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The History of *Pakeliran Padat*

**A Kernel of an Idea**

In the early 1950s, Sedyono Djodjokartika “Gendhon” Humardani (1923–1983), a dancer and choreographer who was at the time also a graduate-level medical student in anatomy, began to publically express his belief that wayang was in desperate need of innovation, as well as his dissatisfaction with the direction dhalang were taking the art form. In a variety of public appearances in his role as founding head of Pedalangan Studies of the Student Arts Association at Gadjah Mada University (UGM) in Yogyakarta, Central Java, he cited the frills, fillers and repetitive material in wayang. He marveled at how it was exactly these places that were currently being favored and extended by dhalang.\(^1\) In his view, long battle scenes, extended slapstick routines and endless joke sequences were getting excruciatingly longer; the formulaic repetition of material from scene to scene was a concept long out of date; and the generic narrative passages of the past had nothing to say to modern audiences. Although not a performing dhalang himself, Humardani was embarking upon what was to become a lifelong crusade as a critic and innovator within the world of *pedhalangan*.

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\(^1\) Little did he know what was to come 40 years later in the days of *wayang hura-hura*. Nonetheless, his is not an unusual perspective throughout the history of wayang. The various palace schools in the 1920s and 1930s were founded on the basis of similar dissatisfaction, as were, in fact, the innovations by Purbo Asmoro in the 1990s that form the focus of this work.
In 1953, soon after he founded the UGM Student Arts Association Pedalangan Studies branch, Humardani proposed to his student colleagues that they develop a new form of wayang. In this new style, the authors\textsuperscript{2} would identify an essential issue (\textit{gagasan pokok}) of a particular lakon. The process would start there, with a single theme, message or central conflict, and the lakon would be built around this theme. Rather than content being subservient to structure, structure would become nothing more than an instrument to sculpt the content. Instead of beginning from the assumption that a dhalang must fit his interpretation of a lakon into a traditional schema of scenes and employ a traditional repertory of pieces, movement techniques, and literary passages, the writers would begin with questions such as: “What do we want to say?” “What is the main conflict in this lakon?” “What is the central message or essential issue to be explored?” Then scene structure, gamelan accompaniment, literary passages, and movement sequences would follow as necessary to support the essential theme, while non-essential material would be discarded.\textsuperscript{3} At the outset, Humardani named this new form \textit{pakeliran baru}, “baru” meaning new and “pakeliran” referring to a wayang performance.\textsuperscript{4} Twenty years later, in the mid 1970s at ASKI, this concept would be renamed \textit{pakeliran padat}, referring specifically to the dense and compact (\textit{padat}) nature of the form, with all elements focused on the essential message to be conveyed.

First Attempts at a Condensed Wayang

Humardani’s first \textit{pakeliran baru} was attempted on the occasion of UGM’s Sixth Founder’s Day in 1955 with the lakon \textit{Kangsa Léna (The Death of Kangsa)} performed by a fellow UGM student, the dhalang Sri Mulyono.\textsuperscript{5} Humardani, who gave the pre-performance speech as head of the Student Arts Association, took the opportunity to give this description of his new concept:

\textsuperscript{2} As is explained later, it was not necessarily the dhalang who would put together the lakon in this new style, and certainly not spontaneously at the screen; rather it was a collaborative effort that resulted in a script.

\textsuperscript{3} Much of the information in this section is taken from ISI Pedalangan instructor Sudarko’s book, \textit{Pakeliran Padat: Pembentukan dan Penyebaran}, 2003. Sudarko was in the first graduating class of ASKI’s Pedalangan Department and was one of a tight-knit group of Humardani’s \textit{pedhalangan} protégés in the mid-1970s, including Bambang Suwarno, Sumanto, Bambang Murtiyoso, and Marwanto.

\textsuperscript{4} \textit{Kelir} means screen in Javanese. The \textit{pa-} prefix and \textit{-au} suffix make a new noun out of the base word, which refers to a performance taking place at the screen.

\textsuperscript{5} Humardani and Sri Mulyono also created a \textit{pakeliran baru} version of \textit{Rama’s Crown} in 1955, according to protégés Sumanto and Bambang Murtiyoso, but not much information is available on this performance.
By adopting a viewpoint of modernity in the arts, we are encouraged to craft the elements [of wayang] into a new shape, creating a new performance style that is balanced, its elements all completely in line with the essence or main point of the story.

The basic equipment, the symbolic elements, the main scenes and the relationship between modes of a traditional performance will be in tact. Also, the expressive idioms specific to wayang will not have been done away with—such as the types of movement techniques and the styles of speech a dhalang uses to paint the scene. The poetic songs and gamelan accompaniment will still be the norm, as in traditional all-night wayang.

But absent will be scenes not relevant to the content or main point of the story. Also missing will be gamelan accompaniment that is only meant for relaxed filler. The gamelan accompaniment will serve to add meaningful background. It will support the atmosphere of the scene and infuse soul into the dramatic aspects of this “pakeliran baru.” Also important to this new form will be the absence of scenes dictated by the time of night or required by beliefs concerning the role of [wayang in] the macrocosmos.

The shape of such a “pakeliran baru” as outlined above will only become a reality through hard work and dedication. In addition, it will require a cool head in the face of the inevitable attacks that will surround it. With hard work and dedication we hope to achieve a form that is ever more satisfactory [than tonight’s trial]; a form that is truly new. New not only for the sake of new, and not with the connotation of destroying the old, but rather new in the sense of developing the art form; a new that is mentes: full of meaning, but without filler.⁶

Over the next four years, until he graduated from the medical school at UGM in 1959, Humardani honed his ideas and tirelessly spoke out in public forums. In his speech before the Indonesian Pedalangan Congress in Surakarta, August 1958, he attempted to clarify his concept further, introducing two phrases that caught on and continue to be widely quoted to this day. One regards function and one compares form and content.

**Function: “Crucial Spiritual Matters”**

Humardani was passionate that the function of wayang should be returned to what he saw as its original purpose: exploration of “crucial spiritual matters” (*nilai rohani yang wigati*). Bambang Murtiyoso paraphrases Humardani as saying, “The entertainment world already has its comedians, the educational world its teachers, and the government its ministers to disseminate information. The purpose of wayang should be focused not on any of these matters but rather on the exploration

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⁶ This speech can be found in the 20-essay collection, Humardani 1991, 138.
of crucial spiritual matters.” Humardani’s proposal to identify an essential issue in a lakon, craft all elements to support exploration of this issue, and remove all elements not related to it, was in service to this idea of focusing on nilai rohani yang wigati. The choices made when creating a padat lakon were judged in decades to come by this commonly repeated pillar of thought: Is the focus on the exploration of “crucial spiritual matters” with all else subservient, or is the performance bound by tradition (or, worse yet, audience taste) to the detriment of the main message.

**Form and Content**

Also in this 1958 speech, Humardani introduces his characteristic challenge regarding whether the format and the contents of a wayang performance are aligned (Humardani 1991, 123):

> As we work toward a new form of pedhalangan, or “pakeliran baru,” our attention is directed mainly toward the integrity and harmony of the content itself, as well as the manner in which the content is treated. Primarily one needs to ask, are the contents and the manner in which the contents are developed appropriate and compact? In other words, does the format of the performance assure presenting the content in a fitting and compact manner? If in fact ritual belief ceremonies in this modern era (not the beliefs themselves but the ceremonies) no longer fall within the realm of the arts, then having to follow the traditional all-night format of a wayang is no longer a requirement. And hence the pedhalangan profession should leave behind the premise that the all-night format is necessary to bring the lakon into oneness with the cosmos (the grand universal rhythm).

> Therefore, the duration of a wayang performance could be condensed to anywhere from, say, two to four hours. But it must be noted, that the resulting duration of the performance is only a side effect. The condensing of the format and contents of a wayang performance may result in a shorter duration but this has no connection to matters of health, stamina, having to get up early the next morning, or other such excuses. It also is not done so as to make the performance more befitting for foreigners, nor for other reasons of scheduling or limited available time.

This discussion of form and content, over the next two decades, transformed into a celebrated metaphor that was to become forever tied to Humardani and pakeliran padat, that of wadah and isi: literally, the container and its contents. Humardani often referred to the all-night form of a wayang as a container (wadah) that was not in proportion to its contents (isi), as though one had a huge container with only a

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7 In *Nilai Rohani Yang Wigati*, 1987, Bambang Murtiyoso explores the meaning of this phrase in depth, and Humardani’s frequent use of it.
shallow layer of water in it. His *pakeliran baru* concept encouraged dhalang to look at the amount of “water” the lakon required and make sure the container was just the right size and no bigger.

