

THE POLITICS OF POPULAR ART:
TAYUBAN DANCE AND CULTURE CHANGE IN EAST JAVA

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In terms of our often chimerical image of *priyayi* culture, *tayuban* dance can at first sight appear bewilderingly un-Javanese. Contrary to most Indonesian dance styles, *tayuban* involves men dancing directly with women,¹ in a fashion which on occasion may be flirtatious or even intimate. The female dancers are paid professionals known as *tlédhek* or *tandhak*.² When it is a man's turn to "receive the dance scarf," these women come to sit at his side, sing him a song, and, at its end, offer him a glass of alcohol, which he dashes down boldly, then taking to the dance floor. Although the practice is generally discouraged today, sometimes women may sit on the male dancer's lap, and on a few occasions actually kiss him. Such sexual behavior by *tlédhek* has contributed to the widespread perception of them as prostitutes, and, together with the dance's drinking and economic expense, has also caused Muslim reformists and some government officials in recent years to call for the dance's abolition. Whatever notoriety *tayuban* has gained, however, it still enjoys considerable popularity in areas of East and (to a perhaps lesser degree) Central Java. In many communities, moreover, it is not only a popular form of entertainment, but an integral part of spirit shrine ritual associated with annual *bersih desa* festivity. Without the dance, one is told, crops might fail, people would fall ill, and the land might turn barren. This identification of *tayuban* with fertility rites has only served to reinforce reformist Muslim opposition to the dance tradition. From an analytic perspective, the fertility theme raises larger questions on the origins of the dance and its relation to other regional dance traditions.

In what follows, I wish to discuss the basic organization of East Javanese *tayuban*, the controversy surrounding its meaning, and its historical development in relation to several other East Javanese dance and ritual traditions. Although *tayuban* was once common in the Central Javanese courts and is still today enjoyed in some communities of Central Java, the bulk of the ethnographic and historical discussion in the present article will focus on rural East Java, particularly certain areas of the *oosthoek* or *ujung timur*, the far eastern

1. Cf. Claire Holt's comments on Indonesian dance: "In the great majority of dances the participants are of one sex only. . . . Under no circumstances is bodily contact between male and female dancers admissible in the traditional sphere." Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 98.

2. The terms *tlédhek*, *ledhek*, or *kledhek* are the most widely used; *tandhak* is somewhat coarser. The more refined term, *waranggono*, is also sometimes heard. The etymology of the term *tlédhek* is unclear, but popular etymology supplied by Javanese villagers links the term to the verb *ngledhek*, "to tease, to entice."

portion of the province to the east of the city of Malang.³ The development of the dance tradition in these regions provides a vantage point from which to assess two broader currents in modern Javanese culture: the decline of regional traditions, and the growing influence of Islam. The example of *tayuban* in the *oosthoek* also raises more general questions concerning the relationship between Java's arts and the Javanese character, issues to which I turn at the conclusion of the present article.

Dance Social Organization

Like much artistic performance in traditional rural Java, *tayuban* is generally performed in the larger context of festivities accompanying *slametan* rites.⁴ A *slametan* is organized around a small prayer meal known as a *kenduren*, a "simple, formal, undramatic, almost furtive little ritual"⁵ in which men gather to recite prayers and symbolically partake of a few ritual foods, the bulk of which are then taken home to be eaten.⁶ No important *slametan* can occur without such a simple prayer meal, and many smaller rites involve little else. For larger village rites like the *bersih desa*, or for household rites (especially weddings or circumcisions) sponsored by high-status villagers, however, this minimal ritual format is often expanded into a veritable festival, in which the quiet *kenduren* prayer meal becomes just one part of a much larger social event which includes visits among the households, meals (attended by both men and women), and popular entertainments such as *wayang* or *tayuban*. Although motorcycles, televisions, and other consumer goods have begun to displace these ritual festivals as indicators of status, traditionally their sponsorship was one of the primary indices of social distinction in much of rural Java, and concerns about status provided much of the practical momentum for promoting the popular arts.⁷ Indeed, as we shall see, even within *tayuban* itself, one of the

