MUDRA UN VISUAL AIND PERFORMING ARTS:
Codes for Expression

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Abstrak
Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk membahas kode-kode visual da/am *seni selama Periode Jawa Kuna,* yaitu *mudra yang mencakup: kode-kode untuk menyatakan tempat dan Hngkungan, membatasi sebuah adegan atau perubahan adegan-adegan, menyatakan tingkat kosmografi, peranan dan status sosial, gaya tan, dan perasaan.*

Kata-kata Kunci: *kode visual, mudra, abhinaya.*

This paper attempts to give a brief survey on the use of visual codes in the arts during the "Old Javanese Period". What is called the Old Javanese Period is the period when the Old Javanese language was used as the official language. That period is also called the "Hindu-Buddhist Era" in Javanese history. The abundance of Sanskrit loanwords characterises the Old Javanese language. Indeed, the familiarity with Sanskrit and the adoption of Indian scripts went hand in hand with the introduction, acceptance, and henceforth the development of Hindu and Buddhist religions on the Javanese socio-cultural soil.

The term *mudra* (Sanskrit) in a strict sense means "hand gestures". However, in a wider sense, the word may figuratively means "codes for expression in general". In this sense, its meaning will be closer to *abhinaya* as it is used in classical Indian theatrical art. It has, thus, the meaning of "a means to convey something, be it a message or an idea". In theatrical art, however, *mudra* is just one aspect of the whole *abhinaya* system. The word *mudra* in a general sense may refer to any code for expression: it could be visual, kinetic, and audible. Nevertheless, it is only the visual and the kinetic (confined only to poses in dance or theatrical expressions) that we may still recognise in the artefacts remaining from the past. We have no means of retrieving, or even interpreting the audible codes from the past. We could, indeed,

make an approximation of the kinds **of** sound coming out from different kinds of musical instruments, **but** we can never capture the actual melody and rhythm. What can be interpreted from visual depictions of musical instruments is limited to the general role they may have **in** music making, for instance a stringed instrument is very likely taking the role of presenting the melody, or a drum must have the role of accentuating **the** rhythm. Moreover, the number of knobs on a stringed instrument can indicate the number of strings used, but cannot for **sure specify** what **notes** that can be produced.

The following discussion on *mudra* as code for expression is confined **to** temple relief **as** data for observation. The visual depiction of scenes on temple walls and balustrades is in itsetf an expression of visual art. However, its codes used in **scene** depiction imply also certain aspects **of a** technical guide for theatrical presentation. **In** this way, a narrative relief on temple walls and balustrades has a double aesthetic significance: as an expression of visual art, **as** well as an allusion to theatrical **art.**

The codes that can be recognised from artefact remains are:

a. codes to express place or environment;
b. codes to limit a scene; or to indicate the change of scenes;

c. **codes to express** cosmographical levels;
 d. codes to indicate roles and their respective social status;
e. **codes of** dance styles; and f.

codes to express moods.'

The corpus of temple relief referred to for this discussion consists of those from Central Java and East Java, representing a period more or less between the 8th and 15th century AD. The main temples in Central Java having narrative relief are the temples of Borobudur, Prambanan, and Plaosan Lor, while those of East Java are mainly the temples of Surawana, Kedaton. Tegawangi, Jago, Panataran, and Sukuh-

1. Codes to Express Place and Environment

In order to identify a scene two most important codes that should be used are, *first,* who is/are the characters) depicted, and *second,* where is the place in which the scene occurred. To indicate a place and environment, first it is distinguished between in-doors and out-doors. An in-doors scene can normally also be distinguished between that inside a palace, and that of a dwelling of common people. Ornate pillars and a rich display of food, often combined with pillows on a heightened floor level, also featuring principal figures dressed ornately, characterise a palace. On the other hand, a house of common people, or a hermit, never show all those characteristics. However, a rich person can also be depicted with some of the normally 'royal' attributes, such as a cushion and ornate dress. Another code for royalty that can never be 'borrowed' by just the rich people is the . presence of a horse and an elephant in the outdoor part of a palace scene.

Differentiation between the palace scene and a rural scene is made by the presence of

specific kinds of animal. While the palace is indicated by the presence of elephant and horse, a rural scene is coded by the presence of goat and swine. The birds, however, can be present anywhere, thus does not have a differentiating function. But the rats are characteristic of the rural area, especially that related to rice. Rats can be present in the rice fields, or in the barn.