Although Humardani continued to work with the dhalang Sri Mulyono even after leaving UGM in 1959, he was never satisfied with the results of their collaboration, or with the reaction to his ideas in general within the UGM community. He complained that their experiments had simply been abbreviated performances (*pakeliran ringkas*), but not truly conceptual pieces that were reorganized around his innovative principles of function, form, and content. He judged the proposed *pakeliran baru* as only in its formative stages, and not yet satisfactory.⁸

**Pakeliran Ringkas or Pakeliran Baru?**

The truncated performances (*pakeliran ringkas*) that Humardani was referring to had existed for some time, and arose simply out of a direct need or conscious desire to shorten wayang. As far back as the early 1920s, European members of the Java Institute and Javanese members of the Mardiguna Arts Association in Surakarta had invited discussion and lectures on the advisability of shortening wayang performances for practical reasons.⁹ Around the same time, King Pakubuwana X (reigned 1893–1939) encouraged dhalang in the Solo palace community to create performances five hours in length. His son, Pembayun, was an avid wayang fan while still in school and his father was concerned about Pembayun’s attention to his formal studies. Evidently, for a short period and among a small circle, this became a trend.¹⁰ Scene structure was kept intact, but each section of the wayang was significantly abbreviated, slicing three to four hours off the total length. During the Japanese occupation (1942–1945) there was a midnight curfew and wayang performances had to be cut short. This was also done by truncating scenes, but not in

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⁸ Humardani’s dissatisfaction was repeatedly quoted in interviews with five of his closest protégés from ASKI: Bambang Suwarno, Sumanto, Sudarko, Bambang Murtiyoso, and Suratno. They each described how Humardani consistently referred to the disappointing and unsuccessful collaborative efforts at *pakeliran baru*, 1954 to 1974.

⁹ Clara van Groenendael, 1987. 1.) Kunst, De kunst ondergeschikt aan de eischen der maatschappij; Verkorte wajangduur 2.) Kats, Verkorting van den duur der wajang-koelit-voorstelling.

¹⁰ This anecdote is related by Sudarko in his book, *Pakeliran Padat: Pembentukan dan Penyebaran*, 2003, and other ASKI students, including Purbo Asmoro, report hearing it from their professors.
any way changing structure or approach. Many sources have stated that *pakeliran ringkas* took its format from tradition in Klaten, in which afternoon wayang ran only from noon to 5:00 PM, again through a shortening of the traditional scenes.

Humardani had a very different vision: the complete re-conceptualization of the basic elements of wayang—interpretive details, characterization, scene structure, movement techniques, gamelan accompaniment, and narration—around a main theme. Since this meant avoidance of generic, repetitive, or traditionally obligatory material, a shorter duration would be inevitable. As Bambang Suwarno proposed in an interview at his home in 2013, “A *padat* performance could theoretically last anywhere from ten minutes to seven hours, as long as every moment is dense, meaningful, and focused on the theme. Of course no one has ever done a seven-hour *padat* performance yet. Whoever could accomplish that would really show themselves to be an extraordinary dhalang.”

**The Next Stage of Unsuccessful Attempts**

After continuing his anatomy studies in London for a year (1960–1961) and then moving to the USA to study ballet and modern dance in New York and at the University of California in Los Angeles (1961–1963), Humardani returned to Indonesia ever more inspired to follow through with *pakeliran baru*. After being exposed to Western dance forms and Western theater aesthetics Humardani would not give up on his new form of wayang. Although not yet developed or realized to its full potential, he continued to insist that his vision was profoundly different from simply shortening a wayang performance, and that it started from a completely alternative conceptual premise. It was just that no one seemed to be quite able to put into practice what he envisioned.

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11 Sudarko explains this but it was also mentioned in one of my interviews with dhalang Sutino Hardokocarito (born 1925).

12 Gaib Widopandoyo (dhalang), Bambang Suwarno (dhalang), Blacius Subono (dhalang), Soewito Wito Radyo (musician), all of Klaten, in interviews.

13 This emphasis on *padat* referring to the density of the treatment rather than necessarily shortening a wayang is important, as Purbo Asmoro’s contemporary-interpretive style was inspired by the potential of extending a *padat* performance all night.

14 See Humardani (1991) for his impressions of Western aesthetics in the essays: “Ballet dalam Perkembangan Tari Kita” and “Menonton Ballet di Covent Garden.”
In the early 1960s, Humardani tried to take his new concept to a wider circle of dhalang, particularly in villages throughout Klaten via the various local Cultural Offices (Kantor Kebudayaan). Bambang Suwarno remembers his father, the respected dhalang Padmatjarito of the village Gemolong, coming home one night from one of these meetings. That night made a big impact on the adolescent Bambang Suwarno, because his father came home with a fascinating strip of paper outlining Humardani’s key philosophical concepts regarding *pikeliran baru*. Inspired by the meeting to attempt a script, Padmatjarito subsequently created the three-hour *Wahyu Sih Nugraha* (*The Boon of Compassion and Favor*),¹⁵ which Bambang Suwarno performed in the public town square of Klaten soon after. To this day, he laments having lost track of the historical piece of paper passed out that night.

A few years later, in 1966, Humardani conducted a tour of Jakarta, which included performing for then President Soekarno and at various foreign embassies. He took a crew with him, including 15-year-old Bambang Suwarno, and they attempted *pikeliran baru* versions of *Lahiré Gathutkaca* (*The Birth of Gathutkaca*), *Gathutkaca Krama* (*The Marriage of Gathutkaca*) and *Makutharama* (*Rama’s Crown*), with a variety of dhalang. Evidently the results still did not match his vision, according to what he would tell his protégés in the years to come.

From 1969 to 1974, Humardani brought the concept to the newly formed Central Javanese Arts Center in Solo (*Pusat Kesenian Jawa Tengah* or PKJT) in his role as director. PKJT was located on the grounds of a small complex known as Sasanamulya, within the main palace environs in Solo. Historically, Sasanamulya was where the crown prince lived when he was in training to be the future king, as well as a venue for weddings and funerals. During the tumultuous and chaotic period surrounding 1965, it was used as an interrogation camp for suspected and accused communists. In late 1969 it was transformed into an idealistic hub for exploration of the arts, where not only instruction, rehearsals, and performances took place but also where many of its students and teachers, as well as its director, Humardani, lived.

¹⁵ This lakon, a *carangan* many decades old, focuses on Nakula, who receives a gift from the gods providing him strength and compassion in life.
In late 1969, one of Humardani’s first activities at PKJT was to organize a
gathering of respected, elderly dhalang to once again start up discussions
concerning *pakeliran baru*. Marwanto, later on to become one of Humardani’s
protégés, was an observer and wrote about the seminar in his essay *Evaluasi
Perkembangan Pakeliran Padat*. “I remember that Ki Nyotocarito, Ki Pudjo Sumarto,
Ki Warsino, Ki Sutrisno, Ki Marsa Carito, Ki Samsudin, and Ki Probahardjono
(heavy-weight classicists of their era) were in attendance, among others. Who knows
if in their hearts they were grumbling, but on the surface participants seemed not
opposed to the idea.”

The meeting ended by appointing Ki Nyotocarito to the task of creating a
*pakeliran baru* version of the same story Humardani had attempted in 1955 at UGM,
*Kangsa Léna (The Death of Kangsa)*. It appears that by choosing the same lakon,
Humardani may have been hoping for a clear comparison to his collaboration with
UGM’s Sri Mulyono—perhaps hoping that a master elder like Ki Nyotocarito might
be more up to the task. The three-hour script that emerged months later, however,
also did not match his vision. It turns out that Humardani did not find a meeting of
the minds by reaching out to elderly and experienced dhalang in Solo. He once again
insisted that the results were only abbreviated and not truly dense or newly
conceptualized. Since his own abilities as a dhalang were limited, he himself was
unable to act out the vision and continued, now 20 years later and counting, to be
frustrated by the results.

