about gender. This is also a theatrical skill required of *kabuki* performers, who can play much younger characters than own age: the voice of the *onnagata* is in the male timbre, while femininity is in the movement sequences (*kata*) (Powell 2005: 142). The gendering is in the movement, not the voice here, which reminds us of that theatrical cross-gendering is more than just a matter of cross-dressing.

These examples of western cross-dressing cannot be differentiated from Asian ones simply by Baker's distinction between real and false disguise. They are *comical* representations which use language and voice as well as clothes, make-up and movement. In performance theory from Aristotle onwards, the psychological powers of laughter -- particularly laughter at the monstrous and the threatening -- to integrate the personality are well established.³⁴ In these terms, laughter prompted by cross-dressing could be understood to be expressive of a fear of sexuality. In Britain, cross-dressing on the stage in pantomime appeals to 'a fascination with vulgarity' and has been associated with burlesque, parody, and satire, and allows us to laugh in order to appreciate our daily lives more (Ardener 2005: 134).³⁵ Explicit sexuality and humour are refined out of the female roles in the *onnagata* tour, as is the case with high art *bedhaya* performances in Java, but this 'Asian'/western contrast is exaggerated because some of the Japanese and Chinese dances in the '*onnagata* tour' are extracted from plays which also include comedy. The exclusions of laughter and sexuality are a function of the extraction for the tour, and not necessarily characteristic of the genres from which the dances come.³⁶

Although Baker associates Asian cross-dressing with conventionality, the indeterminacy of gendering in Asian theatre has been claimed to reinforced theatricality as a differentiated sphere of action (Tian 2000; Siu 2003; Powell 2005; Saeki 2008). This presents us with what

³³ Baker himself distinguishes this from drag, but the creation of 'lovingly observed' seriously credible characters over time with their own histories (1994: 218), a performance which is less like 'men in frocks' than the actress Joan Collins.

³⁴ For an excellent discussion of the transformative power of laughter, see Kapferer (1991).

³⁵ Ardener also discusses how sexual fear can be associated with class prejudice: panto's rudeness is a class indicator.

³⁶ Panto is clearly in the genre of romance: the marriages which pantomime ends with include socially mobile marriage and also lateral marriage, between the dame and a male-dressed character. In these terms, pantomime conforms to the genre of romance: everyone lives happily ever after, and order is restored (Ardener 2005).

Tian calls ‘the paradox’ of acting female impersonation. According to Ayame’s theory of acting, ‘the basis of the art is not to depart from a woman’s feelings’ and the *onnagata* ‘should continue to have the feelings of an *onnagata* even when in the dressing room’ (Tian 2000:84). In these terms, *onnagata* are not female impersonators in the sense that they are trying to become women on the stage. It is the range of acting techniques which matter, as well as the clothes:

‘Much *nō* ‘acting’ consists of dances and chants which are relatively indeterminate as to maleness and femaleness. ... In the context of performance, the production of the same *nō* play by an all-female cast as opposed to an all-male one, would not be significantly different or send out to the audience significantly different messages.’ (Powell 2005:139)

This is not just dressing up, as ‘fake disguise’. *Noh* actors are thus highly trained performers who over time have performed female roles to satisfy the expectations of their mixed-sex audiences. They ‘are not necessarily transvestite or indeed uniform in their sexual preferences’ (Powell 2005: 142). As in the western examples above, many heterosexual performers act male or female roles.

Siu (2003) also argues that it is not enough just to put on the clothes. According to the Qing scholar Yun (1724-1805), ‘We who take our body as female must at the same time transform our heart-mind [*xin*] into female’ (in Siu 2003: 164-165). In Chinese theatre, *zhen* (real) and *jia* (fictional) are connected by *xing*, a metaphoric relationship between the two which is inevitable and ‘ordained by an overall cultural code’ (Siu 2003:156). She also connects this to the collapse between real and fictional in Taoism and Buddhism, linked to their ‘notion that things are fluid and transformable’ (2003: 163-166). Despite this metaphysics of fluid transformability, gender bias and misogyny in everyday life implicate female role play. As Tian notes,

‘the essence of woman is defined in a male perspective-which could end up as a man’s (socially and culturally conditioned) reconstruction, or precisely, imagination or fantasy of womanness-and its antirealistic argument tends to deny actresses the possibility of acting stylistically or artistically because, supposedly, they are inclined to exploit their natural endowments’ (2000: 88).

Such gender imbalances prompts Siu (2003) to draw attention to the phenomenon of female-to-male cross-dressing which has remained unvoiced and in the shadows. She argues that it is time for performers and also the wider ‘gender project’ to attend to this phenomenon in Asia, although of course Western cases of female cross-dressing have also been neglected.³⁷ European scholars like Baker (1994) have only considered female cross-dressing in pantomime, and interestingly, have not classed female cross-dressing as ‘drag’.

