




When Is It Modernism? A Lesson from Indonesian Musik Kontemporer

CHRISTOPHER J. MILLER 

Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, USA

Abstract

When is it modernism? This article poses this question to traditionally based Indonesian *musik kontemporer*, as an occasion to examine a distinctive instance of musical modernism, but most importantly to illuminate issues with the question itself. Taking it literally, I identify when *musik kontemporer* was most clearly modernist, recognizing that modernism, and its conception of history, itself has a history. Scrutinizing the question's more usual goal of drawing a distinction between that which is and is not modernist, I show how the case of Rahayu Supanggah – a musician with a deep and primary commitment to the traditional performing arts, whose work has been shaped by his adoption of modernist ways of thinking without being fully defined by them – defies a simple answer. Ultimately, the article is concerned with what is at stake when invoking modernism, and what this means for the larger project of understanding musical modernism as a global phenomenon.

When is it modernism? There are different ways to take this question, depending on who is asking, and why. Or who is claiming the term, or denying such claims. Or no longer making such claims. In this article I scrutinize different answers to the question as asked of my primary research area, contemporary art music in Indonesia, there called *musik kontemporer*. I am especially concerned with the question as it pertains to the traditionally based side of *musik kontemporer*, which I examine primarily through the case of composer and gamelan musician Rahayu Supanggah (1949–2020). I am concerned most of all with what is at stake – for those whose music is the subject of inquiry, of course, but also for the inquirers, and what this means for our larger project of developing an adequate understanding of musical modernism as a global phenomenon.

Thinking about the question itself, semantic issues come into play, and not just around the freighted term 'modernism' but also around the word 'when'. The term *musik kontemporer*, like modernism and its root modern, imply particular ideas about history and temporality, and about distinctions between practices deemed new and those deemed old and traditional. As we will see, such distinctions did not sit well with Supanggah, and indeed warrant scrutiny. Modernism also conjures up moments within cultural milieus when such distinctions carried an especially potent charge. In other words, modernisms have their own histories, and though

Email: cjm299@cornell.edu

this Indonesian instance is more recent, it too has to a significant extent passed. One might thus also ask ‘when *was* it modernism?’

Less literally, the usual sense of the present-tense version – ‘when is it modernism?’ – is really about evaluation. Nearly always charged when it comes to music, it can be especially fraught once ideas of what constitutes progress or advancement intersect with geocultural difference, when evaluation becomes entangled with questions of coevalness.¹ And so, before delving more deeply into Supanggah’s case, I survey different instances of evaluation, including a critical reflection on some of my own, in conjunction with an overview of *musik kontemporer* as a whole, of Supanggah’s traditionally based circle within it, and of the reception of that circle both within and beyond Indonesia. This sets the stage for the finer-grained examinations of Supanggah’s music and thinking that follow. Finally, I return to the question ‘when is it modernism?’ with some possible answers, and more questions.

Is It Modernism?

In 1991, Canadian concert producer Vancouver New Music presented a programme entitled ‘New Music Indonesia’. The programme showcased pieces by ‘eight of Indonesia’s most provocative composers’, performed by the composers and their gamelan-musician colleagues, all of them from ASKI/STSI/ISI Surakarta, one of Indonesia’s leading post-secondary institutions for traditional Indonesian performing arts.² Hearing the pieces as a young composition student partially indoctrinated into an aesthetic creed I would now term modernist, I was electrified. What impressed me most were extensive sections without any clear melody or rhythm, focused instead on masses of sounds that shifted in texture, density, and dynamic. There were also passages with instruments and voices performing material in traditional idioms, but in no instance was the presentation straightforward. Instead, pieces made extensive use of fragmentation, juxtaposition, and novel textures, formed by unusual combinations of instruments, augmented in some cases by other sound-making objects such as marbles, fans, blankets, plastic cups, and sheets of plywood.

Though a departure from Vancouver New Music’s more usual focus on mildly modernist music for chamber ensembles in the Western art music tradition, with a requisite emphasis on newly commissioned pieces by Canadian composers, the New Music Indonesia programme was not totally isolated. Rather, it was one of a handful of curatorial manifestations of a widespread multicultural zeitgeist that intersected with growing awareness and attention in

1 Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). For an insistence on recognizing coevalness, rather than a critique of its denial, see Gavin Lee in this issue, and Hyun Kyong Hannah Chang, ‘Introduction to Special Issue on Musics of Coeval East Asia’, *Twentieth-Century Music* 18/3 (2021). For a parallel essay on *musik kontemporer*, see Jody Diamond, ‘There Is No They There’, *Musicworks* 47 (1990).

2 Marc Perlman and Jody Diamond, programme notes for the concert ‘New Music Indonesia’, presented by Vancouver New Music, 12 October 1991. ‘ASKI’ (Akademi Seni Karawitan Indonesia, 1964–1988), ‘STSI’ (Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia, 1988–2006), and ‘ISI’ (Institut Seni Indonesia, 2006–present) are names the same institution in Surakarta took after changes in its accreditation status, following a pattern shared by several Indonesian institutions of the same or similar names.

contemporary art music circles to the most recognizable instances of what in this issue we call global musical modernism. Another instance from a few years later showcased artists closer to home, including Gamelan Madu Sari, the local gamelan ensemble I had joined. As a whole, that concert undoubtedly checked various programmatic boxes, but apparently did not satisfy the aesthetic aspirations of artistic director Owen Underhill. In a later conversation, Underhill shared with me his opinion that only one piece did what he was hoping for: ‘Trio for Praise’, an ‘atonal’ composition for traditional Chinese instruments, including a *gu zheng* with ‘an unusual tuning’ using quarter-tones, as composer Zhou Rui-Shi, a Master’s student at the University of British Columbia, described it.³ Underhill did not elaborate on how the other pieces fell short. In the case of Martin Bartlett’s ‘Lines from Chuang-Tzu’, an attempt to implement the non-notation-based approach to gamelan composition modelled by the New Music Indonesia troupe, I suspect the primary issue was the lack of polish resulting from entrusting the execution to a mostly amateur community group. More inherently incompatible were the pieces involving Uzume Taiko (including a collaborative piece for which I contributed the parts for gamelan) and the short, driving rhythmic patterns and flashy physical comportment of the *kumi-daiko* tradition they represented. In so far as *kumi-daiko* was invented in the 1950s, it is modern, but more aptly it is characterized as neo-traditionalist, and its international prominence has everything to do with the market for ‘world music’ that had emerged in the 1980s.⁴ Even given the postmodern softening of new music’s aesthetic identity, in the testing of its bounds by multiculturalism, *kumi-daiko*, or at least Uzume Taiko’s take on the form, was perhaps a step too far. Atonality and other iconic hallmarks of modernism in the narrower stylistic sense, meanwhile, remained unassailable.

In the case of the work on the New Music Indonesia programme, the question that more frequently arose was not whether or not it was really new music, but rather if it was authentically so. Jody Diamond related in a 1990 article the reaction she received at an ethnomusicology conference when she read I Wayan Sadra’s description of his 1981 piece ‘Lad-lud-an’, which featured a performer dropping a rotten egg on a black stone. Sadra explained his underlying concept, that ‘every sound always has a *relationship with elements other than the sound itself*’. A graduate student challenged ‘this sounds like a performance piece from New York! Isn’t this just Western influence?’⁵ The response aligns with what Partha Mitter dubbed the ‘Picasso manqué’ syndrome’, following English art historian W. G. Archer’s assessment of

3 Zhou Rui-Shi, programme notes for the piece ‘Trio for Praise’, presented by Vancouver New Music on the concert *Riptides*, 18 April 1993. My conversation with Underhill occurred several years later, most likely in 1996 or 1997, when I worked as an administrative assistant for Vancouver New Music. My familiarity with the priorities of funding agencies came in part from that position, but more directly from working as the sole administrator for the composers’ collective Vancouver Pro Musica.

4 In his book-length study of the form, Shawn Bender categorizes *kumi-daiko* as a ‘new folk performing art’, arguing that this frame ‘moves analysis away from a modernist concern with temporal progress’. While *kumi-daiko* mostly developed outside of art music circles, ‘modern music’ composer Maki Ishii’s piece ‘Monochrome’ played an important role in the birth of the pre-eminent taiko group Kodo. Shawn Bender, *Taiko Boom: Japanese Drumming in Place and Motion* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), 21, 84–7.

5 Diamond, ‘There Is No They There’, 14–15.

Gaganendranath Tagore's paintings as 'simply bad imitations of Picasso'. Picasso's influence on Tagore, according to Archer, 'locked him into a dependent relationship, the colonized mimicking the superior art of the colonizer'. The 'syndrome' refers to the impossible situation to which would-be modernists from beyond the metropole are condemned to respond: 'if the product is too close to its original source, it reflects slavish mentality; if on the other hand, the imitation is imperfect, it represents a failure'.⁶

In his generally positive review of the New Music Indonesia programme, which opened with Sadra's 'Bayu Bajra', Alexander Varty did not directly accuse Sadra and his colleagues of being derivative. Yet he repeatedly offered John Cage as a point of comparison. He suggested that 'what is new and radical in the Indonesian tradition is somewhat old hat by western standards', arguing that 'collective improvisation, the use of untraditional techniques to produce abstract noises from conventional instruments, theatrical ploys like banging glasses on the ground and shaking large sheets of thin plywood to obtain unconventional percussion sounds, the occasional violent gesture or bow to broad comedy' are 'things that western composers have been toying with for at least 40 years, ever since John Cage opened our ears to the fact that everything perceived as music *is* music'.⁷ The Jakarta-based composer Franki Raden projected an even more direct link to Cage in his review of Al Suwardi's 1984 piece 'Sebuah Proses' ('A Process'), which presented the exploration of sound – a process that had become for ASKI composers the first step in creating a new composition – as a performance itself. Raden hailed Suwardi for having managed to 'eliminate the boundary between art events and everyday reality' and thus to realize the very 'ideal' that Cage himself had pursued.⁸

In fact, Suwardi had not yet heard of Cage – though his curiosity piqued by Raden's review, he sought out recordings of his music a few years later while in the United States to teach gamelan.⁹ Of all the stories and other evidence from my research, this one most neatly encapsulates the relationship of *musik kontemporer* to what Georgina Born once characterized as 'the internationalization of twentieth-century avant-gardes'.¹⁰ Or more precisely, the lack thereof, at least for Suwardi and his colleagues.¹¹ For though *musik kontemporer* exists in Indonesia as

6 Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avant-Garde, 1922–1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7. See also Andrew Clay McGraw, *Radical Traditions: Reimagining Culture in Balinese Contemporary Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), especially ch. 2, 'Placing Bali in the Global Aesthetic Network', which includes sections on 'Global Modernism', 'Musical Modernism in Indonesia', and 'Picasso Manqué'.

7 Alexander Varty, 'Experimental Indonesians Offer Beauty', *The Georgia Straight*, 18 October 1991.

8 Franki Raden, 'Pekan Komponis Muda V: "Proses" dan "Gender" yang Memukau' (1984), in *Enam Tahun Pekan Komponis Muda, Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 1979–1985: Sebuah Alternatif*, ed. Suka Hardjana (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 1986).