**ASKI and PKJT at Sasanamulya**

In 1974 Humardani finally found the collaboration he was looking for to make his
new concept a reality, through the merger of ASKI and PKJT on the Sasanamulya
grounds. While from 1969 to 1973 Sasanamulya housed only PKJT, a performance-
oriented institution, in 1973 the academic and teaching institution ASKI joined in.
Founded in 1964, ASKI had been located on the High School of Performing Arts
campus across town and consisted of only two departments: Gamelan Music
(Karawitan) and Dance. Once ASKI moved to Sasanamulya, Humardani became

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16 This essay was written for a seminar on *pakeliran padat* at ASKI in 1987, and is included in Sugeng Nugroho’s
personal collection of bound essays entitled *Bunga Rampai: Makalah Seni Pedalangan*, Vol II.
17 We can only speculate on Humardani’s choice of lakon, since Marwanto, Humardani, and Nyotocarito have all
long passed away, and I found no one else able to speak in such specific terms about this assignment.
joint director of both institutions. It took him only one year at ASKI to push forward the creation of a Pedalangan Department in 1974. By 1975 he had gathered together an elite group of talented protégés to work on his beloved concept of *pakeliran baru*. By all accounts, some 20 years after his initial idea, he had finally found just the right mix of open minds, new talents, rich artistic backdrop, and “buzz” to realize his vision.

The unique buzz that Sasanamulya created for artists is fondly remembered to this day by many of its alumni. Supanggah describes what it was like to be a part of this inspiring and innovative place (2003, 98–104):

All forms of workshops, rehearsals, seminars, performances, exhibitions, courses—traditional or modern, theatrical or literary, performance art or visual art, fusion or pure, on iron or bronze, auditory or visual, aural or written—contributed to a constant opening of our eyes, ears, thinking, and emotions as artists. There was not a moment void of artistic activity. Everyday, starting at five in the morning and going way past midnight, there were rehearsals, performances, and exhibitions; individuals practicing their dancing, singing, gamelan playing, text recitation, wayang movements.

From the rooms in the back one could hear Sundanese music, from the spaces on the west side gamelan accompaniment, wayang texts, *keprak* signals, and from the inner quarters the gentle sounds of classical Javanese gamelan mixed with shouting and various instructions by Pak Gendhon. From the *pendhapa* one could hear the archaic gamelan set *cara balèn*, and from the other side recordings being played of *srimpi* pieces for rehearsals. Since the rooms at Sasanamulya were not designed to be soundproof, the resulting noise truly resembled a night market in the middle of the day, or even a mental institution. Add the sound of the spoon clanging against a bowl by the meatball soup seller in front of the *pendhapa*, the rings of the telephone, the clicking of the *office* typewriter, and you have the vibrant and uncontrolled Sasanamulya buzz.

It was within this atmosphere in early 1974 that the Pedalangan Department was formed. A handful of interested students from the Karawitan Department, some having only completed a semester in *karawitan* and some more, moved over to become *pedhalangan* students: Bambang Suwarno, Bambang Murtiyoso, Sumanto, Sudarko, Suratno, Kuwato, and Marwanto. According to all interview accounts, Bambang Suwarno and Sumanto quickly became favorites of Humardani, with
Bambang Murtiyoso serving as a *tukang omong*\textsuperscript{18} and the others, at the time, taking more of a back seat.\textsuperscript{19}

Bambang Suwarno had been a golden child of Humardani’s since he was 15, as mentioned earlier, and was considered an expert in the area of dramatization through movement. Sumanto reports experiencing a kind of meeting of minds with Humardani while taking his Philosophy of the Arts and Arts Criticism classes at ASKI. He subsequently became known as a master writer in the area of narration, dialogue, and debate. Bambang Murtiyoso was an older student and not a practicing dhalang, having already earned a liberal arts undergraduate degree before attending ASKI. He was interested in the field of journalism and criticism, and respected for his interpretive story details, characterizations, and general impressions of the conceptual whole. It was this group of students who, over the next decade or so, went to work on Humardani’s *pakeliran baru* and finally began producing results that he referred to as *mentes*.\textsuperscript{20} It was also at some point around this time that the new form of wayang was renamed *pakeliran padat*.\textsuperscript{21}

**The First Pakeliran Padat Scripts**

The first *pakeliran padat* script to come out of ASKI was the two-hour lakon *Rama* in 1975, primarily written by Bambang Suwarno under the supervision of Humardani and with informal support from his fellow protégés. One year later this script was used to tour Europe, with Bambang Suwarno as the dhalang. Focusing on the hero Rama, this overview of the *Ramayana* combined multiple all-night episodes. It started with Sinta’s kidnapping and progressed through the death of Rahwana and

\textsuperscript{18} Sudarko used this term in an interview, meaning that Bambang Murtiyoso was the commentator and critic of the group’s work. Bambang Murtiyoso’s own term in an interview was “bagian crèwel,” a coarse, but endearing, way of declaring himself as annoyingly nagging and critical.

\textsuperscript{19} There is surprising consistency on this hierarchy in individual interviews with each of these protégés, all still living except for Marwanto. It is important to note that the Karawitan and Dance Departments also had their favored Humardani protégés, most notably Supanggah and Wahyu Santosa Prabowo, respectively, but they did not work specifically on *pakeliran baru* teams, hence are not immediately relevant here.

\textsuperscript{20} A Javanese term, meaning: dense, heady, full of meaning and integrity. This is often chosen as the Javanese equivalent to the connotation intended in the Indonesian word *padat*.

\textsuperscript{21} I was unable to ascertain exactly when this change was made, but the term *pakeliran padat* can be found in ASKI lakon scripts as early as 1975, while *pakeliran baru* was still used as late as 1971 in essays by Humardani. *Padat* is Indonesian and therefore spelled without an *h*, although Javanese pronounce it “padhat.” According to Sugeng Nugroho (personal communication, 2011) it was chosen by Humardani’s team over Javanese terms (such as *padhet* or *mentes*) “so as to lend a modern, cosmopolitan feel.”
the fall of the Alengka Kingdom. Marwanto created a similar version, inserting the Sugriwa-Subali episode (feuding monkey brothers) into the middle, thus providing background as to how the monkey army came to be so dedicated to Rama.

As Marwanto describes in his essay *Evaluasi Perkembangan Pakeliran Padat*, this first *padat* experiment was already marked by the characteristic team effort that would become so common in the creation of *padat* scripts. Once the group left for the three-month tour of Europe, with nothing to do each day but perform or travel, they spent hours reworking the material. During these reworkings the discussions focused on how to make the content even more compact and dense—how to trim, clip, clean up, and make all transitions more efficient and to the point. The group re-examined and re-evaluated each element as to its purpose: did it move the story forward, contribute to characterization or theme, or was it merely a traditionally required element? Through these sessions the two-hour original was paired down to two versions: one 90 minutes long, and one slightly longer that included the Marwanto insert. At this point the script was the result of a group effort.

During the initial nine years or so of *pakeliran padat* exploration at ASKI, until Humardani’s death in 1983, some basic principles were developed and refined through a flurry of informal discussions, seminars, script-writing competitions, and curriculum work. There were extensive seminars on *pakeliran padat* at Sasanamulya in 1977, 1980, 1981, and 1983; *padat* script-writing competitions judged by Sasanamulya instructors in 1979, 1980, and 1983; workshops and community *pakeliran padat* rehearsals set up in Solo, Karanganyar (at the home of dhalang Manteb Soedharsono) and Sragen (at the home of female dhalang, Suharni). But probably generating the most lasting influence was the requirement by the Pedalangan Department, from the first graduating class of 1978 until 2010, that a candidate create or perform a *padat* script in order to graduate.

Regulations have changed over the years, sometimes as often as every year, but from the late 1970s up until 2010 students were been required to either create a *padat* script to be performed by someone else, perform a *padat* script already existing from a given list of accepted titles, or both create and perform a new script. Many *padat* scripts were created in the early years, all under Humardani’s supervision. To

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22 As of 2010, students have been free to choose any format for their final exam—*pakeliran padat*, *ringkas*, *tradisi*, *wayang sandosa*, *kréasi*, or any other option that is approved in their initial, pre-exam evaluation (see Chapter 9).
this day, these works, and their subsequent multiple versions circulating in later years, are highly quoted, frequently referenced, heavily studied, and consistently reworked at ISI; they serve as milestone texts in the repertory:

- **Alap-alapan Sukesi (Sukesi’s Hand in Marriage Contested)** by Sumanto, 1977
- **Ciptaning (Arjuna In Meditation)** by Bambang Suwarno, 1979
- **Bisma Gugur (The Death of Bisma)** by Sumanto, 1980
- **Narasoma-Pujawati (Narasoma and Pujawati)** by Sumanto, 1981
- **Salya Gugur (The Death of Salya)** by Sumanto, 1982
- **Déwa Ruci (The God Ruci)** by Bambang Suwarno, 1982

“We were the Gendhon club,” commented Sumanto in an interview regarding those early years. At the 30-year commemoration of Humardani’s death, held at Sasanamulya in 2013, Supanggah expressed a similar sentiment, “The first *padat* scripts, and future works out of ASKI in general, had the idiosyncratic ‘made in Sasanamulya’ trademark.” By the early 1980s the concept of how to craft the elements of a *padat* performance were formalized and a vocabulary developed. New Humardani protégés sprouted up, most notably Blacius Subono, followed by Dedek Wahyudi, both in the area of gamelan accompaniment innovation. The all-important term *garapan* emerged, with a new and ASKI-specific definition. What exactly is it that determines the “trademark,” or represents the “Gendhon club,” or defines *garapan* in ASKI terms?