³⁷ Female Hamlets were common in 19th century Britain (Powell 2005: 147). The first case of female to male cross-dressing was in pantomime in 1831 when Madame Vestris played the Principal Boy, some twenty years after the appearance of the first male-to-female ‘dame’ (Baker 1994: 166-7). The main character one of the most popular pantomimes of all time, *Peter Pan*, is played by a cross-dressed woman. ‘Can we see this as denial of natural laws of maturation, as with the re-ordering of gender-bending, as a triumph of man’s will over nature?’ asks Ardener (2005: 133).

Powell has extended his discussion of the principle of indeterminacy to female cross-dressing in a Japanese institution. The Takarazuka School, founded in 1914, produces all female shows in which the students play all the roles, including cross-dressing as men (Abbitt 2001; Kazama 2005; Saeki 2008). But in an argument similar to that of Baker, Powell emphasises the conventionality of these theatre cultures which contrast with ‘subversive individual’ examples of cross-dressing: ‘The conventions that obtain in all genres of theatre in modern Japan, but especially in *kabuki* and Takarazuka, are sufficiently numerous and binding to ensure that most spectators principally *view performance as performance*’ (Powell 2005: 147-8, my emphasis).³⁸ But Takarazuka has also been analysed to challenge the claim that Asian cross-dressing is unsubversive. Abbitt has argued that its production, *The Rose of Versailles*, depended less on a lesbian aesthetic than on the subversive pleasure the character Lady Oscar gives female audience members as they witness a woman getting away with a male performance of power and freedom’ (2001: 252). Nowadays, the young Japanese leads in the Takarazuka plays evoke emotion in fans off-stage, and some have a considerable fan base among young Japanese girls who get crushes on them, as documented in Kim Longinotto’s film, *Dream Girls* (1993). So while Powell’s claims that cross-dressing in *noh* and Takarazuka both demonstrate the need for a clear line to be drawn between performance and everyday life, there is also evidence that contemporary celebrity culture is bringing emotional and sexual responses into a context which Japanese cultural ideals categorise as aesthetic. This suggests that ways of viewing performance are changing under the influence of celebrity culture generated by films and television, and that there is a close connection between drag and modernity which could be pursued.³⁹ Despite arguments for its conventional indeterminacy and aesthetic boundaries, ‘traditional’ cross-dressing performances *can* engage with contemporary society, in surprising and unpredictable ways.

The inter- and intra-cultural historical variations and diversity of gendering conventions of female and male roles are both clearly outlined in the ‘onnagata tour’ programme notes. In India, women dancers are now learning *Seraikella Chhau*. In Indonesia, the courtly Javanese *Golek Lambangsari*, like *bedhaya*, used to be performed by cross-dressed young men but is now a ‘women’s’ dance. In Japan, *kabuki* was first performed by females at the beginning of the Edo Period (1603-1867). It was later banned because it had become associated with prostitution by women and young boys until 1653 when the government gave permission for men to perform it. This marked the ‘true beginning of Japan’s *onnagata* tradition of female role performers’ (Masanosuke 2003:14; see also Powell 2005: 139-40). In 1941 the female dancer, Gojo Tamami, founded the Gojo school which continues to produce old dances in new ways. Today, Gojo Masanosuke performs male roles as well as female ones.

Most radically on the *onnagata* tour, the Chinese *Yueju* opera performer Zhao Zhigang was *not* a female role player. His two dances represented a man playing a woman playing a man. The gender indeterminacy in *Yueju* opera supports Siu’s (2003) argument for the potential radicalism of cross-dressing. She revisits the history of Chinese opera to balance female roles often played by men (*dan*) with male roles often played by women (*sheng*). Historically, in

³⁸ Although indeterminacy explains generic conventions, one can only speculate as to how an all-female or indeed a mixed gender *kabuki* would be received in Japan.

³⁹ This connection was made in Peacock’s pioneering (1968) analysis of Javanese *ludruk*, where the emotional response of the male (heterosexual) audience to the traditional refinement of the cross-dressed singers enabled them to accept messages of modernity – and in some cases to form relationships with the performers, who cross-dress off stage as well as onstage (see also Boellstorff 2004). Another example to pursue is the famous Singaporean drag queen, Kumar, about whom I first heard while researching this paper.

the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) female players often cross-dressed as males in leading roles, a 'counter-example to the male-generated theatre of the West' (2003: 50). During the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, cross-dressing occurred in private theatrical troupes of (mostly) female actresses, and this had a major influence on the development of opera. In the late Qing period, until late 19th century, cross-dressing boys and men monopolized public theatre and gave rise to the fetishised *male dan*. This form of male cross-dressing was discontinued in the People's Republic of China, but female cross-dressing survived (Siu 2002: 2). It produced

'a bifurcated development in cross-dressing; the gradual demise of the male *dan* across all forms of regional opera, and the continual flourishing of the female *sheng*, particularly in *Yueju* opera' (Siu 2003:191).