9 Al Suwardi, interview with author, 8 September 2004.

10 Georgina Born, 'Musical Modernism, Postmodernism, and Others', in *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, ed. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 21.

11 I focus here on what my research has shown to be most important for the circle connected to ASKI/STSI/ISI Surakarta, which is not Cage or other Western composers. For more on Cage's relationship to other parts of Asia, see David

a singular arena, it brings together composers with quite different backgrounds, and different relationships to what is conventionally taken as modernism's centre. On the one side are those such as Raden, who may fairly be characterized as Western-oriented. They worked in scenes that sprung up around two institutions in two different cities: Institut Kesenian Jakarta (IKJ), where Franki Raden had studied with Slamet Abdul Sjukur, the 'father' of *musik kontemporer*, upon the latter's return to Indonesia in 1976 after fourteen years studying and working in Paris; and Akademi Musik Indonesia (AMI) in Jogjakarta, where by coincidence New Zealand composer Jack Body also began teaching in 1976.¹²

For the traditionally based side of *musik kontemporer*, it is quite a different story. The push towards the new at ASKI/STSI/ISI Surakarta came from entirely different sources. Foremost was Gendhon Humardani, a highly influential presence at ASKI who served as its director from 1975 until his death in 1983, whose 'credo of modernity' was 'continuous creativity, creating, always creating, making something new, something fresh'. While supporting efforts to preserve the traditional performing arts, especially the artistic heritage of the Surakarta courts, Humardani simultaneously called on his students to 'break the shackles' of traditional concepts.¹³ Yet having little involvement himself in *karawitan* – his own training was in dance – he provided little in the way of specific guidance. According to Rustopo, then a student and now a key faculty member, Humardani had a definite sense of the level of innovation he wanted to see, but was unable to offer specific musical direction.¹⁴ As Pande Made Sukerta gleefully relayed, Humardani would alternate between general encouragement and telling him that his work was 'shit'. The most specific advice Humardani offered was to insist that music could, and should, be made from anything, including, if necessary, 'shit'.¹⁵ Somewhat more concrete inspiration for creativity came from two dancers, Suprpto

W. Patterson, 'Cage and Asia: History and Sources', in *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage*, ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), and Serena Yang, 'Against "John Cage Shock": Rethinking John Cage and the Post-War Avant-Garde in Japan', *Twentieth-Century Music* 18/3 (2021). Some might assume Lou Harrison to be influential in Indonesia, but in my research he came up only once. Rusdiyantoro relayed how, after Harrison's single visit to ASKI, Suardi was inspired by the shimmering sound of Harrison's aluminium instruments to design similar instruments of his own. Rusdiyantoro, interview with the author, 9 August 2005. At this visit, Martopangrawit, an eminent gamelan musician discussed briefly later, asked Harrison why he said one of the pieces he presented was in a particular *pathet* (mode). Harrison replied 'ignorance', and subsequently refrained from specifying *pathet* for his pieces. Leta E. Miller and Fredric Lieberman, *Lou Harrison: Composing a World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 170. For more on Harrison and gamelan, see Henry Spiller, 'More Western than It Sounds: Lou Harrison', in *Javaphilia: American Love Affairs with Javanese Music and Dance* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015). For one perspective on the more substantial global exchange around Balinese gamelan, see Peter M. Steele, 'Balinese Hybridities: Balinese Music as a Global Phenomenon' (PhD diss., Wesleyan University, 2013).

12 For a more detailed account of the formation of these scenes, based primarily on interviews with the figures involved, see my dissertation: Christopher J. Miller, 'Cosmopolitan, Nativist, Eclectic: Cultural Dynamics in Indonesian Musik Kontemporer' (PhD diss., Wesleyan University, 2014).

13 Perlman and Diamond, programme notes for the concert 'New Music Indonesia'. For an in-depth profile of Humardani, see Rustopo, *Gendhon Humardani 'Sang Gladiator': Arsitek Kehidupan Seni Tradisi Modern* (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Mahavhira, 2001).

14 Rustopo, interview with author, 21 July 2005.

15 Pande Made Sukerta, interview with author, 7 September 2004.

Suryodarmo and Sardono W. Kusuma, both of whom provided opportunities to collaborate at a formative stage. But again, the models they provided were not specifically musical.¹⁶

It was readily apparent from what I observed during my initial encounter in 1991 with Suwardi, Sadra, and their colleagues that their music was grounded in a tradition altogether distinct from Western art music, the one that Cage emerged from, and remained tied to, even as he upended some of its fundamental tenets. Cage's indeterminacy made distinct demands on performers, but it left largely intact the primacy of the composer and the concept of the work, and for the most part the privileged role of the score as the focal point of contemporary music production has continued unabated. The situation is quite different for those in the New Music Indonesia troupe, who performed the entire concert without a scrap of notation in sight. They did so with a depth of engagement and confidence that contrasted sharply with the typical Vancouver New Music presentation – nearly my only point of reference at the time – which due to the chronic lack of rehearsal involved a good deal of sight-reading. I experienced first hand the collaborative process that gives rise to this result, shortly before reading about it in a dissertation by Alec Roth,¹⁷ through creating a new piece with a small group led by Suwardi, who had returned to Vancouver after the New Music Indonesia tour for a month-long residency.¹⁸ As Roth observes, pieces at ASKI are created through rehearsal, rather than in advance. Rehearsals are not, therefore, about 'memorizing the product'; rather, 'the finished composition already exists within the very being of the performers because it has grown there'.¹⁹ In the case of the piece we created with Suwardi, his primary role was to shape what we came up with in a process basically similar to the one Raden related to Cage.²⁰

As I continued to collaborate with other Indonesian composers, and to study the performance practice of traditional Javanese gamelan music, I came to understand just how consistent the process Suwardi involved us in is with the collaborative and interactive nature of traditional performance practice. It was also clear from the time I spent at ASKI/STSI/ISI, starting with my first extended stay in Surakarta, and confirmed in more detail from my subsequent research,²¹ how traditional music constituted a nearly total frame of reference for

16 Miller, 'Cosmopolitan, Nativist, Eclectic', ch. 4, 'Emergence: Of Traditionally-Based Musik Kontemporer'.

17 Alec R. Roth, 'New Composition for Javanese Gamelan' (PhD thesis, University of Durham, 1986).

18 The residency culminated in a performance on 7 November 1991, at the artist-run centre Western Front. The programme consisted primarily of traditional repertoire that Suwardi had taught us. Keith Wallace, ed., *Whispered Art History: Twenty Years at the Western Front* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1993), 153. Suwardi's residency paralleled those of Supanggah in New York, Sadra at Darmouth College, and A. W. Sutrisna in Seattle, documented in Jody Diamond, 'Interaction: New Music for Gamelan—An Introduction', *Leonardo Music Journal* 2/1 (1992). See also an analysis of the work Supanggah composed for Gamelan Son of Lion: Jay M. Arms, 'Rahayu Supanggah's "Paragraph" and the Problems of Intercultural Collaborations', *Global Musical Modernisms* (blog), 24 December 2020, <https://globalmusicalmodernisms.hcommons.org/2020/12/24/rahayu-supanggahs-paragraph-and-the-problems-of-intercultural-collaborations/>.

19 Roth, 'New Composition for Javanese Gamelan', 77.

20 On account of the similarity, Suwardi dubbed our piece 'Proses Dua' ('Process Two').

21 I attended classes at STSI/ISI during my first extended trip to Indonesia from October 1993 to May 1995, where I was a visiting student through the Indonesian government's Dharmasiswa programme. I visited also during a follow-up visit in 2000, while conducting dissertation research in 2004 and 2005, and as a seminar participant in 2015.

musicians at ASKI when they developed their new approach to composition. Amid a media-scape in which popular music, Indonesian and otherwise, was increasingly dominant, ASKI's curriculum focused almost exclusively on gamelan and related Indonesian traditions. Surakarta-style *karawitan* – the preferred term for Javanese gamelan and vocal music – was most central, while Balinese, Sundanese, Banyumasan, and Minangkabau musics had some representation. Western art music had next to no presence, let alone contemporary art music based upon it.

All of this connects to the idea that had motivated my research: that musicians at ASKI developed a genuinely avant-garde approach to composition – in their case, based on the exploration of sound – independently of Western influence. The idea initially felt bold and clear, but soon enough complications arose. Pressed on it, as the critical thinking demanded by graduate school tempered my unbridled enthusiasm, I recognized the narrowness of the conception of influence on which my thinking was predicated. It is significant, to be sure, that musicians at ASKI had not been drawn into the kind of relationship with a cast of avant-garde precursors that their Western-oriented peers at IKJ and AMI had been – the kind of anxiety-inducing influence theorized by Harold Bloom.²² Reading more about and by Humardani, it became clear how strongly indebted his credo of modernity was to his reading of Western aesthetic philosophy and his experience studying modern dance in the United States – though it also became clear how he attenuated the Westernness of that influence as he urged his students to innovate. Turning my attention to the Western-oriented side of *musik kontemporer*, I found that there too engagement with the indigenous was pronounced among a majority of composers, another manifestation of a widespread 'nativist turn' in the Indonesian performing arts. Nearly without exception, Western-oriented composers have composed for traditional Indonesian instruments and the musicians that play them, in a few cases making that their primary focus.²³ But what of those who continue to compose for Western instruments in an atonal modernist idiom? Are they merely Schoenberg manqué? Some works may fairly be critiqued as derivative, and more broadly my research

22 Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

23 In 1975, Slamet Abdul Sjukur composed a set of pieces for voices and *angklung* for personnel from the Indonesian Embassy in Paris to perform at a folkloric festival in Dijon, which Dieter Mack identifies as 'key' to his subsequent career. Dieter Mack, 'Istirahat yang Berbunga, Slamet Abdul Sjukur', in *Tiga Jejak Seni Pertunjukan Indonesia*, ed. Tommy F. Awuy (Jakarta: Masyarakat Seni Pertunjukan Indonesia, 2005). Tony Prabowo worked extensively for a number of years with Minangkabau musicians in his New Jakarta Ensemble; see Stephanie Griffin, "'Ghostly Notes of Time': The Music of Tony Prabowo" (DMA thesis, The Juilliard School, 2003), esp. ch. 3, 'Like Exiles, Weightless'. For the second Art Summit Indonesia in 1998, Suka Hardjana, introduced later, presented his own works for gamelan. Miller, 'Cosmopolitan, Nativist, Eclectic', 330–5. An especially striking case is that of Sutanto; the most prominent of Jack Body's students, he represented AMI Jogjakarta at the first PKM in 1979 (with a work aptly described as a 'happening'), after winning first place in a composition contest held by the Jakarta Arts Council. Shortly after this, he 'vanished from the Indonesian music scene', reconnecting with the *kontemporer* performing arts scene many years later from his base in the village of Mendut, where he used 'theater as a medium for community development'. Franki Suryadarma Notosudirdjo, 'Music, Politics, and the Problems of National Identity in Indonesia' (PhD diss. University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2001), 349–50. For further discussion on Sutanto's subsequent work with musicians in mountain communities, see Miller 'Cosmopolitan, Nativist, Eclectic', 503–14.

revealed significant deficits in what I have termed ‘aesthetic authority’. There are real issues here, most of them the result of the relatively marginal state of Western art music in Indonesia.²⁴ Yet agency cannot, and must not, be linked to any particular aesthetic orientation; originality and authenticity do not depend on, nor are they guaranteed by, an engagement with the indigenous.