**Garapan: Crafting Elements Anew**

In order to fulfill the ASKI vision of a *padat* performance, the script-writers had to face the challenge of identifying an essential message or theme, and then deliberately and meticulously crafting the following elements to serve that main message:

- **garap lakon** (the crafting of main story threads and plot details)
- **garap tokoh** (the crafting of character development and motive)
- **garap adegan** (the crafting of scene structure)
- **garap catur** (the crafting of narration, description and dialogue)
- **garap sabet** (the crafting of expressive movement to represent meaning)
- **garap iringan** (the crafting of musical accompaniment)
Hence, this conscious crafting and thoughtful interpretation of elements to serve the main theme, as opposed to being in service to a traditional structure, came to be referred to as garapan. Historically in gamelan and wayang circles, garapan simply refers to treatment or interpretation. Every performance is of course an interpretation, as every performer, from classical to contemporary, interprets how they will treat the material. But in pedhalangan circles in the ASKI community, the term garapan came to refer specifically to this deliberate freeing of oneself from the constraints of structure and consciously recreating each element of one’s performance according to the needs and defined theme of the lakon. In traditional pedhalangan circles, interpretation details specific to one dhalang are referred to globally as sanggit, but the ASKI pakeliran padat approach is more deliberate, and breaks sanggit down into these six areas to be consciously crafted.

Aside from the groundbreaking ideas concerning how structure, characterization, musical accompaniment, literary devices, and movement techniques must be subservient to the gagasan pokok, what was revolutionary about these works was the process. Padat creations, to this day, start out as scripts. These scripts, often written collaboratively by small committees, provide not only all the narration and dialogue but also prescribe every musical selection, down to details on how much of the selection to use before making a transition. The scripts also include exacting stage directions concerning dramatic gestures and movement techniques. Then the script is subjected to intense rehearsals with the writers, the dhalang, the musicians, and invited senior advisers from the conservatory staff. Changes, additions, deletions—some minor and some quite broad—are made in this collaborative process over 10 to 20, or more, rehearsals. The exam candidate is required to submit a bound volume that includes introductory analysis, the original script, the rehearsal schedule, and personnel details. The original script is not formally revised to reflect the final product, however, so one needs to attend the performance or obtain a recording to learn what the final consensus was. The point is to remain entirely focused through a dense and efficiently planned package. The dhalang is expected to adhere to the script and all final revisions when performing a padat wayang, lest he revert to digressions or confuse his gamelan musicians, who will be working from a tightly-set score.
**Kunthi Pilih: A Case Study**

Each year as students prepare for their final performance exam in *pedhalangan*, a list of approved scripts is provided for those deciding not to create a script but rather to realize an existing one. This list goes through a strict process of approval by instructors. In 1987, for example, these were the approved scripts, some from the early days and some new:\(^{23}\)

- *Alap-alapan Sukesi* by Sumanto, 1977
- *Ciptaning* by Bambang Suwarno, 1979
- *Déwa Ruci* by Bambang Suwarno, 1982
- *Rama Tundhung* by Suyanto, 1983
- *Durgandini* by Puthut Gunawan, 1984
- *Suryatmaja-Surthikanthi* by Dwiyono, 1985
- *Gandamana Tundhung* by Sukatno, 1985
- *Tresna (Samba Juwing)* by Purbo Asmoro and Harbono, 1986
- *Kunthi Pilih* by Sukardi Samiharjo, 1986

One *padat* script, *Kunthi Pilih (Kunthi’s Choice)* by Sukardi Samiharjo, will be examined in depth in the next section, to illustrate how the concept of *garapan* was realized in *pakeliran padat* performances by 1986. I chose this script from the above list for a number of reasons. First, although *Tresna* was Purbo Asmoro’s own final exam script and therefore obviously of great interest, the final script approved by ASKI with all the accompaniment choices and stage directions has been lost, while Sukardi’s *Kunthi Pilih* final script is in tact. But the most important factor in choosing *Kunthi Pilih* as a cornerstone text here, is that it was the very script that inspired Purbo Asmoro to create his all-night *garapan* style. It will therefore be examined again from a different angle in Chapter 4.\(^{24}\)

*Kunthi Pilih* also goes by the more generic titles *Alap-alapan Kunthi (Kunthi’s Hand in Marriage Contested)*, or *Pandhu Rabi (The Marriage of Pandhu)*\(^{25}\) and is a

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\(^{23}\) From Sinarto’s 1987 ASKI exam book, *Naskah Pakeliran Padat: Ciptaning*. Sinarto chose Bambang Suwarno’s *Ciptaning* to adapt, analyze, and perform as his final exam that year. In the introduction to his exam book he explains the concept of the official, approved list of scripts.

\(^{24}\) Many thanks to Sunarno, instructor at SMKI, for the Harbono script from his collection; to Juworo Bayu Kusuma for uncovering the audio recording during his own *Samba Juwing* exam process; and to Purbo Asmoro for preserving his handwritten script rough draft for over 25 years. Although in the end I decided not to use this script as a main example, having the handwritten original and the audio recording enhanced greatly my understanding of the era and brought all the scripts to life in a way that exam books do not.

\(^{25}\) There is a reference to an 1877 dance “based on a battle within the wayang purwa lakon *Alap-alapan Kunthi-nalibronta*” in Florida 2000, 2:441. A reference to *Serat Pandhudewanata Rabi*, 1877, is found Florida 2000, 2:311. But
complex lakon. It primarily concerns the story of the double marriage of Pandhu of Astina to both Kunthi of Mandura and Madrim of Mandaraka. Embedded within the story, however, are five important subplots: Kunthi’s out-of-wedlock pregnancy resulting in the birth of Karna, the marriage of Narasoma (later in life known as King Salya) to Pujawati, the passing of ogre king Bagaspati’s amulet to the future King Salya, the marriage of Gendari to Dhestarata, and Sangkuni’s decision to move to Astina. Karna, Salya, Gendari, Dhestarata, and Sangkuni are vital characters throughout the Mahabharata, so these subplots are not insignificant.

Given the number of important milestone events that occur in this lakon one might think it to be popular, but in fact it is rarely performed by classical dhalang. In the 1990s and 2000s, I only saw it performed twice, both in classical style, and heard of a third performance by Nyi Suharni at RRI Solo. Among the over 240 all-night wayang recordings on the comprehensive website www.indonesiawayang.com, representing the repertory of three dhalang superstars Nartosabdo, Anom Soeroto, and Manteb Soedharsono, there is not a single recording of this lakon. Purbo Asmoro speculated in an interview in 2012 that this was due to a number of unfortunate events within, that make it simultaneously undesirable for weddings, birth celebrations, or circumcisions: the birth of a famous character out-of-wedlock who is subsequently abandoned (Karna), the murder of a priest at the hands of his own son-in-law (Narasoma’s murder of Bagaspati), and a great prince (Pandhu) entering a marriage competition but bringing three young brides (Gendari, Kunthi, Madrim) home instead of one.

However, it happened to be the story that inspired a celebrated pakeliran padat script by Sukardi, as padat lakon to be performed in an academic setting are somewhat immune to the superstition concerning their use in a private home or village. That in turn went on to inspire the kernel of a new style by Purbo Asmoro, which forms the focus of this work. Sukardi, a 1986 graduate of the Pedalangan Department of ASKI and by all accounts an expert, particularly in the area of gamelan accompaniment, never knew that his script was to become so influential.26

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26 Born in Baki, Sukoharjo in 1944, Sukardi was a graduate of both Konservatori and eventually ASKI. I tried to interview him on several occasions from 2009 to 2014, but his former colleagues, teachers, and students said he
In the next section, we will examine how Sukardi approached re-conceptualization (garapan) of each of the six elements in this lakon. This examination will both illuminate how a padat construction differs from a classical construction, but will also lay the groundwork for understanding (in Chapter 4) how Purbo Asmoro used Sukardi’s padat script to create his first all-night garapan experiment. (Readers may find it helpful to be familiar with the classical treatment plot synopsis of Kunthi Pilih in Appendix 2 before continuing.)