Mountains and rivers are also clearly indicated. Mountains by way of rocks in the shape of superimposed blocks or reclining/ horizontal H forms, while rivers and the ocean are indicated by flowing water in which fishes and crabs are often present inside it. East Javanese temple relief abound in depictions of panorama. Mountains, rice fields, rivers (sometimes crossed by a bridge), and groups of trees, are chiselled out of stone beautifully. Occasionally can be found a scene depicting a side view or a bird's eye view of a temple complex or a hermitage. A relief on Candi Jawi shows a temple complex with clearly defined courtyards by way of dividing walls. The horizontal structure reminds one of the plan of Candi Panataran in East Java, and the general three-courtyards temples of Bali. High towering spires on the relief characterize temple buildings. Hermitages, on the other hand. are usually depicted with ordinary buildings, but with open halls, and ordinary roofs such as those used for common dwellings. The code for a hermitage, in this case. is the presence of one. or more hermit(s). Hermits themselves are characterized by high rising headdress in the form of a turban.

2. Codes **to** Limit a Scene, or to Indicate the Change of **scenes**

The most straightforward way to delimit a scene on a temple surface is by putting a visual frame surrounding it, thus forming a panel. However, there are many examples, both in Central- as well as in East-Javanese temples,

'Some of the codes discussed in this paper have been examined in terms of relationships among the different branches of art, in my previous paper presented at the "Translation Project" seminar organised by EFEO, Paris, in April 2002. The title of that paper is "Trans-Medium Translation of Stylistic Figures and Principles of Expression in Ancient Javanese Art".

that within **one** panel are **put more than** one **scene. The** row **of** relief narrative **on the** walls **of** the "hidden **foot" of** Borobudur temple, featuring **the** *Karmawibhangga* **text,** is **a** typical **example.** In this row of relief are depicted pairs **of scenes: one** depicting a certain deed, and the next **depicting the** consequence **of** it in an **afterlife.**

Two kinds of **codes** that seems to be fashioned by the visual artists themselves **are,** *first,* the already mentioned framing with an **explicit** demarcating line, and *second,* in **cases that one** panel consists of two or more scenes, **by** putting two groups **of** people from two **separate scenes as** sitting **or** standing back **to back.** The imaginary line **formed** by their backs **serves as a** dividing line between the two scenes. **The** panels on the temple of Prambanan, mostly consisting **of** more than two scenes. are **typical examples of this method.**

Another coding method, mostly used on **East Javanese** temples, is that using a tree figure **as a** separating device between scenes. **This** use **of a tree** form to indicate the limit, or a change, **of** scenes reminds one **of the utilization of a** similar **tree** figure in the dramatic **performance** of *wayang kulit* (leather puppet). **In** this kind of traditional dramatic performance **very** popular in **Java and** Bali the puppeteer manipulates the "cosmic tree" figure called *gunungan* to indicate, among others, the **change** of scenes. Along with the consistent placing of roles, with regard to status, on the right **or the** left hand side of the viewer (or the **puppeteer** in a performance), a hypothesis can **be** brought forth, **that** the East Javanese period in the Javanese cultural history saw the consolidation of traditions in performing arts. **Conventions** regarding characterisation and **dramatic** structuring must come to a stronger and stronger position by that time (11th to 14^{111} **century** AD), in such a way that it also gave a strong **impact** on the practice **of** depicting stories in visual arts.

3. Codes to Express Cosmographical Levels

In Old Javanese literature there are descriptions of heavenly being moving in the skies. Substantiating those literary descriptions are the visual depictions on temple relief. Heavenly beings are often depicted flying, or just staying or dancing, on a cushion of clouds, put on the upper part of a panel, white below them are depicted the scenes that happened on the earth. By iconographical codes they can be recognised and differentiated into:

a. *apsaras,* or heavenly nymphs (female). often portrayed **in a** dancing pose, or holding a garland of flowers, Or in the act of throwing flowers down;

b. *widyadhara,* **handsome** male figures;

c. *gandharwa,* also always depicted as males, often holding and playing a musical instrument;

d. *kinnara* (male) or *kinnari* (female), in the form of half human (the upper part) and half bird (the lower part), often also depicted playing a musical instrument, or holding a garland;

e. *rishi,* having **the features** of bearded **gentlemen,** usually their hands put in front **of their chest** in an *afijali* pose.