3. While historical information in the present paper is drawn from several areas of the *oosthoek*, ethnographic and ethnohistorical information is based on my field research in the districts of Malang, Pasuruan, Probolinggo, and Lumajang during nineteen months of 1978-80 and eight months of 1985. Research during both periods was sponsored by the National Science Foundation and Fulbright program. The bulk of the first period of research was spent in Hindu communities of the Tengger highlands, with several weeks residence in neighboring Muslim communities and the city of Malang. Research during the second period was divided between Hindu and Muslim communities. During the two periods, I attended (and danced in) some thirty dance festivals, including events in highland communities and the rural lowlands.

4. Clifford Geertz has commented that in urban Pare in the early 1950s some men organized informal dance clubs for wholly secular *tayuban* entertainment. There was no evidence of such clubs in the areas of East Java in which I worked. See Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (New York: The Free Press, 1960), p. 300.

5. Ibid., p. 11.

6. In Hindu Javanese regions of the Tengger highlands, of course, the Muslim *kenduren* is replaced by priestly liturgy. Otherwise the festival format is essentially the same. See Robert W. Hefner, *Hindu Javanese: Tengger Tradition and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 104-12.

7. For a fuller discussion of the linkage between status concerns, ritual consumption, and economic investment, see Robert W. Hefner, "The Problem of

organizing principles of dance sequence is the graded differentiation of men by status.

In rural East Java, the *tayuban* preparations begin a week or so prior to the festivity, with a day-long gathering of friends and relatives of the festival sponsors to construct a temporary festival hall known as the *tarob*. An open-air pavilion covered by a corrugated metal roof, the *tarob* provides the place in which hundreds of guests will be received, fed, and entertained over the better part of two or three days. In the larger *slametan* festival there is little of the ascetic reserve seen in the far more modest *kenduren* prayer meal. Men and women sit at large tables, usually separately, often with one or two centrally located tables reserved for high-status guests. Tables are piled high with brightly colored cakes, breads, and fried sweets; the room is gaily decorated with palm leaf, metal foil, and tissue paper; and a powerful loud-speaker (powered by portable generator or auto batteries) broadcasts music over the countryside. Once seated, guests are immediately served sweet coffee or tea, and invited to consume the snacks before them. They do so sparingly, however, since it is considered poor form for them to display any visible enjoyment of the food. The guests thus spend most of their time conversing quietly, with an appropriate air of fatigue or boredom. As each table fills, its occupants are ushered into a side room, and there the festival host and hostess invite them to eat a meal of white rice, fish, meat, and rich gravies. Eating quickly and without conversation, the guests complete their meal in as perfect unison as they had begun. They ignore their hosts' protestations that they have eaten "too quickly and too little," and, politely refusing further food, they file back into the festival hall, to await the evening's dance performance.

Although in East Java village women are invited to dine and they do observe at least the first moments of *tayuban* dancing, they themselves do not dance. Reportedly in areas of late nineteenth century East Java village women did join in religious dance (see below), but today none do, and it would be considered unseemly for a village woman to dance in any context, let alone one as libertine as *tayuban*. When the village men dance with *lledhek*, therefore, they are invariably dancing with nonvillage women. The relative social anonymity of the dance relationship allows them to regard the dance as outside the bounds of ordinary village behavior, giving them, on occasion, a sense of license. As a result, many village women deeply resent their men's participation in the dance, and the women exchange stories of *lledhek* reciting magical spells (*aji*) to enchant men, for the purpose of stealing their money, or stealing them from their wives. However, most women are somewhat ambivalent. In communities where *tayuban* is popular and a man's grace as a dancer is considered a sign of social distinction, many women take a keen interest in the dance, with some even urging their husbands to join it. Before retiring early in the evening (leaving their husbands alone with the *lledhek*), the women, from their chairs in a corner of the dance hall, avidly observe the men and take pleasure from critically evaluating their relative dancing skills.