Examining the Six Elements of Garapan
Kunthi Pilih by Sukardi, 1986

1. Garap Lakon: The Crafting of the Story
As is required by the ASKI pakeliran padat process, the writers craft the story around a main theme or message. While classical-style dhalang most certainly think about big issues and surely always have, they do not always start with these. Even if a classical dhalang has a theme or main over-riding message in mind, it would be highly uncharacteristic for him to be explicit about it in his planning, quite unusual for him to expect the audience to necessarily take it on, and unheard of to sacrifice all other elements to presenting such a theme. Sukardi begins his 1986 exam booklet, Kunthi Pilih, with the following:

Wayang addresses the conflicts faced by humans in life. Through the performance, a dhalang explores the nature of these conflicts, both physical and spiritual. It is hoped that as a result of his presentation, the viewer feels inspired to think about such matters.... Through this particular work now before us, I strive to explore the true nature of women and the reality of their stance in the world. Every woman, anywhere, eventually feels a deep love in her heart for a man. She will do anything in order to attain the object of her love.... In her struggles to find a partner, every woman has a different fate. Some find love by chance, some plan the path, some are influenced by something out of their control, others are driven by the love of the man to love him in return, and there are many other possibilities. It is this gagasan pokok that I will address, in the form of a wayang performance, via the lakon Kunthi Pilih.

had been suffering for about a decade with severe withdrawal from society. On 14 February 2015 I visited his relatives, together with Bambang Suwarno, and left the Lontar books with his family, but Sukardi would not come out of the back room to greet us.

27 In fact, as the elderly Sutino Hardokocarito said in an interview in 1997 at his home in Eromoko, Wonogiri: “The main principle of pedhalangan is ‘médhang miring,’ which means everything should be slightly mysterious, vague, indirect, and refined so as not to be obvious.”
As a result of this focus, Sukardi’s entire composition hones in on the plot elements involving four women finding husbands: Kunthi, Madrim, Pujawati, and Gendari, and specifically Kunthi’s love affair with Pandhu. He gives no weight to the male-based subplots concerning Narasoma and his amulet, Karna’s fate as the abandoned son of a god, Sangkuni’s decision to move to Astina, or Dhestarata’s choice of Gendari, in what is usually the dramatic final scene of a wayang. The ogre Bagaspati’s death does not even enter into his script, even though this is a renowned moment in classical wayang repertory. The role of the God of the Sun in fathering Kunthi’s child is not addressed. We also never hear about who adopted Karna. Discarding entire elements of the traditional story is not only allowed but even encouraged in padat creations if the section in question does not develop the main focus. The pakeliran padat artist first forms his focus and then determines which elements of the story will be highlighted, which will not, and which will be left out entirely. He will also return to a consideration of his gagasan pokok when crafting each of the five elements below.

2. Garap Tokoh: The Crafting of Characters

Once the main theme or gagasan pokok is determined, the padat practitioner looks at characterization. As Blacius Subono explained in an interview at his home in 2012:

I think of Arjuna in Ciptaning as a prince who truly becomes one with the environment and the elements through his meditation. I don’t just tell the story as prescribed by tradition but rather want to try to enter Arjuna’s thoughts and feelings as he is struggling with the elements on that mountaintop. And what about Wisrawa in Alap-alapan Sukèsi? A priest. A priest who has succumbed to temptation. This is where the interest lies. Let’s try to get inside his mind. Let’s try to make everything at that moment—the music, the movements, the narrations—aid in exploring that temptation.28

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28 There are certain lakon: in particular Rama, Ciptaning, Alap-alapan Sukèsi, and Déwi Ruci, but also to a lesser degree Kunthi Pilih, Bisma Gugur, Salya Gugur, and Samba Juwing that have repeatedly captured the imagination of padat practitioners from 1975 to 2015. There is a clear preference in the community for the challenge of reworking one of these and giving it a new stamp, rather than always exploring a lakon completely new to the padat repertory.
Character Development

In his introduction, Sukardi describes his intent to focus most of the interpretive details on Kunthi, and to portray Kunthi and Pandhu as young adolescents, deeply in love. While in traditional performances Pandhu wins Kunthi by battling the only other acceptable competitor, Narasoma, this battle does not even occur in Sukardi’s version. Kunthi and Pandhu come together at the end through a meeting of their souls in the heavens. No one approves the match-up, no one announces it officially. Kunthi and Pandhu escape the whole rigmarole of the competition, meet up as souls in another world, and make the decision to be dedicated to one another always. Sukardi crafts every other element focused on the romantic nature of their love.

Wayang-Figure Development

Not insignificant to the garap tokoh process is the way padat script creators explore the actual wayang figures themselves. Traditionally known as wanda, there can be a number of versions of certain wayang figures, particularly of the more popular characters. While developing the main characters in their minds, padat script creators often come up with ideas for new wanda. The inspiration for new wanda started with master wayang designer Bambang Suwarno (Figures 3-1 to 3-4).

Figure 3-1: Kayon Hakêkat (The Essence of Truth Kayon) — Debuted for use in Sukardi’s padat performance in 1986, to symbolize a blanket covering up Kunthi’s pregnancy. Today, this is the most commonly used of Bambang Suwarno’s dozens of innovative kayon figures (photo by Kartiko Nugroho).
Figure 3-2: Kunthi and Pandhu when newly in love (left) and, (right), after her giving birth to Karna (photos by Kartiko Nugroho).

Figure 3-3: Kunthi Garbini (Kunthi Pregnant)—A special version of Kunthi, in which she appears full-bosomed and more round, although not obviously pregnant. Her hair is let down freely to her ankles, to symbolize that she has not gone out for weeks (photo by Kartiko Nugroho).

Figure 3-4: Bayi Basukarna (Baby Basukarna)—A special baby wayang figure, designed to look particularly handsome and “prince like;” asleep, wrapped up in a batik cloth, and with the markings of the God of the Sun’s lineage (photo by Kartiko Nugroho).
Throughout the history of padat creations, this thought toward new wanda has been an important element. Bambang Suwarno outlines more than 30 new figures that he designed (1975–1997) for use in new padat performances in his 2005 article: Kemauan, Kemampuan, Keberanian: Dasar Kreativitas Seni (Having Determination, Competence, and Guts: The Basis of Artistic Creativity).

3. Garap Adegan: The Crafting of Scene Structure

As is typical of all of the approved scripts by ASKI from the 1987 exam list, Sukardi does not present the scene structure as if it falls into any Pathet Nem-Pathet Sanga-Pathet Manyura sequence of three acts. He does not use scene titles familiar to classical wayang, such as Jejer, Adegan Sabrang, Adegan Manyura. He simply notifies his readers that he plans to tell the story in this series of seven scenes, as though they are independent of any pre-existing, historical format for wayang. Sukardi lays out the following scene structure in his introduction:

1. *Pambuka* (Opening)
2. *Pasewakan Mandura* (Mandura Court)
3. *Keputrèn Mandura* (Mandura Female Quarters)
4. *Adegan Plasajenar* (Scene in Plasajenar)
5. *Adegan Pandhu-Kunthi* (Pandhu-Kunthi Scene)
6. *Adegan Mandura* (Scene in Mandura)
7. *Sayembura Pilih* (Competition in Which a Choice is Made)

However, as is also true for all the approved scripts in the list, the scenes do in fact fall loosely within a classical structure: 2 is an opening court scene in Pathet Nem, 3 a female quarters scene in Pathet Nem, 4 a foreign kingdom in Pathet Nem, 5 a forest scene including princely battles in Pathet Sanga, 6 a court scene in Pathet Manyura, and 7, some final battles, also in Pathet Manyura. While the order of scenes is similar to classical style, the way the scene unfolds and the weight of the scene in each case is significantly different. As Bambang Suwarno explains in the introduction to his script Ciptaning (1987):
The organization of the story into scenes in *pakeliran padat* does not follow any prescribed format but rather depends on the whole picture, what main underlying theme has been chosen and how the characterization will be portrayed. We are allowed to expand, alter, or develop any section and start anywhere, as long as what we do is aligned with the content and message we wish to present.

