



## IN MEMORIAM CLAIRE HOLT

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She ended unexpectedly by urging all of us in the class--two missionaries from Texas, a pair of economists and their wives, a dancer, someone from the government, and the resident graduate students--most of us on the eve of setting off on public and private missions to Indonesia, to ask ourselves why we were going or why we hoped to go one day. If you won't do that, she said, nothing that I have told you about Indonesia this afternoon will be of any value. It was only later that I understood how like her it was to conclude a routine orientation class with an uncomfortable personal question of this kind. She knew, better than we did, that the coming journey to Indonesia meant many things to each of us, some clear, some hidden, and some uneasily sensed.

She had a way, too, of asking questions by her life that were more troubling than many she could have expressed in words. She was a highly organized and tidy woman in her own way, but I remember her telling me that nothing important in her life had been planned or foreseen. She would laugh and say, "Something always came up." She had moved from Riga to Moscow, to Paris, to New York, to Java, Bali and Japan, to Washington and finally to Ithaca. She had been a dancer, journalist, traveller, archaeologist, teacher, sculptor, translator, scholar, government official and gardener. And it was clear that she thought of her life not as a career, but as a quest for experience and meaning. She had an intense capacity to be absorbed in what she was doing, but when it was done, it was over. She lingered over nothing when it was finished. She rarely reminisced and found the very idea of writing her autobiography, which her friends often pressed her to do in her last years, when she was living in the shadow of death, irritating and irrelevant. I remember, sometime in 1968, when I had just returned from Indonesia, telling her about an elderly Javanese friend who had begun calmly and systematically to strip himself of everything he had once held dear in preparation for his death: his personal possessions, his family and the music to which he had devoted his life. We talked about him for a while, and her imagination was enough caught by what I had told her that she said perhaps the time had come for her to do the same. But, of course, she couldn't do it--she could never withdraw from her own or the lives of those around her.

She hated things that were pinched, dry, cramped, tight and narrow. She wore loose, baggy clothes which were unmistakably hers. Her hair seemed always in an energetic, flying tangle. She fussed over her plants and loved them, less because they were beautiful than because they grew, and grew to be themselves. When she looked at pictures, she always judged them by the degree to which they breathed. Things should have space around them, she used to say, and people too. I often thought that one of the reasons that she felt such instinctive sympathy with the people of Java and Bali was that in her own way she shared their belief in the hidden power in everything that exists or grows, above all in people. She had a knack of making very different people feel that they had possibilities for growth within themselves that they

had scarcely imagined. She gave them the confidence to trust themselves, perhaps in part because in everything important, that was where she placed her own trust.

It was characteristic, I think, that when she came to write the book by which she will be remembered by many more than knew her personally, she called it *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change*; for to her continuity and change meant simply growth. She had lived in Indonesia during the still, hot-house colonial 'thirties, when the greatest florescence of creative Western scholarship on Indonesian life took place: she had known, talked to, lived beside, worked with, and pitted herself against such now legendary figures as Van Stein-Callenfels, Walter Spies, Margaret Mead, Jaap Kunst and Wilhelm Stutterheim, as well as many others. Then the war came, and some of them died, and the rest retired or moved away to other things. Many of the survivors found themselves trapped by nostalgia for the calm and golden days, and were alienated by the turbulence, clamor, violence and disorder of independent Indonesia, where, indeed, it was difficult to concentrate, to study, to contemplate the relics of ancient civilizations, or live the exotic life in comfort. She was virtually the only one of that generation who returned to Indonesia after the war with passionate curiosity and expectation. And she found what she was looking for, not a Western, but now an Indonesian renaissance. The ghosts of the 'thirties were gone and in their place she found Kartono, Affandi, Hendra, Sudibio and many more.

When she came back and wrote her book, in which the Shailendras, Spies and Sudibio came so naturally together, she opened it with the following words:

Why do people carve their initials in the bark of old trees or scratch them onto rocks? What makes children retrace their steps in wet sand to look excitedly at their footprints, move a pencil round their fingers to create a contour of their hand on paper, or press a hand against a steam-clouded windowpane to produce its silhouette? We say, "You recognize the *hand* of a master. . . ." Figuratively, the artist leaves to posterity an imprint of his hand. He transfers part of himself onto matter, makes it visible, and gives it an existence apart from himself.

Next to these words, she showed a picture of the rivetting hand-silhouette paintings in the Abba cave at Darembang in West Irian. (I will never forget her delight when I brought her a photograph clipped from *Harian Kami* showing children making their own hand-silhouettes on a newly plastered wall somewhere in downtown Djakarta.) She liked the cave-paintings particularly, I think, because what drew her to art was less its formal beauty and perfection than the human energy and fertility it expresses. She felt a deep and strong connection between children's play, the cave-paintings, and the monuments of high civilizations. And so she ended her book where she started, with five representations of what she called "the eternal theme, fertility," which she asked the reader to contemplate in closing her pages.

She went back to Indonesia once again, for a few weeks in 1969, tired, weak and ill, but as curious and eager as ever. She found much that pleased her, especially in Djakarta, and she visited for

the last time many of the ancient places in Java and Bali which she had known and loved for almost forty years. But she was too much a realist and at the same time too alive herself not to see much that saddened her: stagnation and apathy instead of continuity; artificiality and faddishness in the place of growth. And she was distressed to find many old friends vanished or behind prison bars.

But she continued to be wrapped up in Indonesia, as she was with her family, her friends and the world around her. She had taken on the task of editing a volume of essays on the relationship between culture and politics in Indonesia, which was completed just before her death. It was a theme close to her heart, since it reflects at bottom a problem of continuity and change, of the possibilities of changing one's society and yet remaining one's self. She was also happy to be presiding over an enterprise in which Indonesian and Western scholars worked to enhance each other's creativity and growth.

After she was gone, many of those who loved her gathered for a ceremony to take leave of her: the Kaddish, the gamelan music of Java, and a fresh summer wind rolling thunder clouds across the lake. All old things, but things which stay through change.