It is the convention of female to male cross-dressing as the *sheng* which Zhao Zhigang subverted in the *onnagata* tour. Zhao Zhigang is a man dressed as a man who represents a female cross-dressed performer who represents a man. This doubling of gender representation is reminiscent of the case of the dancer Batak in *Bedhaya Hagoromo*: a male cross-dressed dancer who represents a female who represents a man.⁴⁰

This example, along with Siu's critique of the scholarly focus on male-to-female cross-dressing is further evidence to support the analysis of multiple plays on gendering as a function of performative virtuosity which eradicates binary gender, and evokes the image of the hermaphrodite or androgyne (Powell 2005). This does not, however, produce gender equality. There is a radical difference between male and female cross-dressing:

'Today, the transvestite performance convention of the (almost all) female *Yueju* opera contrasts with that of the traditional all-male *Kunju* and Beijing (*Jing-Kun*) operas. The aesthetics demand of the *Jing-Kun* female impersonator that he passes as a real woman on stage, whereas the male impersonator of the much younger *Yueju* opera always looks not so much a man on stage, as a woman dressing in male costume. The construction of gender resulting from cross-dressing in these two instances turns out to be a double movement: *while the Jing-Kun transvestite actor veils his masculine body, the Yueju transvestite actress unveils her corporeal femininity.... is to be immediately recognizable as female*' (Siu 2003: 196, my emphasis)

Siu analyses cross-dressing and its ramifications in relation to sexual politics and gender wars, and argues that it has the potential to become a destabilizing force which challenges existing power relations.⁴¹ Tian (2000) likewise argues that twentieth century developments of stage

⁴⁰ Similarly, pantomime cross-gendering was complicated further when the well-known camp actor and comedian Julian Clary took on the role of Dandini in *Cinderella* in 2000 and 2001 (Ardener 2005: 132): a man performing a woman performing a man.

⁴¹ Although 'From a postmodern perspective, the ambiguous and unstable body of the male *dan* embodies an "undefined realm" between binary genders and prickles the male homophobic nerves of the modern Chinese patriarchy', it is also 'a reinforcement of male dominance materialized through an aesthetics of performing gender predicated upon the superiority of the male body' (Siu 2003: 213).

gendering in China might finally allow women to become actors in their own right.⁴² So in addition to revealing the variety of cross-gender representations in Asia, the analysis of cross-dressing in performance is also being used by Asian scholars to address gender politics offstage, in the hope of influencing gender roles and their performance in everyday life.

INDONESIAN DRAG OR FEMALE ROLE PLAYERS?

The new attention to formerly hidden female cross-dressing and the lack of symmetry between male and female cross-dressing may usefully be applied to other cultural systems of theatrical cross-dressing, including those in Indonesia. Didik's predominance as a male cross-dresser has yet to bring the many female-to-male cross-dressing theatrical traditions in the region to scholarly attention, although a start has been made (Wahyudi and Simatupang 2005). In Central Java in Surakarta, women play the roles of Arjuna and other refined male roles in commercial *wayang wong* dance theatre, and perform all the roles in the all-female *langendriyan* dance opera in the Mangkunagaran court; in Cirebon, on the north coast, women cross-dress in the masked dances of Losari. In Bali, a cross-dressed woman performs role of the king (Raja Manis) in some variants of *arja* dance opera, and women also cross-dress as male roles in *Panji Semirang* and *Margapati*, popular solo dances choreographed by Nyoman Kaler from the late 1940s (Hughes-Freeland 1998: 52; Dibia 2005). In East Java, women cross-dress in '*Ngremo Gaya Putra*', and since the 1980s as male horse dancers (*jathilan*) in *Reyog* (Fauzannafi 2005: 134-5). In Yogyakarta, central Java, from the 1990s women cross-dressed in *reyog* and the trance-possession folk genres of *jathilan* and *angguk*. This list demonstrates how important it is to recognise the specifics of the relationship of genre and gender in deconstructing cultural and gendered binarism. And although a wider discussion cannot be pursued here, it is likely that there would also be asymmetries between male and female cross-dressing in Indonesia of the type discussed by Li, despite differences in gender relations between Indonesian and Chinese societies.