The *lledhek* themselves usually come from an urban or semiurban background. Most are from areas of East Java where the *tayuban* tradition is or was strong, such as, most prominently, Blitar-Ponorogo, Mojokerto, or South Malang. Virtually all *lledhek* claim to be Muslim, some insisting quite strenuously that they are good Muslims. They learn their craft through a brief apprenticeship



1. *Tledhek* dancing *ngremo*.

2. Tipping the *ngremo* dancer.



to an already established *tledhek* to whom the younger woman usually has family or neighborhood ties. Careers are short: a woman may begin her apprenticeship in her mid-teens and will retire by her mid-twenties. During the years she dances, however, she can earn an extraordinary income, and most *tledhek* frankly acknowledge that it is the promise of such income which attracts them to the profession. In 1985, when East Javanese factory workers earned on average less than Rp 750 per day (about 70 cents), a *tledhek* could expect to receive Rp 25,000-50,000 (\$24-48) in direct wages for a two or three day festival. Her income in tips over the same period would usually exceed this amount. In addition, food and transportation are always provided by the *slametan* sponsor. The *tledhek*'s employment is of course intermittent and is restricted to the six or seven months of the year when dance festivals are held. In addition, the work entails several indirect expenses: an annual registration fee in her district (Rp 10,000) paid to the Department of Culture, tips of Rp 2,000-3,000 each to the *gamelan* and master of ceremonies (see below) who accompany her in the dance, and a considerable sum for jewelry and clothing, since in the course of a festival she is expected to change her dress seven or eight times. Nonetheless, until she is too old or marries,⁸ a popular *tledhek* may enjoy an income significantly greater than that of most urban middle-class professional women.

The number of *tledhek* hired to perform at a festival provides a general indication of the status of its sponsor. Only two women may appear at small events, while large occasions may have as many as eight or ten. Whatever the number of dancers, in East Java the festivity always opens with one or two women performing a distinctively East Javanese dance routine known as the *ngremo*. (The *ngremo* is also used to introduce such popular East Javanese art forms as *topeng* masked dance and *ludruk* theater, although there the dance is performed by a man.) The purpose of the *ngremo* is to stimulate the audience and welcome them on behalf of the festival sponsors. The dancer wears princely clothes: short-legged pants, a small vest, a shirt and breast cloth, all of dark material embroidered with gold thread, with a cloth (*sampur*) binding the dancer's waist, and a bell-clad leather anklet adorning her right leg.⁹ Both the cloth and the anklet accentuate the bold movement of the dance. The dancer's make-up includes a mascara moustache and small beard; her head is covered by a small turban jauntily tied Surabaya-style with one end cocked above the head like a feather. Although her dress is unambiguously male, there is no doubt as to the dancer's gender, and the male transvestism manages to evoke masculinity without detracting from the dancer's feminine beauty. In the *ngremo* for *tayuban*, the woman enters the dance hall and prances around it for several minutes, swinging her arms, pounding her bell-clad foot, and raising her legs boldly. She then moves to the center of the hall, plants her legs wide, and sings a song of welcome, in which, speaking for the festival sponsors (whom she names), she invites the guests to enjoy the evening's entertainment, and asks their

8. Some women may continue to dance even after they marry, at least until they become pregnant. In such instances, it is not unusual to see the *tledhek*'s husband at the side of the dance floor, eyeing the proceedings uneasily. Whatever their moral notoriety, most *tledhek* whom I knew during 1978-80 and 1985 had no difficulty in finding a partner for marriage. In addition, whatever its frequency in the past, prostitution among modern *tledhek* seems rare, although most urban middle-class Javanese would probably argue to the contrary.