**The Prologue**

Arguably the most dramatic scene innovation in *pakeliran padat* performances is the addition of the prologue. To begin a wayang performance with anything other than the centuries-old *Jejer Sepisan* (Opening Court Scene) in which members of the court are brought out ceremoniously with slow, stylized movements to the accompaniment of *Kabor, Kawit*, or *Krawitan*, was truly revolutionary in the 1970s and 1980s. *Pakeliran ringkas* performances open in the traditional way but the first scene is truncated to some 10 to 15 minutes by reducing the amount of music, the extent of the greetings between characters, and the length of the narration describing the kingdom. Conceptually, *pakeliran padat* performances require an entirely different sort of opening, working from the aesthetic of exploring the theme and character issues from the very beginning.

Sukardi’s script, for example, starts with a freeform love scene between Pandhu and Kunthi, bringing the audience in touch from the beginning with the theme that Pandhu and Kunthi are deeply in love. Kunthi’s struggles lie not with what her choice will be or leaving the decision to fate, but with assuring that Pandhu wins the competition. Prologues are the most freeform part of *pakeliran padat*, in that they do not fit any idiom that previously exists and that would determine how characters enter and leave the scene or greet each other. The gamelan music, movement, and narrative techniques are entirely open to the dhalang’s creativity. By the 1990s the term *prolog* was used exclusively, but the scripts of the 1970s and 1980s sometimes use the terms *pambuka* (opening) or *bedhol jejer* (prelude to the court scene) or *tablu*, from the French *tableau*, referring to the freeform, introductory, overture-like nature of these scenes. Some scripts, such as Bambang Suwanto’s *Rama* from 1975, have no prologue, but almost all scripts from 1979 onward do.

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29 I was not able to determine how this term came in to practice, but have noticed that *tablu* is used primarily in *wayang orang* and dance dramas, and only in *wayang kulit* when the choreographer comes from those
Subsequent Scenes Weighted by Dramatic Need

Sukardi’s love-scene prologue is followed by a short formal court scene in which Kunthi’s father announces the competition for her hand. The next major real focus is on the scene in the female quarters, in which Basudéwa tries to find out what is wrong with Kunthi. This scene is eight pages long in his script, while the court scene was only two pages long. Female quarters scenes in classical wayang are usually redundant, simply repeating material from the main court scene, yet this is an elaborate and extended scene. Every element (narration, gamelan accompaniment, movement) is crafted to focus on Kunthi’s despair at being with child, her interactions with her spiritual teacher Druwasa, and the whole heart-breaking scenario that leads to her having to abandon her out-of-wedlock child.

A nine-page scene in the forest later on in the story, focuses on Pandhu’s interactions with Madrim, Pujawati, and Gendari. The final competition scene in Mandura places weight not on stylized battle scenes with various opponents, but rather on the compelling ending, when Kunthi and Pandhu meet up in the spiritual world, take themselves away from the entire formal competition and profess eternal love in their hearts.

One strict requirement of the padat scripts, from the early days through to the present, is that there be no comic interludes—no Limbukan and no Gara-gara. Comedic dialogue related to the plot is allowed, but not to excess. Long, extended, generic battle scenes (such as the traditional Prang Gagal and Cakilan sequences) are also to be avoided in the name of keeping the focus on the specific plot at hand.

4. Garap Catur: The Crafting of Literary Elements

Once theme, characterization, and scene structure have been considered, the padat script writer can begin fleshing out the scenes with description, narration, dialogue, and monologue. The classical-style dhalang Catur Tulus of Kartosuro (active as a performer in the 1960s and 1970s) grouped the types of oral recitation that a traditional dhalang has mastery over into four categories (1987):

backgrounds. Since I first started attending Sriwedari Wayang Orang theater in 1991, the term tablu has been used for a short prologue before the audience scene.
• description (*janturan*): generic and lakon-specific
• narration (*pocapan*): generic and lakon-specific
• expressions of etiquette (greetings between characters)
• dialogue and monologue

The language used in wayang (*basa pedhalangan*) is full of generic and idiomatic phrases, similar in function to “Once upon a time...” and “They all lived happily ever after.” While these are the only two I can come up with in English, *basa pedhalangan* has a repertory of hundreds of such pat literary phrases descriptive of kingdoms, lakes, mountains, hermitages, strong princes, beautiful goddesses, perfect sons and daughters, rough ogres, battle scenes; and pat literary bridges used to narrate action and move the plotline forward.

One of the main distinctions between a *padat* performance and a classical performance is the avoidance of these formulas, both descriptive (*janturan*, usually with soft gamelan accompaniment) and narrative (*pocapan*, usually with no gamelan accompaniment). The *padat* practitioner is encouraged to write new descriptions and narrations and employ literary techniques such as riddling (*purwakanthi*) and alliteration. Narration and description should enrich the scenes that deal with the main theme or character, rather than formulaically falling in traditional places.

Sukardí’s script, for example, contains four major narrations: one describing Kunthi’s state of mind when she is alone and pregnant in the female quarters, one humorous in nature describing King Gendara’s aggressive nature using riddling, one alliterative passage describing Pandhu’s longing for Kunthi as he travels through the forest to get to the competition, and a final one describing the tension in Mandura on the day of the competition. All are newly composed and avoid the pat phrases common in wayang. Conspicuously missing, for example, is the typical elaborate description associated with the opening kingdom (in this case Mandura), some version of which dhalang have had to commit to memory for generations.

Sukardí’s script is also light on the use of greetings. Unlike a traditional treatment, there is little ceremony at the opening or closing of each scene and characters get right to the point. Dialogue, monologue, narration, and description

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As phrased in Catur Tulus’s article, respectively: *janturan* (*blangkon, baku*), *pocapan* (*blangkon, baku*), *udanegara* (*bagé-binagé*), *ginem* (*sendiri dan bercakap-cakap*).
are specific to the lakon as much as possible. As Bambang Suwarno explains in his 1984 article on *padat* principles:

Dialogue, description, and narration should utilize new forms and new techniques, avoiding the use of generic phrases (*klise, blangkon*). \(^{31}\) Elaborate introductions that are not necessary should be done away with, and descriptions of a place that is not central to the plot should be left behind. We do not need to start every narration with generic phrases like: “lah ing kana ta wau, anengghih, wauta” [And thus it was, Therefore, And so it was] but rather can jump right into the action of the lakon. The dhalang should not use dialogue that spells everything out but rather should design dialogue that delivers the essence quickly to the heart of the viewer.

Sumanto is considered a master in his literary *garap*. His scripts, such as *Alap-alapan Sukèsi*, are lauded for their level of innovation and their lack of clichéd phrasing. He also shows a preference in his *pakeliran padat* scripts for the more democratic structure of debate sequences between one character and another, rather than one-sided teachings (*wejangan*). He consciously refers to this construction as an example of *garap catur*.

5. *Garap Sabet*: The Crafting of Movement Techniques

Expressive movement techniques specific to *pakeliran padat* were developed in the earliest years of the *padat* work at ASKI. These idiomatic techniques, now also known in ISI circles as *sabet tématik* (or sometimes *sabet tématis*), were created almost exclusively by Bambang Suwarno who has a passion for this area, and are still in use today.

A main principle of *pakeliran padat*, as stated by Sumanto in his recent guide for freelance wayang teaching studios (2014), is that there is “not a moment empty of meaning, not a moment of repetitive or generic material.” Bambang Suwarno felt this idea of filling every moment with expression specific to the plotline and characters, needed to be applied not only to literary, structural, and gamelan accompaniment techniques, but also to the movement vocabulary of the *pakeliran padat* practitioner.

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\(^{31}\) The common reference to generic narration or descriptive phrases as *blangkon* is a reference to the traditional batik cap worn by dhalang when performing. If one is using these phrases, one is speaking the idiomatic language of the dhalang, or the one who wears the *blangkon*. 

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*Sabet*, meaning the movements of the wayang figures, need not be virtuosic or acrobatic. The important thing is that the movement of the character speaks to the drama or the message in the moment and is full of meaning—expresses strength, authoritativeness, heartbreak, happiness, sexual attraction, sadness, and so on. The weight and satisfaction of the movement does not lie in its complexity or difficulty, but rather how the movement is used to get something much more important across (Suwarno 1984).