Another complication had to do with a different word in my proposition. My contention that the work of ASKI composers was ‘genuinely’ avant-garde was innocent enough, intended to garner attention to music I found remarkable, and an argument for its inclusion in a global perspective on musical modernism. The flip side, however, is exclusion: the implication that there is other music that is not ‘genuinely’ avant-garde (or experimental, or modernist). I began to realize this way of thinking might be problematic after a brief and informal exchange with George Lewis, who met my description of my research topic with quiet scepticism. Lewis had drawn attention to the logic of exclusion in his oft-cited and laser-sharp analysis of the denial on the part of practitioners of ‘Eurological’ new music, such as Cage, that their turn towards improvisation had anything to do with the pioneering work within that ‘Afrological’ form called jazz.²⁵

Such exclusionary discourse is not entirely unknown in Indonesia, though even with the weight of established discursive currents from the international beyond their sway is limited. Singer Nyak Ina Raseuki, a frequent collaborator with Tony Prabowo – a self-proclaimed Western-oriented composer, arguably Indonesia’s most prominent, and one steadfastly committed to a ‘high’-modernist idiom – relayed to me that Prabowo found the works of ASKI composers to be ‘formless’. Raseuki too found them ‘lacking in structure’, and reasoned this was because they were not based on the discipline of composition (*ilmu komposisi*). Summing up their position, she asserted ‘if we are going to adopt modernism, we have to adopt it fully’.²⁶

Far and away more influential, however, was the idea that ‘tradition is modern’. This proclamation formed the title of a review of the second Pekan Komponis Muda (Young Composers Week, PKM) in 1981, by Suka Hardjana.²⁷ This festival, which Hardjana himself directed, played a pivotal role in establishing *musik kontemporer* as a distinct arena. Having established a career in Western art music, including a stint as principal clarinetist with the symphony orchestra in Bremen, Germany, Hardjana pivoted to become traditionally based

24 Prompted especially by comments from Suka Hardjana, who put considerable effort into building an Indonesian scene for Western art music performance, I include in my dissertation a preliminary examination of that scene and its history. Miller ‘Cosmopolitan, Nativist, Eclectic’.

25 George E. Lewis, ‘Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives’, *Black Music Research Journal* 16/1 (1995).

26 Nyak Ina Raseuki, interview with author, 18 August 2005. Though Raseuki, who mostly goes by the name Ubiet, is a strong supporter of Prabowo, she is far from exclusively focused on modernism. She holds a PhD in ethnomusicology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and has worked as a collaborator and project leader in a diverse range of musical styles.

27 Suka Hardjana, ‘Tradisi itu Modern’ (1981), in *Musik: Antara Kritik dan Apresiasi* (Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2004), and in *Enam Tahun Pekan Komponis Muda, Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 1979-1985: Sebuah Alternatif*, ed. Suka Hardjana (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 1986).

composers' biggest champion; over the PKM's first eight iterations, between 1979 and 1988, traditionally based composers outnumbered their Western-oriented peers three to one.²⁸

The competing ideas about modernism within the world of Indonesian *musik kontemporer* are but a faint shadow of the sharp divisiveness and polemic that loom large in so much of the discourse surrounding musical modernism. Arved Ashby, introducing a scholarly attempt to negotiate a 'middle ground', notes how modernist repertoire – or more precisely, the canonical repertoire of mostly Western art music from the twentieth century – is variously 'praised (as liberating and healthily demanding of close attention) or vilified (as elitist or worse fraudulent, because their complexities resist perception)'.²⁹ As Heile and Wilson observe, modernism in music 'arouses passions and is riven by controversies'. Having 'achieved ideological dominance' before 'becoming the object of widespread critique', modernism was 'styled first as a breaker then as a maker of taboos'; it 'had itself become taboo'.³⁰ The charge that modernism holds derives from an economy of prestige, one that Susan McClary famously diagnosed as 'terminal', in reference to what at the time seemed to be modernism's demise into irrelevant obscurity at its own uncompromising hand.³¹

Polemic is by no means unknown in the Indonesian cultural field, but the key terms of the most prominent debates differ. In 1935, speaking to the 'vast difference between the localism of ancient cultures and the modern aspiration for an all-Indonesian national culture' the intellectual and writer Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana launched the 'opening salvo' of what came to be known as the Polemik Kebudayaan (Polemic of Culture) by declaring 'And now the time has arrived . . . when we turn our eyes to the West.'³² Others, most prominently the educator Ki Hadjar Dewantara, who became Indonesia's first minister of education, advocated for taking native traditions as the basis for a new national culture.³³ While the debate was never entirely extinguished – writer and cultural critic Gunawan Mohamad commented in 1986 on how mentions of 'the West' prompted discussions along identical lines to the Polemik Kebudayaan, 'as though one were playing a recording from the 1930s'³⁴ – there did emerge a clear tendency towards what elsewhere I have called 'cosmopolitan nativism'.³⁵ Suka

28 For a table showing the numbers of traditionally based and Western-oriented composers at the first eight PKM, see Christopher J. Miller, 'Indonesian Experimentalisms, the Question of Western Influence, and the Cartography of Aesthetic Authority', *Proceedings from the Conference Beyond the Centres: Musical Avant Gardes since 1950* (Thessaloniki: Department of Music Studies, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2010), <http://btc.web.auth.gr/proceedings.html>. The data are taken from Hardjana, ed., *Enam Tahun Pekan Komponis Muda*, and programmes from the 1987 and 1988 festivals obtained from the archives of the Dewan Kesenian Jakarta.

29 Arved Mark Ashby, ed., *The Pleasure of Modernist Music: Listening, Meaning, Intention, Ideology* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 1.

30 Björn Heile and Charles Wilson, eds., *The Routledge Research Companion to Modernism in Music* (London: Routledge, 2019), i, 1.

31 Susan McClary, 'Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition', *Cultural Critique* 12 (1989).

32 Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, quoted and paraphrased by Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 211.

33 For a discussion of Dewantara's concepts and their impact on cultural policy, see Philip Yampolsky, 'Forces for Change in the Regional Performing Arts of Indonesia', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 151/4 (1995).

34 Gunawan Mohamad, *Sidelines: Thought Pieces from Tempo Magazine* (Jakarta: Lontar, 1994), 51.

35 Christopher J. Miller, 'Cosmopolitan, Nativist, Eclectic'.

Hardjana's contention that 'tradition is modern', in large part a response to the work emerging from ASKI Surakarta that in turn was a realization of Humardani's vision, are all part of this broad consensus within Indonesia's contemporary art scene – even as swirling all around was a highly xenocentric popular culture.³⁶

There is much more to say about these higher-level perspectives on culture, modernity, and the arts. What I wish to focus on for the remainder of this article, however, is a finer-grained examination of the thought and practice of the composers behind the work presented on the New Music Indonesia tour, with a focus on one of those composers: Rahayu Supanggah. Supanggah's outlook especially suggests that questioning 'when it is modernism?' need not trade in prestige, or imply disparagement. It can instead be a more neutral question. For while Supanggah undeniably responded to aesthetic ideologies properly identified as modernist, he was not beholden to them. As we will see, their import for him was dwarfed by a different set of priorities and values.

Rahayu Supanggah

In the discourse around *musik kontemporer*, whether scholarly, critical, or expository, three figures mentioned previously loom large as its standard bearers at and from ASKI/STSI/ISI Surakarta: I Wayan Sadra, Al Suwardi, and Pande Made Sukerta. Suwardi appeared three times at the PKM, with nuanced explorations of timbre employing newly invented instruments of his own design.³⁷ Sadra became known for his iconoclastic gestures; besides the rotten egg in 'Lad-lud-an' at the second PKM, his pieces have involved bringing cattle on stage and dragging gongs on the floor.³⁸ In an early assessment from within the scene, Sadra distinguished the 'open' and 'free' approach, which had at its heart the kind of 'exploration' Suwardi presented as a performance at the fifth PKM, from the older approach to composition, which used 'existing materials' and resulted in works with 'a strong relationship to the past'. Sadra quoted a statement by Sukerta concerning his piece 'Malam', which seems to be the first piece to have taken this new approach, created for a competition and workshop at ASKI in 1979. Sukerta explains how he began 'with the assumption that any object can be a potential source of many sounds'. Following Humardani's exhortations, Sukerta used not only gamelan instruments, but also other 'objects' such as 'drinking glasses, fabric, bicycles, mallets, sheets of tin, etc. as well as food like crisp chips (*krupuk*) that are chewed or

36 Jeremy Wallach, 'Exploring Class, Nation, and Xenocentrism in Indonesian Cassette Retail Outlets', *Indonesia* 74 (2002).

37 For detailed discussions of Suwardi's music, see Roth, 'New Composition for Javanese Gamelan' and Ann Warde, 'Contemporary Indonesian Composition: Elastic-Edged Experimentalism', *Asian Music* 34/1 (2002).

38 Marc Perlman discusses the participation of a cow in a concert Sadra organized in 1997 in his article 'The Traditional Javanese Performing Arts in the Twilight of the New Order: Two Letters from Solo', *Indonesia* 68 (1999), 13–14. For an insightful discussion of Sadra's use/abuse of gongs, see Andrew C. McGraw, 'The Ethical-Aesthetics of I Wayan Sadra (1953 – 2011)', in *Performing Arts in Postmodern Bali: Changing Interpretations, Founding Traditions*, ed. Kendra Stepputat (Aachen, Germany: Shaker, 2013).

crushed'.³⁹ These would become staples in his pieces, including two for the PKM, and the piece featured on the New Music Indonesia programme in 1991. Drawing upon his many years as the principal composition instructor at ASKI/STSI/ISI Surakarta, Sukerta outlined the 'alternative methods' he and his colleagues devised in a guide that has undergone several versions since the first in 1989.⁴⁰

There is a fourth figure, not as conspicuously innovative as Suwardi, Sadra, or Sukerta but nonetheless centrally important. Rahayu Supanggah, through a combination of exceptional musical abilities, relative seniority, intellectual acumen, confidence, and forthrightness, provided a good deal of leadership at the scene centred around ASKI/STSI/ISI Surakarta, for compositional activity specifically and in general. Born into a family of artists, Supanggah grew up around gamelan and wayang (shadow-puppet theatre). His skill as a gamelan musician was already high when he entered the performing arts high school in Surakarta, so much so that in 1965 he was included as the youngest member of a presidential arts mission to China, North Korea, and Japan.⁴¹ Supanggah was made chair of the *karawitan* department upon graduating from ASKI in 1978.⁴² In 1979, he and his colleague Sri Hastanto presented new compositions at the inaugural PKM – the first presentation of concert pieces outside ASKI. Supanggah became the first instructor of composition as it was added to the curriculum, and as the creation of a *komposisi baru* (a new-style composition) was made a graduation requirement. He taught the course until 1981, when he left to pursue a doctorate in ethnomusicology at the Paris Diderot University (aka Paris 7), which he completed in 1985.⁴³ Sukerta, who had taken over teaching composition, continued after Supanggah's return. Supanggah, however, resumed a leadership role, acting as artistic director for the New Music Indonesia tour in 1991. Four years later, in 1995, when the Indonesian government marked the fiftieth anniversary of the republic's independence by launching a triennial Art Summit, Supanggah was again the first from the ASKI/STSI/ISI circle to be featured, this time with an evening-length programme of his own.⁴⁴

There is much about 'Gambuh', the piece Supanggah presented at the 1979 PKM, that invites the label 'modernist'. With its 'fragmented bits of traditional vocal melodies interspersed and overlaid with Buddhist chanting' and 'seemingly random sounds from several gamelan instruments', the piece was, in R. Anderson Sutton's estimation, 'clearly an attempt

39 I Wayan Sadra, 'Komposisi Baru: On Contemporary Composition in Indonesia', *Leonardo Music Journal* 1/1 (1991), 22. This article is a translation with additional commentary by Jody Diamond of a working paper presented at the eighth Pekan Komponis in 1988, which in turn built on an internal report distributed at ASKI in 1986.