In contrast to the neglect of female cross-dressing, scholarship has long attended to male-to-female cross-dressing in relation to studies of ritual and theatrical performance in Indonesia at different periods of time. Examples of male cross-dressing include Yogyakarta court *bedhaya* and dance drama, discussed above; Central Javanese *Lengger Banyumas*; East Javanese *waria* performers in *ludruk* theatre, the *Gandrung Lanang*, *Beskalan Putri Malangan*, and (*Ng*)*remo* dances, and the *warok-gemblak* (actor-understudy) relationship in *reyog* theatre; Sundanese male 'women singers'; Balinese *Gandrung* dancers, and formerly, *Nandir* (McPhee 1987:28-30), and *Arja Muani*.⁴³ Considerable attention has also been given to the ritual performances of *bissu* priests of South Sulawesi.⁴⁴

⁴² 'After the passing of generations, they will create their own style-not necessarily toward a naturalism based on their biological endowments but certainly toward a rejection of a rigid and cliché-laden conventionalism (artistic as well as social and cultural). In due course, traditional Chinese theatre will have its own Siddonses and Duses' (Tian 2000: 91).

⁴³ On cross-dressing in Java and Bali, see Peacock (1968); Boellstorff (2004); Pramono (2005); Dibia (2005).

⁴⁴ The most recent discussions of *bissu* are Graham (2004); Boellstorff (2005); Latief (2005). Historically, most *bissu* were women, and women *bissu* (*makkunrai* or *core-core*) are still required for certain rituals. Refraining from sex increased their power, but some married and some had sex with men. After three years of training, *bissus* guarded royal regalia, conducted rites of passage for nobles, and fertility rites for rice fields, they dressed androgynously with male and female clothing (Boellstorff 2005: 38).

Boellestorff has developed the concept of ‘subject-positions’ to allow for gendered multiplicity within cultural frameworks and to recognise sexual norms as historical, not natural (2002: 93). He characterises *bissu* and the East Javanese *warok-gemblakan* relationship as ETPs, “‘ethnolocalized homosexual and transvestite professional’ subject positions’, which refer to professions, not to ‘categories of selfhood organized around sexual desire’ (Boellestorff 2005: 45).⁴⁵ He argues that these cases of ritual cross-dressing are the sort of ‘indigenous’ and different ‘ethnographic objects’ that ‘Westerners like to discover’. They also put non-normative sexuality in a ‘traditional’ category which is problematic for his analysis (ibid: 38-41). This is because he aims to transcend the cultural in gender relations through the concept of ‘dubbing’, the reworking of western discourses in the Indonesian context ‘not through “tradition” but through rhetorics of national belonging’ (2004: 205). Dubbing also flags ‘incommensurabilities’ of translation: with dubbing there can never be a “faithful” translation’ (2005: 5-6).

Although the professional dimension of the ETP subject position might initially appear useful for understanding Didik’s professional stage identities, there are some problems. Firstly, subject positions and dubbing are inscribed nationally, but Didik is a transnational and cosmopolitan performer, as already explained. The second and more important reason is that Boellestorff’s central interest is not in staged performance but in style, evidenced in its punning presence in the name of Indonesia’s gay movement, GAYa Nusantara (‘Archipelago Style’) as performativity in Butler’s sense (2005: 158). Indeed, apart from the examples mentioned above, he does not discuss other kinds of historic or contemporary cross-dressed performance, and does not even mention Didik Nini Thowok.

So, how can we relate Didik’s practice as a female role player in relation to the discussions about cross-gender, drag and indeterminacy? Didik has articulated his own situated subject position defined by his skills as a performer and not through his sexuality. His subject position as a cross-dresser is as a stage performer, not as a homosexual in everyday life.⁴⁶ It is not therefore appropriate to position him other than in professional performance role with which he identifies.

In *Bedhaya Hagoromo* and the *onnagata* tour, Didik is a man dressed as a woman performing the ideal feminine in a performative representation which seems to contrast with western drag by eliminating embodied sexuality and humour. But Didik does not *only* represent the female role in this idealized manner. Consider his clowning dances, already mentioned above. The ‘Two Face’ dance, (*Dwimuka*) does not represent an idealized feminine: it is a play on tradition. As Didik turns around to replace the beautiful mask with his own grimacing face adorned with false eyelashes and false teeth (figs 2 and 3), he subverts performance tradition and the idea of presenting a mask to the world, not gender itself. The dance could be said to be a playful critique of hypocrisy, although for Didik it is also for *fun*.