Bambang Suwarno’s pioneering script from 1979, *Ciptaning*, set the standard for these expressive movement techniques. The entire first three pages of the script are dedicated to detailed movement instructions for the *Bedhol Jejer* (later known as the Prologue). This movement sequence with no text at all is aimed at communicating Arjuna’s despair at the state of the world and his decision to meditate in search of an answer. Bambang Suwarno spoke in 2013 at an interview in his home about these techniques: “The concept of *padat* is applied to movement. I look for more effective ways, denser ways, to express emotions than long dialogue sequences where characters simply say what they are feeling and we’re supposed to believe them. This movement vocabulary is a kind shorthand, a *padat* expression of what was traditionally related through narration or dialogue.” *Padat* practitioners, teachers, and frequent audience members, in time, come to understand the new movement code, for example:

- A *kayon* figure pressed against the screen at the tip, forming a kind of tunnel, signifies emotional upheaval.
- Characters held close to the light, with their shadows overlaying the characters on the screen, are communicating from another realm.
- Two characters on either side of a *kayon*, alternatingly rising up and down like a balance in the dhalang’s two hands, signifies flirtation or sexual engagement between the characters.
- Characters shown through one of Bambang Suwarno’s innovative *kayon* figures, such as *Kayon Hakékat*, are going through some sort of physical transformation.
- General *kayon* activity around a character always symbolizes something, and it may mean the character is having a dream, a flashback, or a vision during meditation.
In Suwarno’s prologue to *Ciptaning*, there is no dialogue. By bringing Arjuna out with one arm over the shoulder (a classical code also, for sadness), then showing turmoil through the *kayon* movements, followed by a transformation through the *Kayon Hakékat*, and finally a new Arjuna *wanda* emerging with his hair down, the dhalang shows that Arjuna has given up on the world and decided to meditate to find an answer. Sukardi’s *Kunthi Pilih* script (1986) also starts with a three-page Prologue, and no speaking at all, during which the audience is meant to realize that Kunthi and Pandhu are deeply in love. Every movement is highly scripted:

Princess Kunthi appears from the right, travels to the left, enters under the *kayon* shadow that is poised, tip underturned, on the upper left. From this upper left position Kunthi turns suddenly to face right, then turns left again, and disappears to the left, as does the *kayon*. The accompaniment switches to *Ladrang Gadhung Mlathi*, in *irama dadi*, with a special treatment by playing the first and second *kenongan* very loudly. Pandhu enters, traveling backwards from the left, Kunthi enters to face him. The dhalang uses his left hand to hold Pandhu, the right hand to hold Kunthi. Once they travel all the way over to the left, the dhalang switches hands, Pandhu in the right and Kunthi in the left. They then embrace. With the *kayon* in the middle, the dhalang alternates Pandhu and Kunthi rising up and down, opposite each other.

This kind of description go on for three full pages. Surprisingly, having seen these performances multiple times, I can say that many dhalang still follow the instructions in such *padat* script passages to the letter in their performances, like a choreographed ballet. The point though, according to Bambang Suwarno, is to both shorten the scene and intensify audience understanding of the relationship between the characters, by using movement packed with symbolism and meaning.


Blacius Subono, a composer, classical gamelan musician, and dhalang who in the early 1980s became one of the last generation of Humardani protégés, was the first to

32 There is significant debate at ISI as to how to refer to the gamelan music used in dance and wayang performances. Some feel that it should be referred to as *karawitan pakeliran* or *gendhing pakeliran* for wayang, and *karawitan tari* or *gendhing tari* for dance. In the early 1970s, the term *iringan* (accompaniment) was coined at ASKI, but a significant segment of the ISI Karawitan Department faculty feels this belittles the role of the gamelan music. Many others however, Purbo Asmoro included, say they use *iringan* because it is a less formal, one-word solution, and can be applied to either dance or wayang. As for the English translation, surely the most appropriate word is “accompaniment.” Just as in ballet accompaniment, operatic accompaniment or piano accompaniment, the term serves to accurately differentiate these functions from concert music. Hence, following Purbo Asmoro’s own practice and with no belittling intended, the term *iringan* is used in these writings.
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examine the crafting of gamelan accompaniment to pakeliran padat in detail. In *Iringan Pakeliran Padat*, his 1981 undergraduate thesis from ASKI, he explains:

> The purpose of the gamelan accompaniment is obviously to support what is being accompanied. Therefore the *iringan* designer does not need to stick to a limited repertory but can take from wayang music, concert music, dance music, processional music, or the repertory of other regions…. We should avoid endless repetitions of the basic traditional building blocks of wayang accompaniment—*ayak*, *srepeg*, *sampak*. We can change the form of a traditional piece, alter its introduction, do away entirely with the introduction, truncate the middle of the piece, bypass the ending by jumping right into something else, or even overlay one piece with another.

The first *pakeliran padat* scripts were quite conservative with regard to gamelan accompaniment. In fact, of all the elements to be crafted, the gamelan accompaniment was the least revolutionary in the early attempts. Bambang Suwarno’s *Rama* from 1975, for example, starts with the traditional *Ktw Gd Kabor*.\(^{33}\) In this script, he uses only the following pieces, which all come from the traditional repertory, remain in the traditional mode placement, utilize traditional tempo structures, and primarily have the same traditional scene association from previous centuries.

**PATHET NEM**

*Ktw Gd Kabor* ng Ldr
Ldr Diradameta
*Ktw Kinanhti Sandhung*
Palaran Durna
Ayak-ayak
Srepeg
*Sampak*

**PATHET SANGA**

*Ktw Pangkur Dhudhakasmaran*
Embat-embat Pinjalin
Ayak-ayak
Srepeg
*Sampak*

**PATHET MANYURA**

Ldr Sumirat

\(^{33}\) By 1986 this would have been considered a tame opening for a *padat* script. However, given that his first scene is Ayodya Kingdom, dhalang of the day performing in strict, palace, classical style would have used *Ktw Gd Krawitan*. His use of *Kabor* instead—and from *buka gendr* instead of from *Ayak-ayak*—was an innovative gesture aimed at getting to the point more quickly. But it is viewed now as a *pakeliran ringkas*-esque presentation, with no prologue and no opening focus on the theme at hand.
He does, however, pioneer a number of techniques in *Rama* (1975) and *Ciptaning* (1979) that have entered the permanent repertory of *pakeliran padat* practitioners, and it is these techniques that led to more revolutionary thinking with future scripts:

- Using only the end tag (*ompak*) in place of an entire *sulukan*, and choosing or creating vocal texts relevant to the plot.
- Interrupting one piece in the middle with another piece, or with a *sulukan*, with no formal transition and no warning.
- *Sulukan* sung by a female soloist instead of the dhalang, representing the female character “talking” rather than an omnipotent dhalang voice singing something removed from the plot.
- Alternatives to “endless repetitions” of *sampak* during battles. Bambang Suwarno debuted the concept of choosing and reserving an alternative for the final battle in wayang (which Supanggah had previously debuted in the dance drama world), such as the final battle, Rama versus Rahwana, accompanied by *Kodhok Ngorèk*.
- Poetry from repertory not characteristic of wayang (*sekar ageng, sekar tengahan*) sung in unaccompanied chorus by the *gérong*, with texts written especially for the lakon.

By the time of Sukardi’s *Kunthi Pilih* script years later, much more extreme accompaniment choices were being employed. Sukardi’s script is praised by many as exquisite in its marriage of drama with musical accompaniment. In his score, and others of this era, there are many techniques that further remove the pieces used from their traditional placement or function. Pieces are cut short, form, tempo sequence or mode altered, and then pasted together again to create a unique “film score” for a particular lakon. Some of the techniques used, in addition to those mentioned above:
• Freeform accompaniment in the prologue—anything goes in terms of form or mode. For example, Kunthi Pilih begins with the gendèr introduction to Ldr Gadhung Mlathi in sléndro sanga, followed by the ladrang being played in an untraditional loud style.

• Sulukan are sung not only by pesindhèn now, but also by gérong chorus, or a single male vocalist rather than the dhalang, depending on the intended effect. They are meant to be story specific, and often feature newly created, lakon-specific texts.

• Plot-related dialogue is spoken over sulukan to avoid an empty moment or drop in the action.

• Recitation by the male gamelan musicians is used for dramatic effect, such as rehearsed and timed expressions of surprise during the story, for example an expression of surprise in chorus: “LHO!”