40 For an English translation of a more recent version, see Pande Made Sukerta, 'Alternative Methods in Composition of New Karawitan', *Balungan* 12 (2017).

41 Rustopo, 'Panggah dan Sadra: Anak Desa Menjadi Komponis Dunia', in *Seni Dalam Berbagai Wacana: Mengenang 20 Tahun Kepergian Gendhon Humdani*, ed. Waridi (Surakarta: Program Pendidikan Pascasarjana, Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia Surakarta, 2003), 110–112.

42 Marc Perlman, 'Unplayed Melodies: Music Theory in Postcolonial Java' (PhD diss., Wesleyan University, 1993), 601–2.

43 Roth, 'New Composition for Javanese Gamelan', 65.

44 Edi Sedyawati, Sal Murgiyanto, and Sri Hastanto, eds., *Art Summit Indonesia 1995* (Jakarta: Direktorat Jenderal Kebudayaan Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, 1997), 73–6.

to abandon traditional assumptions in a radical way'.⁴⁵ As the title indicates – Gambuh is a variety of *macapat*, a category of Javanese poetic metres and their associated melodies – the piece is a setting of *tembang* (sung poetry), a source for a great many gamelan compositions. Yet it does indeed avoid conventional approaches, in which the melody is sung by a soloist or chorus accompanied by a full complement of gamelan instruments, or is taken as the basis for a fundamentally instrumental composition.⁴⁶ The closest Supanggah comes to a conventional treatment is four-and-a-half minutes into the nearly thirteen-minute piece, when there is a *pathetan* – an unmetred mood-setting song, in which the vocal melody is joined by just four instruments. Conventionally, *pathetan* are rather atmospheric and liminal pieces, functioning as a prelude or postlude to a metred *gendhing* (a piece for full gamelan); or articulating junctures in the dramatic structure of *wayang*; or accompanying the entrances and exits of dancers. In other words, they usually set up or wind down from that which constitutes the focus of attention.⁴⁷ In Supanggah's piece, the *pathetan* becomes one point of focus amid even more atmospheric and exploratory material. (A second is a brief episode of loud-style gamelan.) The piece opens with multiple gamelan instruments fading in on a tremolo on a single pitch, joined as they fade back out by a few isolated bell-like strokes on inverted gong chimes. This introduces the Buddhist priest Pujo Darmasurya leading a group intoning the syllable 'om', before further chanting, mostly on the same pitch introduced by the tremolo. As the chanting continues there are ethereal whistles from several *suling* (bamboo flutes), a group giving a more speech-like delivery of a few phrases before an exaggerated execution of *alok* (stylized swoops and cries from a male chorus present in several gamelan genres), a gong struck too hard, and a group covering and uncovering their mouths with their hand to produce a chorus of 'wa-wa-wa-wa-wa' while Darmasurya resumes his chant. After the *pathetan* proper comes to a close, there is a hint of metre as a *gambang* (xylophone) introduces an ostinato. That quickly fades into a texture of tremolos and subtle instrumental flourishes, and the chorus singing seemingly in slow motion, holding out long tones while shifting very gradually between vowels. Finally, a solo singer sings phrases of 'Gambuh', but from off-stage, as the established texture gradually gives way to quiet and low rhythmic chanting.⁴⁸

As fitting for a piece based on sung poetry, Supanggah's 'Gambuh' focuses to a significant extent on the vocal. But in good modernist fashion, the vocal is made strange. Also characteristically modernist is Supanggah's stated intention in his commentary on the piece (a requisite of all PKM participants): to develop those aspects of *karawitan* that are 'weak', or

45 R. Anderson Sutton, *Variation in Central Javanese Gamelan Music: Dynamics of a Steady State* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1993), 57.

46 Sumarsam, *Gamelan: Cultural Interaction and Musical Development in Central Java* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), see esp. ch. 4, 'Current Theories of *Gendhing*'.

47 For a concise discussion of the form and function of *pathetan*, see Benjamin Brinner, 'At the Border of Sound and Silence: The Use and Function of *Pathetan* in Javanese Gamelan', *Asian Music* 12/1 (1989).

48 For a detailed examination of Supanggah's 'Gambuh', along with Sri Hastanto's 'Dandang Gula', discussed later, see Roth, 'New Composition for Javanese Gamelan', 168–73. Roth includes a graphic 'outline sketch' for each piece. Recordings of the two pieces are included as the first selections on the first MP3 audio file available through the page for the thesis at Durham University's e-theses site: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/917/> (accessed 29 June 2022).

otherwise underutilized. Supanggah identifies the tendency of traditional *karawitan* to avoid sharp contrasts in volume, tempo, and sound quality, and also speaks of the untapped potential of gamelan instruments as sources of sound.⁴⁹ Especially in its exploration of the latter – and its incorporation of other sonic elements such as Buddhist chanting, and also humming tops – Supanggah’s ‘Gambuh’ is appreciably more radical in its treatment of traditional elements than Sri Hastanto’s ‘Dandang Gula’. In this other piece that represented ASKI at the first PKM, fully idiomatic elements such as more straightforward renditions of *tembang*, and *rebab*, again playing in the rhythmically free style of *pathetan*, are far more prominent. The difference is significant, and was noted by Suka Hardjana, who faulted the piece in his review for feeling ‘too “ordered”’.⁵⁰ Yet Supanggah’s and Hastanto’s pieces are more similar than they are different: both based on *macapat*; both mixing traditional and non-conventional elements; both featuring a short section of more iconic loud and metred gamelan playing in the middle of pieces dominated by softer and less tightly structured material; and most importantly, both resulting from the same enterprise.

These first instances of pieces created for concert presentation – a practice without precedent in a tradition where music primarily serves as accompaniment to something else, whether another performing art such as wayang or dance, or socializing, or aristocratic grandeur – were one component of ASKI director Humardani’s mission to cement a contemporary existence for the traditional Indonesian performing arts. For Humardani, that meant transforming them to become ‘Art’, the ‘independent and privileged realm of spirit, truth, and creativity’ that reached its ‘apotheosis’ in Europe in the nineteenth century.⁵¹ It also meant meeting the rapid developments in society with a commensurate level of innovation. This was, Humardani opined, no longer an era in which the creativity of ‘*empu*’, the respected elder masters of traditional arts, would suffice.⁵² Simply putting traditional forms on a stage in front of an attentive audience – as happened in many of the cultural missions staffed by those affiliated with ASKI/STSI/ISI, including the one Supanggah participated in 1965 while still in high school – was not enough. The work needed to be modern, and to be modern demanded ‘an individual attitude’ and ‘originality in the realization of form and content’.⁵³

At the same time, the traditional arts that Humardani viewed as insufficient to meet the moment were the primary focus of all at ASKI, in its curriculum as well as in preservation projects Humardani himself led. They are what Supanggah, Hastanto, and their colleagues lived and breathed. Supanggah emphasized this reality at the outset of his commentary on

49 Rahayu Supanggah, ‘Gambuh’, in *Enam Tahun Pekan Komponis Muda*, ed. Hardjana. See also the English translation of the essay Supanggah presented at the composition workshop at ASKI shortly before the PKM in Jakarta, in Roth, ‘New Composition for Javanese Gamelan’, 280–8.

50 Suka Hardjana, ‘Pekan Komponis Muda di TIM’ (1979), in *Musik: Antara Kritik dan Apresiasi*.

51 Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 187. Among Humardani’s points of reference was De Witt H. Parker, *The Principles of Aesthetics* (Boston: Silver Burdett and Co., 1920), which he translated and published through ASKI in 1980.

52 Rustopo, *Gendhon Humardani ‘Sang Gladiator’*, 152.

53 S. D. Humardani, ‘Masalah-Masalah Dasar Pengembangan Seni Tradisi’ (Surakarta: Akademi Seni Karawitan Indonesia, 1981), trans. as ‘Fundamental Problems in the Development of the Traditional Arts’, in Roth ‘New Composition for Javanese Gamelan’, 250.

'Gambuh', stating that he 'lives in the sphere' of 'traditional Javanese *karawitan*', and that he is 'fully immersed in playing, teaching, endeavouring to understand, endeavouring to realize, endeavouring to broaden, and endeavouring to arrange traditional *karawitan*'.⁵⁴ The challenge, then, was how to balance these two commitments: to creativity and originality on the one hand, and to the world of *karawitan* on the other. In a paper for the composition workshop at which Sukerta presented 'Malam' – the piece with the drinking glasses and *krupuk* – Hastanto expressed frustration at how his own milder experiments were met by traditionalists as 'violent' and 'uncivilized', while the 'non-traditional camp still does not realise whether this is progress'.⁵⁵ Reflecting on the workshop several decades later, Sukerta was somewhat dismissive of the other pieces submitted to the competition. He described them as '*baik-baiklah*' – nice, to a fault. The jury – which included Supanggih, and also Martopangrawit, ASKI's most respected '*empu*' but a modernist spirit in his own way – apparently agreed, and awarded the prize to Sukerta, even though by his own admission the piece had 'no form' and was merely 'concepts' and 'ideas'.⁵⁶

In the years after this competition and the first PKM, Sukerta's approach, with its emphasis on sound exploration, rose to prominence at ASKI. It was taken up broadly by students as Sukerta took over teaching composition from Supanggih, after his departure to Paris. More broadly, there was a shift in dynamics with several comings and goings. Like Supanggih, Hastanto also left in 1981 to pursue a doctorate, in his case at Durham University in the UK.⁵⁷ That same year, Humardani persuaded Sadra to come to ASKI after hearing, seeing, and smelling his piece with the rotten egg at the second PKM.⁵⁸ Sadra joined Sukerta in teaching composition and added his own renegade ideas to the mix. Suwardi was coming into his own as a composer, going from collaborations on pieces, including 'Ngalor-Ngidul' with Rustopo and T. Slamet Suparno for the third PKM in 1982,⁵⁹ to pieces of his own, such as 'Debah', his graduating project in 1983,⁶⁰ and 'Gender', a more fully composed piece he presented along with the afore-discussed 'Proses Dua' at the fifth PKM in 1984.⁶¹ He also contributed to teaching composition. 'Proses Dua' joined Sukerta's 1980 piece 'Demung' as a beacon of sound exploration's status as *de rigueur*, going so far as to focus exclusively on novel sounds and textures. Meanwhile, by late 1984 Supanggih and Hastanto had returned to ASKI. The emphasis on composition as a requirement for graduation was scaled back, and a new option, formulated by Hastanto, was introduced: *penataan*, novel arrangements of traditional repertoire. This may have reduced the

54 Supanggih, 'Gambuh', 40.

55 Sri Hastanto, 'Some Experiments to Seek Innovation in Karawitan' (1979), in Roth, 'New Composition for Javanese Gamelan', 292.