The musical instruments held by those heavenly beings are mostly of the chordophone class,

Portrayals **of** heavenly beings **on a** cushion **of** clouds abound in Central Javanese temples. It is remarkable that the visual renderings on the temples **are** consistent through the temples **of** both religious belief, Hindu and Buddhist. The majority of those visual renderings **are** found on Buddhist temples, while most of the (later) literary **texts** describing heavenly beings **are** mostly Hindu. On **the** temple of Borobudur, **it is on the rows** of **relief** depicting the *Bhadracan* text that heavenly scenes appear most frequently. **Thus** the division of cosmos **into** the upper world **(the** world of deities) and **the** middle world (the world of human beings) is visually interpreted **as** literally the upper and the lower part **of space** on a panel. The underworld, however, if there is a **need to depict** it. is **put as** occupying the whole space in **a panel** or a **scene area. Scenes** from the

underworld if occasionally found, e.g. at Borobudur and Candi Jago. Further on, **the** *bhuta* of the underworld, portrayed **as** dwarfish squatting stout figures, is normally put in the lowermost part of a pilaster as if carrying it. **If the pilaster** is a symbol of the world (of men), **then the** dwarfish figure symbolise the **underworld that bears** the **world.**

4. Codes to Indicate Roles and Their Respective Social Status

The roles in a scene can first be **identified** through **their** dress and their relations with other roles in a scene. To put it **the** other **way around,** the sculptors must have **used a system** of **codes** to differentiate characters in **a story,** and they also have to take recourse in choosing typical scenes in a story in order to **be able** to **be** recognised. The differentiation **in** apparel between a noble and a commoner **seemed** to be the first step taken. The reference might be the contemporary dress **style** in Central or East **Java.**

In East Java, beginning with the relief series of Candi Jago, the next step to formulate a characterisation system was then taken. Different types of character, for instance among the Pandawa family consisting of Kunti, Yudhisthira, Bima, Arjuna, and Nakula-Sadewa, was already made discernible by differentiating their body-built and style of headdress.[2] Status among the roles is distinguished by more adornment for higher-ranking personages, or applying a halo for persons with divine qualifications. A sage or hermit, also the females, such as Kunti in exile, is given a visual code in the form of a high, multiple folded turban. Sages are given the trait of a long beard.

5. Codes of Dance Styles

Basically the dance styles depicted on the temple walls can only be divided into two

categories. The first one is that with a clearly observable basic in classical Indian dance. The turnout of both legs is the strongest code for this category. Moreover, legs, arms, and torso movements depicted on the panels can be recognized as the movements described in classical dance manuals such as the *Natyauastra.* Almost all the dance poses depicted on the outer wall of the balustrade of the main temple of Candi Prambanan illustrate this category of dance style.

Only one among the 62 dance-panels of Prambanan shows the other category, namely the 'local' dance style.[2] There are also some examples of the same kind on the walls of Candi Borobudur. The characteristics of this 'other', or 'local' style is that the two legs of the dancer are posed parallel to each other, without any indication of a turnout.

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Moreover, a dance that is meant to display a counteraction towards the classical style is that demonstrated by a dance scene of the temple of Borobudur, namely No. 0 39 of the *Karmawibhangga* serial. This seemed to be meant as a Jest or a joke, by which the dancer makes arm as well as legs movements contrary to the standards of the India-based classical dance. The dancer flexes his arms and legs directed towards his own body, thus contrary to the turnout for legs and arms required in classical dance.

6. Codes to Express Moods

The codes to express moods used for the Prambanan relief series were clearly taken from dramatic manuals for the Sanskrit,

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[2] A more detailed presentation of character types has been given in Edi Sedyawati, "Structure and Character Types in Javanese Performing Arts", a paper for *International Conference on Indonesian Art,* organised by The Indira Gandhi National Centre for The Arts. New Delhi, March 4^-6^, 2003. 'It is namely panel Number 58, counted from the eastern main entrance, clockwise.

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classical Indian drama.[4] Gestures of the head, of the torso, and the arms, hands, and legs were used according to the rules of dramatic art- The *Sduta* head gesture for instance, which has been described as "turned up once, slanting" to denote self-esteem, is used to depict Bharata in his coronation. A similar gesture, udvahita, which has been described as "the head is once turned upwards" and means "looking high up", is used to describe the perplexed people of Lingka looking up at Hanuman Jumping from roof to roof.

The drooping head *{ancita)* combined with a sacking chest *{abhugna)* is used to depict sad persons, such as Dauaratha after being left by his exiled son, Rama. The sadness of Sita as a captive in Lingka is described by the dhuta head gesture indicating "a slow sideways movement", which is to be used among others to express sadness or astonishment.

Related to the torso, there is a gesture called the *"nata* movement of the sides", described as "the waist and one side are slightly bent and one shoulder slightly drooping down". This gesture is used to depict Sfta approaching Rama after the *swayamwara.* and also to depict Bharata approaching Rama in the forest. The mood implied in the two scenes is that of love and care to the person approached.

Movements of the legs and arms to describe anger or readiness to fight are found in several scenes of the Rama story at Pambanan temple. The gesture used is the *alfdha, pratyalfdha,* or *mandala.* To sum up, the dramatic codes expounded in manuals for dramatics are consistently applied in visual renderings of scenes.

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