9. The ankle bells are known as *gongseng* or *krincing* and are also used by dancers in East Javanese *topeng*.

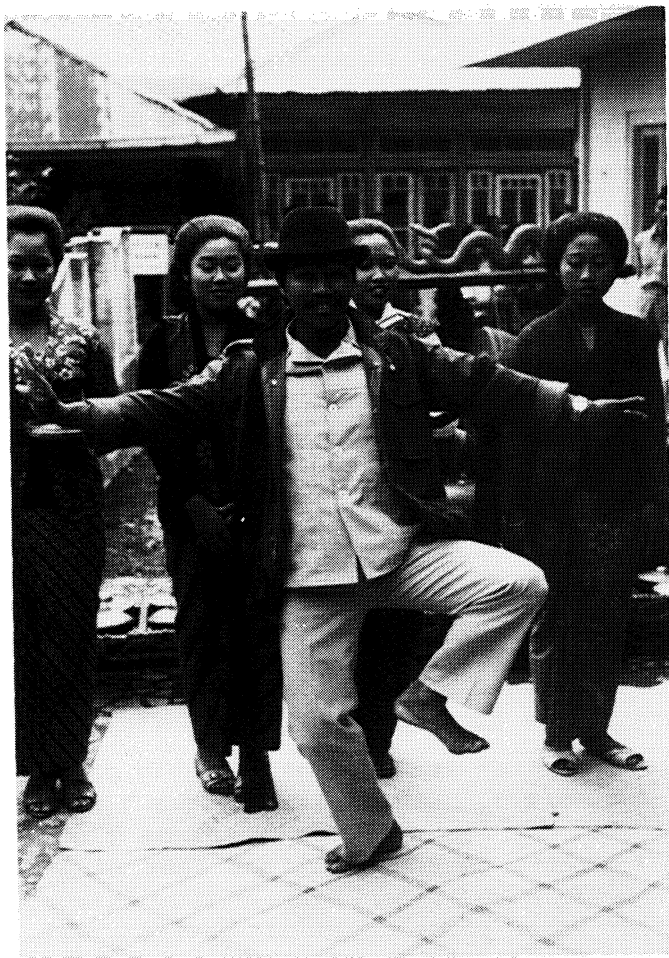
forgiveness lest in the course of the night there be any impropriety. Toward the end of her song, the festival host and hostess approach to give her money, sometimes affixing it with a safety pin to her vest, or, in the case of the male host, inserting it directly into her brassiere. Other family members may do the same. Before finally retiring, the *tledhek* dances freely again, accentuating her movements by pounding her foot and flipping her scarf. Throughout, one should note, the female *ngremo* provides extraordinary exception to Claire Holt's observation that in modern Java women dancers never swing their arms, raise their legs high, or otherwise assume bold stances.¹⁰ As *ngremo*, the *tledhek* does all of these, strutting proudly across the floor, arching her back, flexing her arms and pounding her feet.¹¹

Moments after the *ngremo*, the general *tayuban* opens with the appearance of a male master of ceremonies known as the *pelandang* or *pramugari*. The *pelandang* is a critically important player in the dance scene. Like the *tledhek*, he is expected to be a talented dancer and singer, and an outgoing (*blater*) gentleman who acts for the host in welcoming and entertaining guests. The *pelandang* prefaces the general dancing by himself performing a song and dance routine which, much like the *ngremo*, welcomes the guests and apologizes for any impropriety which may occur in the course of the night. *Tledhek* who did not join in the *ngremo* (and who are thus already dressed for the general dance) usually join him in this routine and take turns singing with him. The *pelandang*'s major responsibility, however, is not simply to entertain the audience but to supervise selection of the male dancers who are to "receive the dance scarf" (*ketiban sampur*) and take their turn dancing with (*ngibing*) the *tledhek*. This selection process makes clear that *tayuban* is not a communal dance as such, in which men dance at the same time all together, but a highly restrictive social activity, in which some men are given the floor, while others are relegated to the margins. Herein lies much of the dance's social tension, and here too lies the delicate responsibility of the *pelandang*.