This film score approach requires numerous rehearsals and agreement by all parties not to alter what has been preset. By 1986, padat scripts that were submitted for the exam requirement included a listing of the dates and personnel of the numerous rehearsals. Dhalang and musicians would go into a performance with no question as to what was going to be played, and with no room for spontaneity. The role of the traditional signaling system between dhalang and musicians was altered and in some regards defunct (Brinner 1992). All these issues are explored in more detail in Chapter 5, where Purbo Asmoro’s specific iringan style and rehearsal process is examined.

**Reaction to Pakeliran Padat**

In a short 12 years, from 1974 to 1986, a truly new form of wayang had emerged, developed by the “Gendhon club” of Humardani protégés at ASKI. The process of identifying a theme and then crafting plot details, scene structure, characterization, literary techniques, movement vocabulary, and gamelan accompaniment had been practiced by dozens of script artists, in consultation with their rehearsal teams. This produced a significant repertory of dense, mentes, lakon scripts, with new creations assured every year due to the graduation requirements. From the outset, when the
kernel of an idea had emerged in 1953, *pakeliran baru* had never been driven by commercial purposes, foreign tour needs, or to solve practical matters related to time constraints. It was a conceptually based alternative and challenge to the format wayang had taken for centuries. It stood its ground in the name of specific artistic ideals regarding the function of wayang in the modern world, and an aesthetic that the container and its contents be in balance. Unlike *pakeliran ringkas*, *pakeliran padat* was founded upon a utopian vision of how to use a lakon to explore a theme in the most driven, focused, meaningful, relevant, and concentrated way, regardless of resulting duration.  

From 1953 to 1986, this artistic journey included little to no discussion concerning the success or popularity of *pakeliran padat* among the Javanese people or non-ASKI dhalang. However, in 1987 a seminar was held at ASKI to reflect on the state of *pakeliran padat*. It turned out, perhaps surprisingly, that there were few voices of praise to be heard, either from within ASKI or outside of ASKI. The lectures and papers were unanimously pessimistic, negative, and critical. Humardani was praised for the concept; the process and aspirations were described as admirable. But there was an overwhelming, self-reflective “nay” to the reality of how this form was received by audiences and traditional dhalang.

Bambang Suwarno’s *Pakeliran Padat Masih Belum Memasyarakat* (*Pakeliran Padat Has Not Yet Entered Society Effectively*) and Bambang Murtiyoso’s *Pakeliran Padat: Antara Harapan dan Kenyataan* (*Pakeliran Padat: Our Hopes Versus the Reality*) raised similar points, which are summarized here:  

- The process of creating and then following a *pakeliran padat* script is complicated and intellectual, and not every dhalang will be up to it.  
- *Padat* performances require a great deal of rehearsal, collaboration, and therefore funding and support.  
- The audience has to pay attention all the time or they will miss crucial parts, and this is not an aesthetic natural for wayang viewers.  
- The dhalang has to have a lot of experience and understanding of life to deal so intimately with themes and messages, rather than being able to depend to

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34 Brinner touches on this distinction between *pakeliran padat* and *pakeliran ringkas* in his 1992 article.  
35 Articles from the 1987 seminar by Marwanto, Sugeng Nugroho, Soetarno, and even Sri Mulyono from the early UGM days unanimously express similar sentiments. Sugeng Nugroho saved and bound all these papers into a self-published volume he entitled, *Bunga Rampai: Makalah Seni Pedalangan*, Volume II, ASKI (no date).
one degree or another on crowd-pleasers such as comedy, or traditional visual attractions.

- Sponsors have voiced concerns that they are “not getting their money’s worth,” because the performance is over in two hours but requires the same setup, preparation, and funding. What is more, villagers love their all-night wayang.

- The movement techniques are like obscure riddles that not everyone gets, and give the impression that there is a secret ASKI language, coming across as self-involved and alienating.

- All of ASKI’s efforts at instruction, competitions and rehearsals off-campus have been fruitless, as the resulting substandard scripts by non-ASKI participants at various competitions have proven. Pakeliran padat is obviously a difficult concept to grasp.

- The padat process requires teamwork and collaboration and this is not the norm for the typical dhalang who enjoys his independent, kinglike status, and values guarding his performance secrets up to the very end.

Mujoko Joko Raharjo (1940–1992), at the time a popular dhalang from Gombang, Sawit, Boyolali, submitted a paper for the seminar as well. This was the only time in anyone’s living memory that Mujoko ever put his thoughts to paper for such an event, hence one can assume he felt passionate about the issue. An occasional visiting studio instructor at ASKI, he was not formally educated and was basically an outsider. He starts by criticizing the movement vocabulary of pakeliran padat:

> When a plotline is represented only in movement, this is difficult for the audience to follow, especially for those not students or instructors at ASKI. And also for those who are not familiar with the storyline at all. To the point that the question will surely emerge in their minds, “What is going on and why is the dhalang doing that?” For example a kayon that is folded at its tip against the screen, or the reverse when the dhalang pulls the tip into a fold and covers a wayang figure. Those who already know the story can connect the dots, even though they will still be wondering why the meaning has to be represented in such a way. But there will be everyday types there, who mostly do not want to be required to think so hard because they just are looking for some entertainment. There are those who might be attending because of a personal or social obligation, and do not wish to be forced to connect meaning in that way.

He then comments on the fact that the audience has to be so intent on watching:
Quite often I see audience members appear tense, because they have to follow the story constantly. To the point that they cannot drink anything, eat anything, or smoke because there is no opportunity to do so, lest they miss an important phrase or a movement that represents an event. Forced to not eat or drink? To the point that they feel tortured.

In fact, Sumanto relates the anecdote of an elderly dhalang, Ki Marmanto, who complained bitterly to him after an ASKI pakeliran padat performance of Ciptaning, “I took one bite of my damn lemper and missed the whole transformation of Arjuna from prince to meditator—what kind of a wayang is that?”

Rahayu Supanggah presents a challenge to padat practitioners in his Salam Terkasih Pakeliran Padat (My Fondest Respects to Pakeliran Padat), also from the 1987 seminar. He uses highly expressive, coarse Javanese terms to describe the feeling of most padat performances, in his view:

- **pating cruwil**—Fragmented, due the incessant cutting up and truncating of so many of the gamelan pieces, poetic songs, scenes, and narrations.
- **suk-sukan**—Rushed and frenetic, due to the fast tempos, loud dynamics, absence of down time, and dearth of material that is familiar and comfortable.
- **wijang**—which he rephrases as “overdosis,” and has since referred to as krajingan sampah (garbage can) in various seminars, because so much is thrown in at once from all regions, from all styles, from all tempos and modes, all attacking the listener at once.

Supanggah challenges padat practitioners to ask themselves: Must everything be cut off, fragmented, crashed into, shortened, rushed, loud, “efficient,” and without any humor, break, reflection, visual attraction, or musical filler? He also comments that the process is now the reverse of the original intent, according to his observation. Practitioners start with the idea that everything must be cut off, loud, and fragmented, and then later down the road try to decide and explain why. He even speculates that some dhalang are finding it convenient to break off the gamelan piece just anywhere, because they do not have command of proper transitions. He concludes with the observation that padat was intended as a minimalist philosophy, one that did away with elements not directly necessary to the support the theme. But
instead, by 1987, *padat* creators seem to think that they need to impress their audiences. They borrow from as many different techniques as they can, from as many different regions as they can, and with the loudest, biggest, and grandest of instrumentation and stage set-up, with little justification. Supanggah expresses his great reverence for innovation in general, for the ideals of *padat*, and for the original scripts of the 1970s and early 1980s. But he feels that by 1987 the form had taken a turn for the worse.

*Pakeliran padat* study and exploration continued after the highly critical 1987 seminar, and continues to this day at ISI. However, there is no question that the 1987 critics were partially correct in their evaluation. *Pakeliran padat*, as of this writing, has never caught on with the general Javanese community, is not popular with sponsors, and has not sparked inspiration in dhalang outside of the environment of academic institutions for the very reasons cited in the 1987 essays. It did, however, have at least one profound influence, as will be seen in the next chapter.

It is in this atmosphere of idealistic development and subsequent harsh self-reflection at ASKI that the focus of this study, Purbo Asmoro, entered artistic life in Solo. Graduating from ASKI in 1986 and stepping out into the performing world in 1987, he was most certainly a product of the ASKI *pakeliran padat* generation, although not a direct protégé of Humardani. The next chapter will explore his coming into being as a performer and his own personal passion for a new approach. A new approach which, it turned out, had at its core the concepts of *pakeliran padat*, recrafted into yet again a different package.