56 Pande Made Sukerta, interview with author, 8 July 2005.

57 Roth, 'New Composition for Javanese Gamelan', 291–2.

58 Rustopo, 'Panggih dan Sadra', 130–1.

59 T. Slamet Suparno, Al Suwardi, and Rustopo, 'Ngalor-Ngidul' (1982), in *Enam Tahun Pekan Komponis Muda*, ed. Hardjana.

60 Roth, 'New Composition for Javanese Gamelan', 196–9; Warde, 'Contemporary Indonesian Composition', 114–25.

61 Pande Made Sukerta and Al Suwardi, 'Laras—Gender—Sebuah Proses', in *Enam Tahun Pekan Komponis Muda*, ed. Hardjana.

gratuitous use by students wishing to please their examiners with ‘inverted bicycles, bouncing volley balls, glass plates, balloons’, and, following Sukerta’s lead, ‘the orchestrated sounds of many *krupuk* being eaten noisily’.⁶² But *penataan* were despised by *empu* such as Martopangrawit and Mloyowidodo, for their more direct interference with the guiding principles of traditional *karawitan*.⁶³

Supanggih’s relationship to this play of positions was complex. He was by no means aesthetically conservative; he identified himself in his biographies as ‘a pioneer in strange new works of karawitan’, and noted how we would be stamped ‘controversial’ or ‘a rebel’.⁶⁴ As a jury member he seemingly approved of Sukerta’s use of all manner of objects in ‘Malam’. The original 1979 version of ‘Gambuh’ had its own fair share of strange sounds and textures. But as we will see, while the heightened attention to sound left its mark on Supanggih’s work, it did not become a singular focus. Relative to others involved in composition (as distinct from *penataan*) at ASKI/STSI/ISI, Supanggih’s innovations seem quite mild; as a younger colleague Sukamso put it, in Supanggih’s work ‘the colour is the same as tradition’.⁶⁵ From the perspective of Otto Sidharta, a Western-oriented composer who presented a piece for amplified water sounds at the first PKM, Supanggih is ‘basically traditional in his aesthetic’, in contrast with Suwardi and Sadra.⁶⁶ The difference stems in part from their respective relationships with Humardani. Sukerta, Suwardi, and others credit Humardani for having pushed them to be ‘crazy’. According to Rustopo, Humardani did not dare put that kind of pressure on Supanggih, recognizing his superior musical knowledge and ability.⁶⁷ But while Supanggih’s work is not as conspicuously experimental or iconoclastic as that of some of his colleagues, characterizing it as ‘basically traditional’ underestimates it. Supanggih’s attachment to tradition was, however, evident in lines that he drew. In our 2004 interview, he spoke against what he regarded as the mistreatment of instruments, alluding to (without naming) Sadra and his dragging of gongs on the floor. This is not something he could bring himself to do, not wanting to ‘injure the owners of that culture’.⁶⁸

The positions of others are also, however, more mixed than I have made them appear here. While Sadra’s actions were without question iconoclastic – though in a more targeted way than Supanggih seemed to appreciate – they did not represent a full repudiation of traditional musics. On the contrary, he spoke at some length in a 2005 interview regarding his concern about the decline in Javanese gamelan – an expected concern which he sincerely held as he

62 Roth, ‘New Composition for Javanese Gamelan’, 217–18.

63 Rusdiyantoro shared this perspective with me, and identified Hastanto as the source of the concept of *penataan*. Rusdiyantoro, interview with author. For more on Martopangrawit and the range of creative practices at ASKI, see Marc Perlman and Sri Hastanto, ‘Ra Ngandel: Martopangrawit’s last “experimental” composition’, *Balungan* 6/1–2 (1998). For more on *penataan* specifically, see Joko Sutrisno, ‘*Penataan*—Many Different Feelings in a Short Time’, *Balungan* 6/1–2 (1998).

64 Rahayu Supanggih, *Kurmat Pada Tradisi (Homage to Tradition)*, self-published audio CD (2001), reissued by the American Gamelan Institute as *New Music Indonesia on Gamelan* (Lebanon, NH: American Gamelan Institute, 2003).

65 Sukamso, interview with author, 4 August 2004.

66 Otto Sidharta, interview with author, 30 June 2005.

67 Rustopo, interview with author.

68 Supanggih, interview with author, 21 July 2004.

filled a stint as chair of the *karawitan* department. He identified the tendency to compose for subsets of instruments as a problem and that compositions for full gamelan might be at least a partial remedy.⁶⁹ Suwardi and Sukerta, writing together in a joint essay for the fourth PKM in 1984 – the meeting at which they presented Suwardi’s ‘Sebuah Proses’ – acknowledged the occasional use in their pieces of ‘figuration, techniques and idioms that resemble traditional patterns’. This is ‘understandable’, given their background – that however much they may long for ‘emancipation’, it is something that ‘consistently pounds our spirits’. They ask themselves, ‘is this a sign of our inability to act and change totally?’⁷⁰ Indeed, as much as Sukerta spoke of ‘moving outside’ tradition (*keluar dari tradisi*) – as distinct from Supanggah and others speaking of taking tradition as a point of departure (*titik berangkat*) – nearly all of his pieces include identifiably idiomatic material, albeit in a such a way that it comes across as quotation.⁷¹ Suwardi demonstrates a more subtle but otherwise parallel move. In a 2004 interview, he described how with his early experiments with instrument building his thinking was ‘still tied’ to the *pelog* and *slendro* scales of *karawitan*. In the creative ferment at ASKI, he soon enough turned to ‘just sound’.⁷² More recently, while the scope of his instrument building and composition has expanded, he has returned to primarily using *slendro* and *pelog*.⁷³

While sound exploration had become a hallmark of ASKI-style *musik kontemporer*, it never became a totalizing approach, not even for its primary proponents. It never approached the level of dominance serialism had in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere, however much that dominance has at times been overstated.⁷⁴ The notion of leaving tradition behind entirely would seem to partake of the same logic of *terra nullius* exhibited by Western musical modernism – a connection Gavin Lee makes in his article in this issue. But it remained notional, one ideal that competed with others, most notably a grounding and ongoing commitment to concepts, practices, and materials from the very same musical traditions whose shackles Humardani urged his students to break. This other ideal was held by all involved in *musik kontemporer* at ASKI/STSI/ISI. Within that circle, however, it was most resolutely and consistently championed by Rahayu Supanggah.

69 I Wayan Sadra, interview with author, 4 August 2005.

70 Sukerta and Suwardi, ‘Laras—Gender—Sebuah Proses’, 316.

71 Pande Made Sukerta, interviews with author, 4 August 2004 and 7 September 2004; Supanggah, ‘Gambuh’, 41. On Sukerta’s use of idiomatic material, see Christopher J. Miller, ‘A Different Kind of Modernism: The Sound Exploration of Pande Made Sukerta’, in *Performing Arts in Postmodern Bali: Changing/Interpretations, Founding Traditions*, ed. Kendra Stepputat (Aachen, Germany: Shaker, 2013).

72 Suwardi, interview with author.

73 As a thesis project for his doctorate in artistic creation (Penciptaan Seni) from ISI Surakarta, Suwardi composed *Planet Harmonik*, a major piece for an ensemble playing all instruments of his own design. Al Suwardi, *Planet Harmonik*, Music composition (Doctoral project, Institut Seni Indonesia Surakarta, 2016), <http://repository.isi-ska.ac.id/1390/>. For a discussion of the piece in the context of Suwardi’s work, see Aton Mulyana and Joko Suranto, ‘Nunggak Semi AL Suwardi: Organology and Perspective of Harmonic Planet Music Creation’, *International Journal of Visual and Performing Arts* 3/1 (2021).

74 See, for example, Christopher Fox’s scrutiny of ‘the “Darmstadt” myth’. Christopher Fox, ‘Darmstadt and the Institutionalisation of Modernism’, *Contemporary Music Review* 26/1 (2007), as part of the special issue he co-edited with Paul Attinello and Martin Iddon on ‘Other Darmstadts’.

The piece Supanggah presented for the 1991 New Music Indonesia tour encapsulates his stance well. In its use of novel instrumental combinations and sequence of contrasting sonic textures, Supanggah's 'Keli' fits well into the programme for which he as artistic director was responsible. But in contrast to the way in which all other pieces layered and moved between material that was rhythmically coordinated, material that was looser but still melodically focused, and clouds of sound, Supanggah's piece is rhythmic from start to finish. A single *rebab* starts with a tremolo on a single pitch, joined by three more on other pitches and an ostinato on gongs. After several cycles they break into a unison melody – perhaps evocative of the group-playing of beginning students at ASKI/STSI/ISI, which is practically the only time one would hear more than one *rebab* at a time, and explains the less-than-uniform intonation. This peculiar and slightly awkward opening introduces what turns into a parade of references to traditional genres, one cross-fading into the next: Javanese choral singing juxtaposed with Sundanese *gambang* and Banyumasan *calung*; *kodok ngorek* and then *carabalen*, two archaic gamelan forms, the latter joined by splashy Balinese *gong beri*, and *rebana* frame drums associated with Islam, before coming to an abrupt stop. Right away, the Javanese choral singing resumes, this time in strict canon, half of the singers following four beats behind the others. After several phrases, a *pesindhen* (solo female singer) joins one of the male singers for two more, the first in unison, the second trailing after in the more conventional form of counterpoint, before leaving the men to continue, but now humming quietly. As the programme notes register more explicitly, the piece reflects Supanggah's 'concern about the future of folk music in a rapidly changing society'. 'Keli', the piece's title, 'refers to something that is swept away by a river, following wherever the current leads'. Supanggah's inspiration for the piece 'is both court music and folk songs which have been carried downstream, meaning almost lost'; by placing them in a 'new' and 'contemporary' context, 'their beauty can be introduced and appreciated'. A heightened attention to sound is still active in 'Keli', but rather than an end in and of itself, it is in the service of a larger project.⁷⁵

Tradition is Modern

In the one interview I conducted with Supanggah, from 2004, he was especially emphatic about two points. 'I am a traditional person', he asserted several times. And for him, 'there is no difference between tradition and *kontemporer*'.⁷⁶ These came up early on, as I attempted to ask about his experience moving between two worlds that are, to a great extent, distinct: that of the traditional performing arts in Java, and that of the contemporary performing arts internationally. The disconnect between the two was on display at a wayang performance I had attended the night before. During a comedic interlude, where the focus shifts from the story being told to jokes, light songs, and banter between the performers, the puppet master Ki Purbo Asmoro asked the singer Sukeksi about taking part in performances of *I La Galigo* in

75 Supanggah, paraphrased by Perlman and Diamond in their programme notes for the concert 'New Music Indonesia'. I am indebted to Rachel Cooper of the Asia Society for providing me audio recordings of several of the concerts from that tour.