The order of dancers is supposed to conform more or less to their status. Several simple rules guide the selection process, but these are clearest only with regard to the first, and thus most honored, guests. The festival sponsor (or, in village-sponsored festivals, the village chief, who is identified as the host) is always the first to dance. After him comes the village chief, although he may quickly defer the honor in favor of any district or subdistrict officers who may be in attendance. Not uncommonly, however, the extra-village government officials refuse the chief's tactful invitation, so that he dances first and they after him. Then come the village officials, followed--with progressively less clarity as to who precedes whom--by urban guests, wealthy merchants, high-status villagers, and, finally, ordinary village men, all of whom are similarly differentiated by age and status. Ranking occurs from beginning to end. In two or three day festivals, the selection process may be

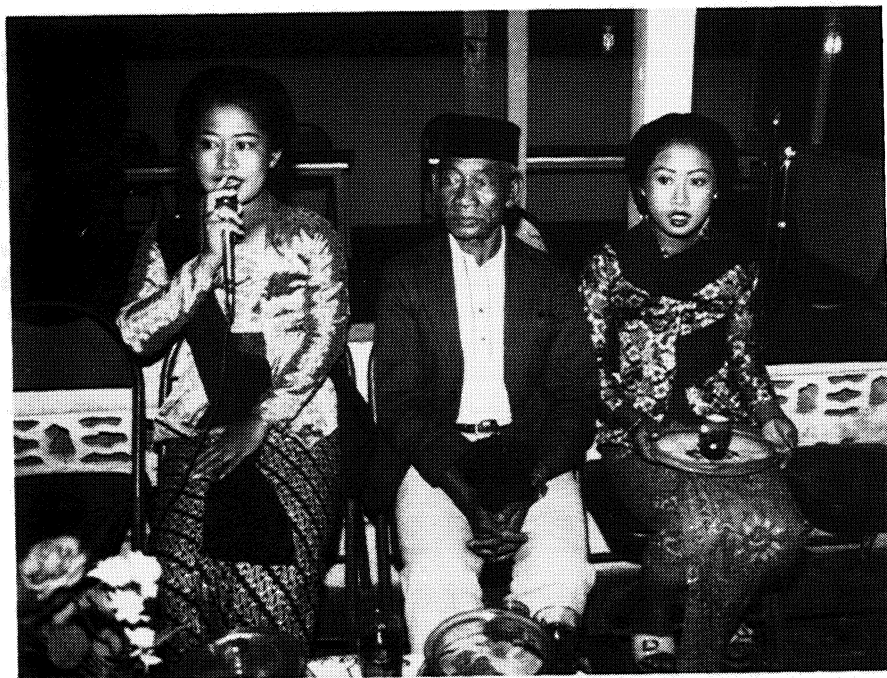
10. See Holt, *Art in Indonesia*, pp. 109-21, for her insightful discussion of the historical evolution in Javanese dance toward more subdued female expression. The *ngremo* is only a qualified counterexample, of course, since in theory the woman dancing represents a man.

11. Although the larger gender issues cannot be discussed here, it is interesting to note that Central Javanese *tayuban* does not open with the *ngremo* but utilizes a more restrained welcoming dance known as the *gambyong*. The play of sexual and transvestite images seen in the female *ngremo* is of course even more dramatically evident in East Javanese *ludruk* theater. See James L. Peacock, *Rites of Modernization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).



3. *Pelandang* master of ceremonies
(at spirit shrine).

4. *Ketiban sampur*
(receiving the scarf).



simplified by the first night of dance being restricted to close family of the festival sponsors, village officials, and honored guests from outside the community. Despite all these regulations, the selection process can still cause real tensions, and stories abound of individuals taking issue with the *pelandang*'s choice and causing a brawl. To reduce the likelihood of such a disaster, many communities make sure that the *pelandang* is a local man of high standing, sometimes even an active village official. The high status of the *pelandang* helps to remove his choice out of range of challenge, or so it is hoped. Problems arise nonetheless, and many men--especially in upland communities, with their tradition of communitarian inclusiveness as opposed to a lowland society regarded as hierarchical and factionalized--confess to finding the whole dance procedure humiliating. Indeed some men avoid dance festivals entirely for this reason, referring to *tayuban* as an effete custom which has no place among simple farmers. Despite such dissatisfaction, the selection procedure governing the dance seems to vary little from village to village, even between communities as distinct in their internal social organization as those of the Tengger mountains and of lowland *kampung* in south Malang. Such consistency across a widely varied social terrain suggests that the dance does not neatly "reflect" village social values. Rather, it ignores some while exaggerating others, a problem to which I return at the conclusion of this article.