⁴⁵ Previously the ‘T’ stood for ‘transgendered’, and the category was described as *waria (banci)*: male-to-female transvestites (Boellestorff 2002: 92-3). Other subject positions are female-to-male transgendered persons: *tomboi*, *hunter*, *lesbi*; and heterosexual men and women (Boellestorff 2002: 92-3; see also Blackwood 2005).

⁴⁶ When Mrazek writes ‘Didik never told me whether he was gay or not... His gayness thus remains unpublished’ (2005: 270 n. 33), he positions Didik in a way which misrepresents his subject’s own position, as well as being tautological. In his autobiography, Janarto ‘publishes’ Didik’s heterosexuality by noting that he has had at least five close relationships with women, and that his son was born in 2004 (2005: 192-3). Although in Boellestorff’s terms, this is normal ‘gay’ behaviour in Indonesia, this is not how Didik identifies himself.

Indeed, Didik's comedic dances are full of inventive surprises and cultural play, if not wholesale subversion. In *ketoprak* some of Didik's female roles *do* reflect the exaggeration of drag, discussed above in terms of tough glamour, but they are often inflected with the hectoring aggressive mothering with humour that can include biting satire and a sense of the absurd, and which is much closer to the British pantomime Dame. We should also not forget that Didik is not only a cross-gendered performer but has also played male roles (in the television comedy show, *Warung Kopi*).

In general, Didik's cross-gendered performance practice moves between the ideal and desirable feminine, which arguably is so refined stylistically as to be out of the sphere of sexual desire, and the burlesque, which desexualises gender because of through the grotesque. He portrays the feminine in two ways: by a reduction of embodied feminine desire, or by a grotesque and comedic excess. These in turn are associated with contrasting readings of performance elements, as having an ethos of eternal enduring spirituality and comic ephemeral, elements which also coexist in many of the dance theatres discussed above, which resist being categorised into genres.

However, in both *Bedhaya Hagoromo* and the *onnagata* tour, with the exception of the *Beskalan Putri* dance which references a regional ritual cross-dressing performance, Didik has situated himself in the high art performance culture of Asia, not in popular or ritual cultures. In both these projects, he polarises cross-dressing into a more *contrastive* position with the humorous grotesque of drag, which can be related to his emerging thoughts on his own performance practice.

MYSTICAL GENDER AND TRANCEFORMATION

As part of his recent cross-gendered and cross-cultural projects Didik has latterly attempted to situate himself in relation to academic discourses on cross-gender in performance. This is evident in his involvement in an academic publication about theatrical performance entitled *Cross Gender* (Wahyudi and Simatupang 2005) which contextualises Indonesian examples in relation to mostly Japanese and Chinese practices of male cross-dressing (except for a brief discussion of Takarazuka). The book reiterates a number of arguments raised above about avoiding binarism in explaining cross-gender. It also clarifies Didik's concept of 'mystical gender'. As he stated at the end of an interview (Ross 2005),

'For me, I never think about who is behind the mask. I only see the character in the mask. So "transgender" is not the right word to use: "mystical" is better. When a woman dances the male mask, she is transformed-it is mystical. And when a man dresses up as a woman, in *bedhaya*, we don't always recognize that the dancer is male-it is mystical. He, too, is transformed. I believe a better term is "mystical gender". I plan to start using this term'.

This concept is founded on cross-cultural ideas. When Didik presented me with a copy of this book, he recommended that I read Shanta Serbjeet Singh's chapter, 'Indian dance: inhabiting gender-free spaces in search of the inner self'. Singh discusses 'tranceformation' in relation to two Indian concepts (2005: 103-6). The first is the hermaphrodite figure of Ardhanareshwara which represents male and female energies through different divinities, famously in the Shiva-Parvati statue at Ellora. Singh, however, considers its anthropomorphic representation to be problematic, because the metaphysical idea is concerned with

formlessness. The second concept is *aavhanam*, ‘summoning the spirit as witness’, which refers to all manner of transpositions found in Indian mythology.⁴⁷ Singh argues that in contrast to society, which polarises and dichotomises gender, the arts retain a ‘wonderfully neutral’ and ‘metaphysical’ space. Here the gender of the performer is not at issue; what matters is his or her ability to evoke masculinity or femininity. The erasure of gender of course does not extend to all aspects of religious practice in Hinduism. In the male cross-dressing in divine play (*līlā*) in worship (*bhakti*), transformation is incarnation or possession by the goddess. Women’s emotional temperament is not considered to be good for asceticism but it is good for *bhakti*, because the performer takes on female emotionality to become closer to the divinity (Humes 1996: 129). Metaphysical neutrality exists alongside an everyday binarism and which can move between genders in art and devotion.