76 Supanggah, interview with the author.

Europe. That production, an international collaboration directed by renowned dramaturge Robert Wilson for which Supanggah composed and arranged the music, represents a pinnacle achievement for an Indonesian composer, with performances at premier venues in major cities on four continents. Ki Purbo asked Sukei to sing a selection. She obliged, after which Ki Purbo responded, only half jokingly, ‘Ack! What is that? Dayak music? I think I might puke.’⁷⁷ It was not because the selection was too avant-garde – on the contrary, the music for *I La Galigo*, a work inspired by an epic of the Bugis people of South Sulawesi, is likewise inspired by, or drawn directly from, traditional musics from South Sulawesi and elsewhere in the Indonesian archipelago.⁷⁸ Rather, Ki Purbo’s apparent gut reaction was to the melody’s sheer foreignness. For despite being a celebrated innovator himself – Ki Purbo, more than anyone in wayang, has built upon Humardani’s earlier experiments and turned them into a mature approach – he works very squarely within the Central Javanese tradition.⁷⁹ He performs abroad often enough, but this has had only a modest influence on his practice. Supanggah, by contrast, though no less devoted to Javanese traditions, is profoundly cosmopolitan. An obvious contributing factor is his extensive international experience: before the *I La Galigo* production he had composed music for Singaporean dramaturge Ong Keng Sen’s *Lear* and Peter Brook’s *Mahabharata*, and as early as 1983 collaborated with Werner Kaegi at the Institute of Sonology in the Netherlands.⁸⁰ No less important is his *intra*-national experience. His work on *I La Galigo* was predicated on substantial ethnomusicological research of traditional musics entirely distinct from Central Javanese gamelan, and is just one instance of many of Supanggah’s interactions, scholarly and creative, with music and musicians from several of Indonesia’s myriad ethnic groups.⁸¹

Supanggah is not, then, a ‘traditional person’ in the same sense as Ki Purbo Asmoro – and especially not in the way that the average gamelan musician in Surakarta is. This was neatly demonstrated by two pieces Supanggah presented at a musical gathering at his home in 2009, one in a regular series called Klenengan Pujangga Laras that he frequently hosted.⁸² This

77 Dayak, an umbrella term for ethnic groups from the interior of Borneo, are a prominent other for many Javanese. I am indebted to Kathryn Emerson for filling me in on the details of Ki Purbo Asmoro’s reaction.

78 For a discussion of the *I La Galigo* production and Supanggah’s music see Sarah Weiss, ‘Permeable Boundaries: Hybridity, Music, and the Reception of Robert Wilson’s *I La Galigo*’, *Ethnomusicology* 52/2 (2008).

79 See Kathryn Emerson, *Innovation, Style and Spectacle in Wayang: Purbo Asmoro and the Evolution of an Indonesian Performing Art* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2022).

80 Supanggah wrote about his participation in Ong’s *Lear* and Brook’s *Mahabharata* in ‘A Story of Art Collaboration’, paper presented at the seminar *Internasional Milleneart*, organized by Masyarakat Seni Pertunjukan Indonesia and Asosiasi Tradisi Lisan, Tirtagangga, Bali, 9 September 1999, obtained from the archives of STSI Surakarta. An Indonesian version, ‘Cerita Sekitar Kolaborasi Seni’, was published in *Jurnal Seni Pertunjukan Indonesia* 10 (2000). Kaegi is included in lists of collaborators in biographies from programmes and CDs; programme notes from their collaboration are reproduced on Kaegi’s website, www.kaegi.nl/werner/?Kompositionen%2FCompositions:1983%2F1984_DIALOGUE (accessed 19 September 2022).

81 Rustopo includes a list of Supanggah’s ethnomusicological research projects and publications, along with lists of newspaper articles, compositions, artistic collaborations, and administrative positions in ‘Panggah dan Sadra’, 112–21.

82 Klenengan Pujangga Laras was launched in 2001 by Kathryn Emerson and Wakidi Dwidjomartono, with financial contributions from members of the North American gamelan community, to support the performance of ‘classical’ *karawitan*.

particular meeting served also to inaugurate an impressive set of instruments Supanggah had recently acquired. Klenengan Pujangga Laras is open to all *pangrawit* (practitioners of *karawitan*) interested in its focus on ‘classical’ repertoire, and it was the usual attendees who played Supanggah’s first piece: gendhing ‘Sasangka’, a composition in a fully traditional idiom with a prominent vocal melody sung by a large mixed chorus. The musicians managed to sight-read the piece, which for most instrumentalists meant inferring and interpreting an ‘unplayed’ or ‘inner’ melody from a notated *balungan*, or ‘skeletal’ melody, and generating idiomatically appropriate parts based on that.⁸³ At times the singers – who had their own notated parts – stumbled over less predictable turns of phrase, and the ensemble as a whole might have had difficulty navigating a few somewhat unconventional transitions had Supanggah himself not played *kendhang* (drum). But they made it through as well as they would any unfamiliar piece, whether new or just infrequently played (a category into which much of the ‘classical’ repertoire falls as performance opportunities diminish and it is less often performed).

There is no possibility, however, that the usual attendees could have played Supanggah’s second piece: an almost completely reworked version of ‘Gambuh’. Though all the material related to traditional idioms – the piece was stripped of the most conspicuously experimentalist elements from the original 1979 version – only some of those elements were Central Javanese. The first of two sections involving full gamelan was more Balinese in its treatment of mode, and included a male performer singing in the style of Balinese *tembang*. A later section superimposed melodies of a Balinese *suling gambuh*, a Javanese *pesindhen*, and *adzan* (the Islamic call to prayer). The piece, in this form, could only have been played by the group that gave the performance: Supanggah’s ensemble, Garasi Seni Benawa, all of whom were affiliated with ISI. Only they had the specific idiomatic expertise upon which the piece drew, and only they knew, through their involvement in the piece’s (re)composition, how the different elements were to be layered and sequenced.⁸⁴

‘Gambuh’, even in this reimagined version, is unambiguously not a traditional piece, even if it is composed almost entirely of traditional elements. ‘Gambuh’ does not at all realize the hope Supanggah expressed in his 1979 essay, ‘to add to the treasury of traditional repertoire’,⁸⁵ at least not in the way that gendhing ‘Sasangka’ potentially could – as a piece that anyone sufficiently well versed in traditional performance practice would be able to play without specific instruction. Nevertheless, ‘Gambuh’ demonstrates well how the continuities between

83 Sumarsam, “Inner Melody in Javanese Gamelan,” in *Karawitan: Source Readings in Javanese Gamelan and Vocal Music*, Vol. 1, ed. Judith Becker and Alan Feinstein (Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan, 1984). Marc Perlman, *Unplayed Melodies: Javanese Gamelan and the Genesis of Music Theory* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004). See also Benjamin Brinner, *Knowing Music, Making Music: Javanese Gamelan and the Theory of Musical Competence and Interaction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

84 For documentation of the gathering on 23 June 2009 at which Supanggah’s pieces were played, see https://gamelanbvg.com/pl/reports/year_08/8_08_20090623.html. For recordings of ‘Gambuh’ and gendhing ‘Sasangka’, choose ‘Guest login’ at the website ‘Rekaman Gendhing Jawi’, <http://dustyfeet.com/lagu/>, then ‘Pados gendhing’ (search for gendhing) ‘komposisi Gambuh’ and ‘Sasangka’.

85 Supanggah, ‘Gambuh’, 41.

ASKI-style *musik kontemporer* and traditional Indonesian musics go beyond the incorporation of traditional melodies and other musical elements. It is not a traditional piece, but it is substantially Nusalogical, to employ a term parallel to Lewis's 'Afrological' and 'Eurological'. Through all its different versions, Supanggah's 'Gambuh' exemplifies particular 'musical belief systems and behavior', or in short, a particular kind of musical 'logic'.⁸⁶

Two especially relevant and interconnected aspects are the importance of collaboration, and the fluid identity and modularity of pieces. In traditional Javanese *karawitan*, these are evident on both subtle and striking levels, from the interpretation of *balungan*, to transformations in the course of performance in tempo and temporal scale (both covered by the term *irama*),⁸⁷ to the way pieces are strung together into suites. Supanggah pointed to such 'freedom of interpretation' as a 'positive' aspect of *karawitan* in his essay for the 1979 PKM.⁸⁸ What is set, and what invites or requires creative input from other players, changes with the departure from the conventions of *karawitan*, but these Nusalogical principles are retained.

The differences between the versions of 'Gambuh' – the original version presented at the 1979 PKM, an initial reworking for a 2001 self-produced CD titled *Homage to Tradition*, and the preceding version presented in 2009 at Klenengan Pujangga Laras – have in part to do with shifts in Supanggah's vision, as well as with material he generated. In each version, the *balungan*-based metred sections for full gamelan are entirely distinct. More generally, there is a shift from an emphasis on innovation and 'new flavours', as he wrote in 1979, to the concept of 'compatibility or conformity' – the meaning of the word *gambuh*, as Supanggah noted in the 2001 CD – and 'the hope for compromise between various elements: social, cultural, ethnic and religious'.⁸⁹

No less important, however, is the combination of who else was involved and the attitudes that prevailed at different times. The experimentalism of the 1979 version should be understood as tapping into the creative ferment of that moment. Specifically, the Buddhist chant is most certainly drawn from Wayang Budha, a multimedia production presented at the Young Choreographers Festival, a parallel forum to the PKM, from a year earlier, in 1978. Supanggah was given key responsibility for the music once it had become an official ASKI production under Humardani's watch. For several years prior it had served as a focal point for more free-

86 Lewis, 'Improvised Music after 1950', 92–3. My term 'Nusalogical' is derived from 'Nusantara', a 'term derived from the Sanskrit *nusa* meaning "island" and *antara* meaning "in between" or "including"'. First appearing in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscripts, *nusantara* has been adopted by various cultural figures and groups throughout island- and peninsular-Southeast Asia in the twentieth century. Adil Johan and Mayco A. Santaella, 'Introduction: Popular Music as a Means of Conceptualising the Nusantara', in *Made in Nusantara: Studies in Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 1–3. Nusantara is also the name of the new future capital of Indonesia. On an uptick in the use of the formulation *musik nusantara* by those who previously would have used *musik kontemporer*, see Christopher J. Miller, 'New Directions in New Music among the Islands', *Bulletin of the Southeast Asia Program at Cornell University* (2016), 5–9.