The *pelandang* takes the floor, sings a song of welcome, and finally dances toward the guest who is to receive the dance scarf. Gracefully handing him the scarf, the *pelandang* then retires to a seat by the side of the dance floor, while two *tledhek* position themselves in chairs to the right and left of the honored guest. One woman carries a microphone, the other a small tray bearing a glass of beer, wine, or gin.¹² The first woman sings (*nyinden*) to the guest, and at the end of her song the second gives him the glass of alcohol. He downs it gingerly (enjoying its taste is not the point of alcohol consumption), gives each woman a small tip (*besel*),¹³ and then places a much larger cash payment on the small metal tray. This is the *howo*, a cash contribution from the guest to the host, intended to help defray the cost of festivities, and generally presented only where a *slametan* includes food and/or entertainment. Although the payment has a genuine economic purpose, the way it is presented in *tayuban* shows that it also has a less utilitarian aim. It is usually made in full view of the other guests, without the more discreet use of an envelope, as is usual in other kinds of *slametan*. The amount of the *howo* in *tayuban* tends to vary according to a man's social status and his relationship to the host, ranging (in 1985) from Rp 1,000 for ordinary villagers to Rp 5,000-10,000 for wealthier individuals. These are sizable sums by the standards of rural East Java. In 1985, agricultural laborers in this same region might expect to earn Rp 350-500 for a day's labor. In theory, of course, all *howo* are to be repaid, but a recipient is obliged to do so only if the original donor himself later sponsors a ritual festival, something poor and middle-income villagers may not do. Like the status issue, this economic factor effectively excludes many less-advantaged villagers, who frequently refer to it with real resentment.¹⁴

12. In today's *tayuban* it is always industrially manufactured alcohol that is consumed. Home-brewed rice wine and palm liquor went out of fashion in the 1960s.

13. Amounts usually average about Rp 100 per woman, although higher-status men may give tips of Rp 500 or Rp 1,000.

14. The most dramatically exclusionary aspect of *tayuban* economy is sponsorship itself. Surveys have revealed that few of the events cost less than \$750-1,000

The main recipient of the dance scarf is always accompanied on the dance floor by another man, known simply as his "partner" (*pengiring*). This partner is supposed to be of equal or somewhat lower status than the main dancer. He is also given a dance scarf, and, like the main dancer, enjoys a glass of alcohol after one or all of the three or four dances in which he is entitled to participate, although he defers paying the *howo*, until he himself is directly honored. These two dancers thus occupy center stage, while other men, seated or occasionally standing at the edge of the dance floor, clap their hands or sway with the music, as an indication of respect for the main dancer. In the normal dance format these other men do not themselves dance. If they wish to give special honor to a dancer, they will give a small tip to the gamelan orchestra, so that the man may perform some extra dances. Since the main dancer and his partner are given a glass of alcohol after each dance, such encores may in effect lead to inebriation. Sensitive to the criticisms of reform Muslims, some men may refuse the offered glass. Others, however, down it eagerly, and in especially raucous festivals, drunkenness is quite common.¹⁵