Didik borrows Singh’s idea of tranceformation to develop his idea of mystical gender and to keep the emphasis on theatrical performance which contrasts with everyday gender performativity. As he explains,

‘In dance, I experience something unusual, like trance; a power and blessing from above. I want to share this beauty through dance. It is an offering... Although I don’t criticise, I can show human pretensions. Comedy shows truth politely. If people look with their heart’s eye, they will understand’ (quoted in Burridge 2006: 114).

When Didik uses the phrase ‘tranceformation’, he is referring to the process of taking on a role, not to a loss of consciousness: he is possessed not by the divine but by feminine beauty. In this he is positioned clearly within Javanese (not Hindu) theories of the person and of acting, and specifically with the careful differentiation between performance and the altered states which often characterise village ritual performance practices. Javanese theories of acting emphasise the way in which embodied consciousness suffuse a person when they perform a role (Hughes-Freeland 1997b; 2008: ch 6). His interest is in performance as a transformation, whether through acting or through the gestures of dance and different degrees of facial expression. He has published on stage makeup, and designs a lot of it and does it as well. Make-up and costume become a technology which make manifest the transformation which makes the actor more than him/herself (and in some cases more than human), but only temporarily, during the performance.

In both comedic and high art traditions, Didik is interested in the expressive aspect of gender which reveals character, not in its carnal, sexual aspect. We have already encountered the issue of paradox in cross-dressing: that it is more than in the clothes and make-up which define it. The effective action is in a total immersion, so that the physical and spiritual aspects of a person become unified. The concept of tranceformation replicates the high-art precept of meditative inwardness in his high-art dances. But Didik diverges from this in his comedic cross-dressed dances. Here his glance engages with the eyes of the audience, and trigger questions about what it is that he doing on the stage. So, although the idea of tranceformation and mystical gender may be related to court-originated high art theories of acting which usually refer to dance and dance theatre, not all of Didik’s work has involved the suffusion of

⁴⁷ In this labile, fluid world, ‘gender was a non-issue... masculinity and femininity were not considered mutually exclusive’ but were inscribed in a constant karmic cycle of dharma and rebirth characterised by processual being, ‘never the static of “is” ’ (Singh 2005: 105).

feeling: his gestures, clothes and make up tell one story, but his gaze challenges the audience to as to how literally they take that story.

CONCLUSION

Dancing has always been a challenge to social scientists because it is a moving unity which can accommodate, play with, and transcend the rigidities of binary oppositions: traditional and modernity, self and other, east and west, male and female, real and unreal. My examples have questioned the simplicity of the categories of cross-culturalism and cross-gender implied in examples of particular performances. These examples suggest that the power of dance undercuts the limits of cultural classifications, while at the same time gaining momentum from them. They also indicate the importance of process, particularly in the interweaving of established prior practice ('tradition') and invention or innovation. In the field of cultural politics, the classification of genres – as 'traditional', 'high', 'popular', folk etc – could well be replaced with a different continuum, the local to translocal. But we should not forget that just as globalisation has been qualified by glocalisation. However much dance is diffused across space in its broadcast and reception, it always begins in a space which is within a locality, with at least one foot on the ground.

This analysis has been driven by the work of a particular performer. As a performance practitioner, Didik buys into the individualist model of the artist, as demonstrated in his marketing and entrepreneurial skills as a choreographer, as a performer and entrepreneur in high profile venues in Indonesia and overseas, and in his initial silence about Emmert's and Dea's roles in creating and performing *Bedhaya Hagoromo*. However, he works within cultural convention while engaging with other conventions, and is able to experiment and innovate, precisely because he offsets newness and surprise by meeting local socio-cultural expectations of a dancer and a comedian. He has used the cross-gendered element of his performance practice to engage with other Asian performance cultures which are characterised by high art and an emphasis on 'mystical gender', a performative androgyny which is disconnected from personal sexuality. In this process, he uses a multicultural approach, borrowing aspects of Indian and Japanese performance in different ways to enhance his own practice and as well as expanding the sphere of both performance repertoire and its gendering for other dancers. Didik is thus part of an Asia-wide conversation within long-established traditions of conventional performance skills, where Asian scholars themselves are now asking questions about the way in which these conventions been misrepresented so as to conceal complexity, including female-to-male cross-dressing. However, whereas some scholars are taking performance into the field of gender politics, Didik retains his grounding in Javanese cultural values, which give his work appeal to a wide audience of different ages, not to a radical avant-garde.