87 R. Anderson Sutton and Roger Vetter, 'Flexing the Frame in Javanese Gamelan Music: Playfulness in a Performance of *Ladrang Pangkur*', in *Analytical Studies in World Music*, ed. Michael Tenzer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

88 Supanggah, 'Gambuh', 40–1.

89 Supanggah, *Kurmat Pada Tradisi*.

form experimentation in which Supanggah was not so involved, but Sukerta and Suwardi and others were, led by dancer-turned-movement-meditation-teacher Suprpto Suryodarmo. This included *pentas kecil*, ‘small performances’ within ASKI’s facilities – which at the time was a compound within the Surakarta palace where students both studied and lived. They were not planned events for public consumption, or even for audiences within the academy, but spontaneous actions to try out new ideas. Many at ASKI have identified the *pentas kecil* and Wayang Budha as an incubator for the creative directions taken in the 1980s, including sound exploration.⁹⁰

Two decades later, when Supanggah returned to ‘Gambuh’ – or more specifically, to one section from the 1979 piece – ISI had grown to become Indonesia’s pre-eminent institution for the traditional performing arts. While still primarily focused on Central Javanese traditions, it attracted students from other parts of the country, and offered some instruction in other regional traditions. ‘Gambuh’ came to more explicitly foreground multiculturalism with its simultaneous sounding of disparate elements such as Balinese *suling gambuh*, Thai/Lao *khaen*, and – most poignantly, given the increasing strength in Indonesia of intolerant strains of Islam – the *adzan*, which Supanggah identified in his notes as having inspired the piece.⁹¹

A third way in which Supanggah is solidly Nusalogical in his attitude is his sense of vocational identity. Composers are rarely formally acknowledged in *karawitan* circles; older pieces are often attributed to monarchs rather than the composers in their employ, while with newer pieces misattribution is common. Prestige and reputation attach primarily to one’s knowledge of repertoire and performing ability, which as outlined earlier includes a good deal of interpretative creativity. Even as Supanggah moved beyond this highly convention-reliant sphere of music-making in much of his creative work – while continuing to excel and create within it – and even as that work cemented his reputation nationally and internationally as the go-to figure for new music for gamelan, he did not become a composer in the sense of a singular auteur. ‘I never call myself a composer’, he told me, explaining that he hopes instead ‘to be regarded as a person who likes to work in music, or sound’.⁹² Most of all, he prioritized working with other musicians, not merely as players who will execute his fully formed vision, but as co-creators who contribute, sometimes very substantially, to the shape of his music. He has applied Nusalogical approaches and dispositions gained through his involvement in *karawitan* – and further enriched through his extensive research as an ethnomusicologist – and applied them to creative work in a diverse range of situations, including those in which he cannot assume a shared base of knowledge: ‘I’m not especially concerned with who it is that helps me, whether they are Balinese, or from Flores, or Javanese, or jazz musicians. Because when I make music, I always study the people, what are their abilities, what is their knowledge.’⁹³

90 Miller, ‘Cosmopolitan, Nativist, Eclectic’, 257–62.

91 Supanggah, *Kurmat pada Tradisi*.

92 Supanggah, interview with author.

93 Supanggah, interview with author.

The results of Supanggah's approach were not uniformly successful. In 2009, the Kronos Quartet, in one of their numerous international excursions to broaden the scope of the contemporary string quartet repertoire, gave the world premiere of Supanggah's 'Purnati', for which Supanggah joined them on *kendhang* and several Balinese gamelan instruments. The title of the piece derives from the name of the Bali Purnati Center for the Arts, where the *I La Galigo* production was developed and which facilitated Supanggah's meeting with Kronos. The piece uses the *slendro* and *pelog* scales (more precisely diatonic approximations thereof), and as Supanggah noted is 'still strongly colored by the media and work methods with which I am familiar'.⁹⁴ To my mind, at least judging from the one publicly available excerpt, the piece fails to go beyond a simple translation of Javanese and Balinese melodic material and rhythmic/formal devices to the medium of the string quartet. Based on the fact that it has not received subsequent performances or been recorded, it seems the piece failed to substantially impress the members of Kronos as well.

Supanggah wrote effusively of the 'honor of meeting and studying directly' with 'a musical ensemble with a worldwide reputation' and of the opportunity to enter into 'a new musical world which uses different media and work methods', a world 'that I had never before even imagined'.⁹⁵ Yet this is a bridge Supanggah only set foot on, without fully crossing in the way that a handful of younger traditionally based Indonesian composers have.⁹⁶ This is reasonably viewed as a limitation, but to focus on the underwhelming results of one very un-Nusalogical collaboration would be to overlook Supanggah's formidable achievements in more compatible working relationships. Chief among these is his critically acclaimed music for *I La Galigo*, considered by some to be the strongest element of the production.⁹⁷ Another is his prize-winning music for the film *Opera Jawa*.⁹⁸

While *I La Galigo* represents the strength of Supanggah's intracultural cosmopolitanism – his sense of responsibility as an Indonesian, and particularly as an ethnomusicologist and prominent academic, to performing arts traditions other than those he grew up with – *Opera Jawa* is at its heart a profound engagement with the music he knows best, with only

94 Rahayu Supanggah, programme note on 'Purnati', performance with Kronos Quartet, Oliver Ranch, California, 24 October 2009. I am grateful to Suzanne Charlé for providing me with a PDF. A brief clip of a performance of the piece in workshop at the centre in Bali is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=HCALWxln1U8 (accessed 13 October 2022).

95 Supanggah, programme note on 'Purnati'.

96 Far more successful in this respect is Supanggah's protégé Peni Candra Rini, whose commissioned work 'Madaswara' was performed by the Kronos quartet at Carnegie Hall on 23 January 2023, www.carnegiehall.org/Calendar/2023/01/27/Kronos-Quartet-0730PM (accessed 29 January 2023). Candra Rini and the quartet are currently discussing further commissions. Peni Candra Rini, communication with author, 27 January 2023. Other younger gamelan musicians who have even more fully embraced Eurological modes of new music composition include Iwan Gunawan, I Wayan Yudane, and Dewa Alit. On Alit, see Michael Tenzer, 'Chasing the Phantom: Features of a Supracultural New Music', *Music Theory Online* 24/1 (2018), <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.18.24.1/mto.18.24.1.tenzer.html>.

97 Matthew Isaac Cohen, 'Review of *I La Galigo*', *Asian Theatre Journal* 22/1 (2005): 146; Sarah Weiss, 'Permeable Boundaries', 225–6; Jennifer Lindsay, 'Intercultural Expectations: *I La Galigo* in Singapore', *The Drama Review* 51/2 (2007), 68–9.

98 Garin Nugroho, dir., *Opera Jawa*, SET Film Workshop, for the New Crowned Hope Festival, 2006.

a handful of non-Javanese elements. The film, directed by Garin Nugroho, is based on the abduction of Sinta episode from the *Ramayana*. It is an opera in the sense that nearly all of the dialogue and narration is sung. There are connections with traditional dramatic forms, such as the courtly *langendriyan*, in which the characters sing while dancing to gamelan accompaniment, in ornate costumes but with no props. But rather than an adaptation of an aristocratic form like this, or the more commercial *wayang orang* presented on a proscenium with shifting scenery,⁹⁹ the film instead employs an encyclopaedic array of traditional Javanese genres as accompaniment to mostly naturalistic action in a mix of ordinary and extraordinary settings. In one scene an employee of Siti and Setio (small-business owners who as dancers used to portray Sinta and Rama) gives her resignation singing *tembang* as they sit on the stoop in front of their house. In a second, Ludiro (a butcher, and the character parallel to Rahwana) seduces Siti in her kitchen, dancing with a group of others, wearing rice-cooking baskets as hats, to unaccompanied and unseen singers singing a *lagu dolanan* (children's song) that transforms into a *gendhing dolanan* (a gamelan piece based on such a song) with the gradual entrance of gamelan instruments. In a third, Ludiro sings *palaran* – one of the principal genres in *langendriyan*, in which *macapat* is sung in relatively free rhythm over the pulsing accompaniment of gamelan – in a slaughterhouse-turned-art-installation, dancing beside a suspended carcass and then among a grid of wax heads on the floor. In a sequence of scenes towards the end of the film, the music is almost fully diegetic. One in a group of men at a night-time eatery sings in *tembang* of his concern about the threat of violent conflict, leading the others to join in the style of *wayang jemblung*, an a cappella imitation of wayang. This cuts to Ludiro amassing his forces to a collection of bamboo and bronze folk instruments, then to Setio inciting villagers to confront Ludiro, who then march to similar musical accompaniment. This cross-fades to the sound of a full gamelan ensemble over a brief scene of hand-to-hand combat on a beach that cuts to the musicians (Supanggah and his ISI colleagues), in formal attire, and then to dancers in formation for the court-style *bedhaya* dance as the music transitions to a *gendhing kemanak*, an austere form in which a choral melody floats above a spare percussive ostinato. As the music and dance continue, the camera pans to reveal Ludiro with a second group of dancers down a passageway, heading towards a cow led by two servants. At moments when the onscreen action demands it, such as when Siti is stalked in her house by the rice-basket-hat-wearing dancers in a lion-dance configuration, underneath a bedsheet, Supanggah dispatches an eclectic set of instruments to produce an other-worldly atmospheric texture of the kind featured in his 1979 'Gambuh': a long-tone held on a *suling gambuh*, a pair of *kemanak* played erratically, the jangling of cowbells, jaw-harps, bamboo buzzers, and *alok*. But the vast majority of the music is traditional in idiom, if usually adjusted in instrumentation, form, and transitions, to fit the demands of what happens on the screen. In all cases, diegetic or not, the music never recedes into the

99 For a discussion of *langendriyan*, see R. Anderson Sutton, 'Creative Process and Colonial Legacy: Issues in the History and Aesthetics of Langendriyan, Javanese Dance-Opera', *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 31/1 (1997). For a discussion of *wayang orang* as a commercial form, labelled 'kitsch' by Indonesian cultural critic Umar Kayam, see Jennifer Lindsay, 'Klasik, Kitsch, or Contemporary: A Study of the Javanese Performing Arts' (PhD thesis, University of Sidney, 1985), 50–5.

background as soundtrack, but is always itself a significant point of focus – another sense in which the film is operatic.¹⁰⁰

The side of Supanggah's work represented by projects such as *I La Galigo* and *Opera Jawa* does not itself add to the treasury of tradition, any more than did the different versions of 'Gambuh', although certain original pieces within the latter might, alongside 'Sasangka' and other *gendhing* he has composed. But that too seems unlikely, at least in the way Supanggah probably hoped for in 1979. The mechanism that would support the addition of new pieces into the actively shared repertoire has atrophied through two related factors: an overall decline in *klenengan* and other occasions to play, and thus in the number of opportunities to exercise individual and collective memory; and perhaps more critically, a redirection of attention to other kinds of music-making.

'The gamelan tradition', as Marc Perlman reminded himself in assessing the state of *karawitan* in the late twentieth century, 'is a capacious one'. Yet the trends and developments he surveyed – which have prioritized innovation no less than those coming out of ASKI/STSI/ISI, just of a different sort and with different goals and priorities – have strained that tradition's ability to incorporate them.¹⁰¹ The most prominent of these is *campursari*, a genre that took Java by storm in the late 1990s. *Campursari* – the name translates as 'mixture of essences' – is defined by the combination of gamelan and Western band instruments. Most prominent among the latter are electronic keyboards. In a withering critique, Supanggah characterized *campursari* as 'pseudo-modern', the result of a 'superficial' understanding of modernization in a society that gravitates towards physical symbols of modernity rather than 'the meanings, work methods, ethics, ideas, reasons, and thoughts' behind such objects: 'The desire to learn about or carry an in-depth study into something new would seem not yet commonplace in our society.' In *campursari*'s most egregious manifestations of this deficit, 'a keyboard whose quality is no more than a children's toy, with a range no more than two octaves and the ability to produce no more than two different instrumental sounds is enough . . . to be given the stamp "modern"'. No matter if the *campursari* musician plays the instrument 'with only one hand, and haphazard fingering'.¹⁰² While Supanggah recognized the technical sophistication of *campursari*'s more accomplished proponents, underlying his discussion is a disdain widely shared by the *karawitan* community. Popular taste, however, is generally favourable. *Campursari* has quite thoroughly eclipsed 'classical' *karawitan* in most settings where music with a distinctive Javanese identity is sought.

'Classical' *karawitan*, then, has become residual, in the sense theorized by Raymond Williams.¹⁰³ So while Supanggah's work in fully traditional Javanese forms and idioms is

100 *Opera Jawa* is currently available to view on YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBmsqK4Y8a0 (accessed 30 September 2022). The start times for the scenes described are: 29:37, employee resigning singing *tembang*; 31:24, Ludiro seducing Siti with *lagu dolanan*; 10:06, Ludiro singing *palaran* in slaughterhouse; 1:24:58, the sequence of scenes beginning with *wayang jemblung* and ending with *bedhaya* dance and *gendhing kemanak*; 3:03, other-worldly texture as dancers stalk Siti.

101 Perlman 'The Traditional Javanese Performing Arts in the Twilight of the New Order', 4–8.

102 Rahayu Supanggah, 'Campur Sari: A Reflection', *Asian Music* 34/2 (2003).

103 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121–7.

substantial, and reflects as deep a grounding in the tradition as that of his teachers, it can only stand as a modest contribution to the larger project that Humardani instituted at ASKI and to which Supanggah and his colleagues at ASKI/STSI/ISI dedicated themselves: the establishment and growth of a contemporary existence for traditional Indonesian performing arts. Far more consequential on that account are the projects in which Supanggah departs from tradition. Through major productions such as *Opera Jawa*, Supanggah has successfully inserted Javanese *karawitan* into the most prestigious reaches of the international contemporary art world, and not as an exotic novelty, but as an integral component of contemporary productions. The film was commissioned by Peter Sellars for the 2006 New Crowned Hope Festival, one of several mounted in Vienna to celebrate Mozart's 250th birthday. Supanggah's music earned him several awards, and the project led him and director Garin Nugroho to create a theatrical version and a stage opera, both of which were presented in Europe and in Indonesia.¹⁰⁴ Nugroho and Supanggah collaborated on a second project, titled *Setan Jawa*: a silent film with live musical accompaniment by gamelan and orchestra that premiered in 2016 and continues to be presented even after Supanggah's death in 2020.¹⁰⁵ In between, Supanggah created music for the Indonesian pavilion at the 2013 Venice Biennale.¹⁰⁶

There are many questions to be asked about the nature of this facet of a contemporary existence for traditional Indonesian performing arts, and its relationship to others, whether elite or vernacular, international or local. For now, I will stay focused on the nature of the work itself, and how through that nature it has helped create this facet. Supanggah's music draws extensively on the whole range of forms and practices in Javanese *karawitan* – far more substantially than *campursari* or other popular hybrids do – along with elements from a number of other regional traditions. He takes these forms seriously and does justice to their own distinctive aesthetics as he employs them in the altogether different contexts of concert presentations, elaborate stage productions, and film. His ability to do so, and his appeal to collaborators and presenters alike, draws extensively on the depth of his mastery of *karawitan* and the reputation he has built. Yet no less crucial is his willingness to engage in the new. Supanggah could be seen to have broken the shackles of tradition. Or perhaps for Supanggah tradition never was a constraint. We should take seriously his assertion that for

104 Supanggah was awarded 'best musical composition and best composer' from Festival of the Three Continents, Nantes, in 2006; 'best musical director' from the Asian Film Festival, Hong Kong, in 2007; and best music composer from the Indonesian Film Festival, Jakarta, in 2007. The theatrical version, entitled *Iron Bed*, was performed in Zurich in 2008; the stage opera was performed in Amsterdam, Surakarta, Jogjakarta, and Jakarta in 2010, and in Paris and London in 2011. Rahayu Supanggah, *Music of Opera Jawa*, audio CD (Karanganyar, Central Java, Indonesia: Garasi Seni Benawa, 2012).

105 'Setan Jawa was commissioned by Arts Centre Melbourne, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and Singapore Esplanade for Asia TOPA'; performances in Singapore, The Netherlands, Japan, and France, featured 'a live score by Australia's Iain Grandage and Indonesia's Rahayu Supanggah featuring a blend of Western symphonic tradition and Indonesian gamelan music', <https://turningworld.com.au/project/setan-jawa/> (accessed 2 November 2022). The project was presented again in Paris on 23 March 2023, www.lebalcon.com/?audiotheme_gig=setan-jawa-cine-concert-9 (accessed 2 November 2022).

106 Carla Bianpoen and Rifky Effendy, curators, *Sakti: The Indonesia Pavilion* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2013).

him there is no difference between tradition and *kontemporer*. In his hands especially, among his ASKI/STSI/ISI colleagues, tradition is modern.

When Is It Modernism?

The foregoing suggests a number of possible answers to more specific versions of the question posed in this article's title. Was Supanggah a modernist? Perhaps only momentarily, with the original 1979 version of 'Gambuh', if we take outward aesthetics as our criteria. Perhaps never wholeheartedly, if we take into account how he talks about his work – in his commentary about 'Gambuh' there is not only his emphasis on his grounding in tradition, but also an undercutting of his talk of 'a fresh new flavour' with wry scepticism as he identifies this as language used by toothpaste advertising.¹⁰⁷ Taking a more nuanced understanding of what constitutes musical modernism, one could argue that he has always been a modernist – that his engagement with the experimentalist fervour that so animated the initial flourishing of composition at ASKI left an indelible mark on his work, even as in asserting his identity as a 'traditional person' he mostly took traditional materials rather than sound exploration as his starting point. One could go further still, to view Supanggah's experimentalist moment not as a critical catalyst, but as more incidental to the kind of restless creativity that is inherent in *karawitan*, even if it is more evident in some *pangrawit* more than others. Rather than a modernism predicated on a refusal of tradition, perhaps Supanggah's interventions and their relationship to Javanese *karawitan* are better understood through Anthony Braxton's concept of 'trivibrational dynamics'. In Braxton's terms, Supanggah is by no means a strict traditionalist, but perhaps more a stylist than a restructuralist.¹⁰⁸

For the ASKI/STSI/ISI scene as whole, the more apt question might be 'when was it modernist?' For while Sukerta, Suwardi, and Sadra were more conspicuously modernist in their thinking and practice, they too have displayed a certain degree of ambivalence, and/or mellowing since the height of experimentation from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. Insofar as the scene has largely moved past its modernist moment, it could be characterized as postmodern, though as I have argued in an article focusing on Sukerta's music, the historical circumstances and cultural dynamics were quite different. Rather than a dominant and established ideology to react against, modernism was a novel catalyst that gave rise to a more relativistic attitude towards tradition, though not to the point where their relationship to tradition took on anything like the arbitrary character of 'high' postmodernism.¹⁰⁹

Rather than putting too much stock in direct answers, I am more inclined to side-step the question, taking a hint from Sadra, who in one of our conversations observed that *kontemporer* is not a noun, but an adjective.¹¹⁰ I do not mean to dwell on the significance of different parts of speech, or to get lost in the tangle of relationships between the terms 'modern',

107 Supanggah, 'Gambuh', 41.

108 Graham Lock, *Forces in Motion: The Music and Thoughts of Anthony Braxton* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1988), 162–5.

109 Miller, 'A Different Kind of Modernism', 328–9.

110 I Wayan Sadra, interview with author, 5 August 2005.

‘modernity’, ‘modernization’, and ‘modernism’ (from which modernist, but also modernistic).¹¹¹ More simply, looking at Supanggah’s example, I want to suggest the value of thinking less categorically about modernism.

Supanggah’s music can, and should, be understood as modernist. Put differently, our understanding of modernism needs to accommodate a case such as his – especially his, among composers from ASKI/STSI/ISI – if we are to advance an adequately global perspective on musical modernism. That is part of what is at stake for us. Yet Supanggah’s music is not just modernist. It is simultaneously profoundly traditional, even if not as straightforwardly so as the more actively circulating items in the treasury of traditional repertory, whether older pieces or new ones that are more readily assimilated than those by Supanggah. Supanggah vehemently rejected any imposition of modernist-type labels – the most salient in Indonesia at the time being the term *kontemporer* – that would deny what to him was the core identity of his self and his music as traditional. *Kontemporer* for Supanggah was not a ‘badge of honour’, as it was for many in the broader community – even if for someone like Sadra, who remained iconoclastic in his work to the end of his life in 2011, it had lost some of its lustre.¹¹² Supanggah saw instead its potential to inflict damage, to reinforce the still prevalent notion, despite the best efforts of Indonesia’s cosmopolitan-nativist cultural elite, that the traditional arts were stagnant, backwards, and something to jettison. That was what was at stake for him.

When is it modernism? Answering this, with respect to ASKI Surakarta-style *musik kontemporer*, and especially with respect to Supanggah, depends on how modernism is understood. Is it the name of a canon of composers and works, to which Supanggah and his colleagues might be admitted? Is it a set of principles, impulses, and tendencies that animate and manifest differently in different types of music? How purely must a given creative musician’s output engage with or display those principles, impulses, and tendencies? Can it engage and display others that are deemed not to be modernist? Is it a historical circumstance, as Chelsea Burns suggests in her article in this issue? Modernism is all these things, and though a few ‘high’ modernists (proponents of total serialism, for instance) imagined it could be absolute, as a force in the world it invariably interacts with other forces in the world. Sometimes, as in Supanggah’s case, those interactions are rather more complex, even conflicted. Sometimes it is necessary to refuse a simple answer.

111 See Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity across Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), esp. her exploration in ch. 2, ‘Planetary’, of the relationship between modernism and modernity registered by the slash in *Modernism/Modernity*, the title of the journal of the Modernist Studies Association. On the use of the ‘modernistic’ as distinct from the ‘genuinely modern’ in architecture, see Bridget Elliott, ‘Modern, Moderne, and Modernistic: Le Corbusier, Thomas Wallis, and the Problem of Art Deco’, in *Disciplining Modernism*, ed. Pamela L. Caughie (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

112 I take the phrase ‘badge of honour’ from Chris Cutler, as quoted in Benjamin Piekut, *Henry Cow: The World is a Problem* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 390. Cutler was even more sceptical of the term’s value than Sadra, but as Piekut notes, he astutely observed that ‘words live in communities of use, which can never be wrong, no matter how perplexing and contradictory’ – a fact we as scholars would do well to recognize.

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