More generally, the interface between life and art is elusive precisely because of the cultural categorisation of behaviours in particular contexts. Cross-cultural work or cross-gendered performance resists analytical reductiveness, but both are susceptible to manipulations through the politics of representations. By attending to cross-gender cross-culturally, it becomes clear that there are general patterns of difference in the place of sexuality on stage between western drag and the Asian female role player. Furthermore, in both cultural regions, other performance skills account more for popularity of particular performers or troupes than do their sexual orientation. Cross-gendered performance, however located in relation to culturally defined spheres, is important for understanding issues such as aesthetics,

appreciation, audiences, play and creative innovation, rather than gender identity which is associated with sexual orientation. Cross-gendered performance needs to be analysed in relation to these issues, and not a representation of personal sexual preference or issues of purity. It presents us with a definitive sphere of enquiry which cannot be determined by the humans as biological. Instead it has to begin with socio-cultural specificities and particular characteristics of performance. Only then can we understand how those characteristics are part of and contribute further to a process of ongoing transformation and exchange.

REFERENCES

- Abbitt, Erica Stevens. 2001. 'Androgyny and otherness: exploring the West through the Japanese performative body', *Asian Theatre Journal* 18(2): 249-257.
- Archer, Margaret. 1995. *Realist Social Theory: the Morphogenetic Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ardener, Shirley. 2005. 'Male Dames and Female Boys: Cross-Dressing in the English Pantomime', in (eds) A. Shaw and S. Ardener, *Changing Sex and Bending Gender*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Baker, Roger. 1994. *Drag: a History of Female Impersonation in the Performing Arts*. London: Cassell.
- Barber, K. 2007. 'Improvisation and the art of making things stick', in (eds) E. Hallam and T. Ingold, *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation*. ASA monographs 44. Oxford: Berg.
- Blackwood, Evelyn. 2005. 'Gender transgression in colonial and postcolonial Indonesia', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 64(4): 849-879.
- Boellstorff, Tom. 2002. 'Gay and Lesbi subjectivities, national belonging and new Indonesia', in (eds) K. Robinson and S. Bessell. 2002. *Women in Indonesia: Gender, Equity and Development*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- 2004. 'Playing Back the Nation: Waria, Indonesian Transvestites', *Cultural Anthropology* 19(2): 159-195
- 2005. *The Gay Archipelago: Sexuality and Nation in Indonesia*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Brakel-Papenhijzen, Clara 2006. 'Jaka Tarub: a Javanese Culture hero?', *Indonesia and the Malay World* 34 (98): 75-90.
- Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. London: Routledge.
- Burridge, Stephanie (ed.) 2006. *Shifting Sands: Dance in Asia and the Pacific*. Canberra: Australian Dance Council.
- Coast, John. 1954. *Dancing out of Bali*. London: Faber.
- Coldiron, Margaret. 2004. *Trance and Transformation of the Actor in Japanese Noh and Balinese masked dance-drama*. Studies in Theatre Arts, 30. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Dibia, I Wayan. 2005. 'Silang gender dalam drama tari arja di Bali', in (eds) S. Wahyudi, L.L. Simatupang, L.L., *Cross Gender: Didik Nini Thowok*. Malang, Indonesia: Save Media.
- Fauzannafi, Muhammad Zamzam. 2005. *Reog Ponorogo: Menari di Antara Dominasi dan Keragaman*. Yogyakarta: Kepel Press.

- Femina. 2007: http://www.femina-online.com/serial/serial_detail.asp?id=50&views=17 (last accessed 15 April 2008)
- Graham, Sharyn. 2004. 'While Diving, Drink Water: Bisexual and Transgender Intersections in South Sulawesi, Indonesia', *Journal of Bisexuality* 3(3-4): 231-248.
- Hanna, Judith. 1988. *Dance, Sex and Gender : Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance, and Desire*, London: Chicago University Press.
- Hughes-Freeland, F. 1995. 'Dance and gender in a Javanese palace tradition', in (ed.) W. J. Karim *'Male' and 'Female' in Developing South East Asia*. Oxford: Berg.
- 1997a. 'Art and Politics: from Javanese Court Dance to Indonesian Art', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 3(3): 473-95.
- 1997b. 1997. 'Consciousness in performance: a Javanese theory', *Social Anthropology* 5(1): 55-68.
- 1998. 'From temple to television: the Balinese case', in (eds) F. Hughes-Freeland and M. Crain, *Recasting Ritual*. London: Routledge.
- 2001. 'Performers and professionalization in Java: between leisure and livelihood', *South-East Asia Research* 9(2): 213-233.
- 2007. 'Tradition and the individual talent: T.S. Eliot for anthropologists', in (eds) E. Hallam and T. Ingold, *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation*. ASA monographs 44. Oxford: Berg.
- 2008. *Embodied Communities: Dance Traditions and Change in Java*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Humes, Cynthia Ann. 2006. 'Becoming male: salvation through gender modification in Hinduism and Buddhism', in (ed.) S.P. Ramet, *Gender Reversals and Gender Cultures: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Janarto, H.G. 2005. *Didik Nini Thowok: Menari Sampai Lahir Kembali* [Dance till you are reborn]. Malang: Save Media.
- Kapferer, Bruce. 1991. *A Celebration of Demons: Exorcism and the Aesthetics of Healing in Sri Lanka*. Smithsonian University Press: Berg.
- Kasama, Junko. 2005. 'Cross gender dalam teater Jepang: Kabuki dan Takarazuka', in (eds) S. Wahyudi, L.L. Simatupang, L.L., *Cross Gender: Didik Nini Thowok*. Malang, Indonesia: Save Media.
- Kuan-Hsing Chen and Chua Beng Huat. 2007. *The Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Reader*. London and New York: Routledge.

- Morris, Rosalind C. 1995. 'All made up: performance theory and the new anthropology of sex and gender', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24: 567-592.
- Mrazek, J. 2005. 'Masks and selves in contemporary Java: the dances of Didik Nini Thowok', *Journal of Southeast Asia Studies*, 36 (2): 249-279.
- Pound, Ezra and Fenollosa, Ernest: <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/ot2www-japanese?specfile=/web/data/japanese/search/japanese.o2w&act=text&lang=en&offset=73524041&textreg=1&query=Hagoromo&query2=&id=PouHago> (last accessed 15 April 2008)
- Powell, Brian. 2005. 'Cross-Dressing on the Japanese Stage', in (eds) A. Shaw and S. Ardener, *Changing Sex and Bending Gender*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Ramet, Sabrina Petra (ed.). 1996. *Gender Reversals and Gender Cultures: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Ross, Laurie Margot. 2005. 'Mask, Gender and Performance in Indonesia: an Interview with Didik Nini Thowok', *Asian Theatre Journal* 22(2): 214-27.
- Peacock, James. 1968. *Rites of Modernization*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Peletz, Michael. 2006. 'Transgenderism and Gender Pluralism in Southeast Asia since Early Modern Times', *Current Anthropology* 47(2): 327-8.
- Pramono, Ki Soleh Adi. 2005. 'Cross gender dalam kehidupan pewayangan', in (eds) S. Wahyudi, L.L. Simatupang, L.L., *Cross Gender: Didik Nini Thowok*. Malang, Indonesia: Save Media.
- Saeki, 2008. 'Beyond the Gender Dichotomy: the Cross-Dressing Tradition in Japanese Theatre', *Intersections* 16, March: http://intersections.anu.edu/issue_16/saeki.htm (last accessed 17 April 2008).
- Shaw, Alison. 2005. 'Introduction', in (eds) A. Shaw and S. Ardener, *Changing Sex and Bending Gender*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Siu Leung Li. 2003. *Cross-Dressing in Chinese Opera*. Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Singh, Shanta Serbjeet. 2005. 'Indian dance: inhabiting gender-free spaces in search of the inner self', in (eds) S. Wahyudi, L.L. Simatupang, L.L., *Cross Gender: Didik Nini Thowok*. Malang, Indonesia: Save Media.
- Suthrell, Charlotte. 2004. *Unzipping Gender: Sex, Cross-dressing and Culture*. Oxford and New York: Berg.
- Tian, Min. 2000. 'The Paradox of Sex, Acting, and Perception of female Impersonation in Traditional Chinese Theatre', *Asian Theatre Journal* 17(1): 78-98.
- Wahyudi, S. and Simatupang, L.L. (eds). 2005. *Cross Gender: Didik Nini Thowok*. Malang, Indonesia: Save Media.

Yuki, Hata. 2003. 'Female Role Performers in Asian Dance and Theatre', in Programme for *In Gesture and in Glance. The Female Role Player in Asian Dance and Theatre*. London: Japan Foundation.

FILMOGRAPHY

Didik Nini Thowok. 2004. *Bedhaya Hagoromo: A Japan-Indonesia collaboration*. DVD, 29 mins. Yogyakarta.

Hughes-Freeland, F. 1988. *The Dancer and the Dance*, 45 mins, 16mm/Video/ DVD, © Royal Anthropological Institute and National Film and Television School. Distributed by the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, London.

Longinotto, Kim, and Williams, Jano. 1993. *Dream Girls* [about Takarazuka]. 50mins, Video/DVD. Distributed by Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland. London.

Purwolelono, S.P. 2003. *Female Impersonations in Dance and Theatre*. 28 mins, DVD. Yogyakarta.