While stylistic details of the dance vary from region to region in East Java,¹⁶ its overall pattern is surprisingly uniform. The two male dancers begin by facing each other at a distance of five or six yards, with two (or more) *tledhek* standing on opposite sides of the dance floor to their right and left. As the music starts, the men bow to each other and extend their right hand and thumb in a polite gesture of invitation. As the *tledhek* take turns singing, the men slowly advance, pass each other, turn around, and advance again. This approach, pass, and turn sequence is the most basic choreographic pattern of *tayuban*, although its pace varies in accordance with the music chosen by the main dancer. Within this general pattern, each individual dancer adopts what in classical dance terms would be described as a relatively "refined" (*alus*) pattern of male dance. Legs and arms are kept open, and the movements are slow, expansive, and forcefully impassive. Dancers refrain from adopting positions which could be regarded as "strong" variants of classical dance. That is, they do not raise their legs sideways, fully perpendicular to the body in a right angle at the knee, but instead utilize a much more restrained, half-lift movement. Similarly, rather than cocking up the arms in a powerful stance, they keep their arms and shoulders relaxed and partially lowered as the hands are gracefully rotated. The dancers move across the dance floor through successively shifting their weight from left to right, alternating this with raising

to sponsor, while the larger ones could be three to five times that amount. See Hefner, "The Problem of Preference," and *Hindu Javanese*, pp. 216-38. Guests at a festival can expend five or more times that amount.

15. In recent years the custom surrounding the serving of alcohol has changed in many regions. In some communities, the host provides only one drink to each dancer, and individual guests who wish to drink more are obliged to buy liquor from merchants who peddle their wares in a corner of the dance hall. This seems to have effectively reduced alcohol consumption in many places. In communities where the *tayuban* tradition is especially popular, however, this commercial innovation is less common.

16. East Javanese tend to prefer a somewhat stronger musical style in *tayuban* than has been reported among Central Javanese, and, in general, the *kendhang* (two-headed horizontal drum) in much *oosthoek* gamelan leads the orchestra in a sharper fashion, providing a more pronounced sound contour for dance movement.



5. In dance.

6. Tipping and drinking beer.



and extending their arms and legs.¹⁷ The impression is one of relaxed poise rather than the sinewy relentlessness of Central Javanese classical dance.

Sometimes men do shift into more overtly powerful choreographic movements. In a feigned flurry of passion, for example, one dancer may break from his fellows and stride boldly across the floor toward a particular *tledhek* (who does her best to ignore him), then plant himself firmly just inches away from her, with legs apart and arms outstretched in a dance gesture of passionate embrace. In one dance format, onlookers are allowed to join in the more general dance, in a pattern known as *julafuli*. Each *tledhek* throws her scarf flirtatiously around a particular male, who then dances face to face with her while moving around the perimeter of the dance floor, with other men dancing alone, following just behind. The recipient of a *tledhek*'s attention is expected to tip her when the dance is over. As the night progresses, the number of such less restrained dances may increase, particularly after all of the high-status guests have had an opportunity to receive the *sampur* scarf. The formal reserve of the dance format may be undermined by drinking and revelry. In particularly bawdy festivals, dancing may be repeatedly interrupted by drinking bouts, when the men kneel in a circle on the floor, putting tips in a metal dish (money divided between the gamelan and *tledhek*), and, for each cash payment, helping themselves to a healthy swig of alcohol, presented by the *tledhek*. Unused to alcohol, many men get dizzily intoxicated, and the regulated formality and status ranking of the early evening may appear to give way to joyously blurred revelry, with the men singing raucously, patting the *tledheks*' behinds, and doing comic imitations of both the women and other men. Even in such moments of bleary-eyed communitas, however, a strong element of social differentiation remains. First, intoxication in practice is an exclusive prerogative of high-status guests, who are the only visitors who are both likely to be invited to drink abundantly and sufficiently audacious to risk offending the host or other villagers by doing so to the point of intoxication. Second, the *tledhek* never drink, and always attempt to protect themselves from excessive male advances by maintaining an alluring but quite controlled reserve. While they may smile and chat with a dance partner, the women cannot risk acknowledging the advances of individual men. The gay commotion of the dance floor is first and always a man's affair, and a high-status man's affair at that.

At large festivals, the dancing continues through the night until daybreak, at which point the *tledhek*, *pelandang*, and gamelan players retire for a few hours' sleep. At small festivals, the dancing may last only a portion of one night, and never approach the heights of larger parties. However long the festival lasts, each guest is formally entitled to receive the dance scarf only once, and, unless the dance breaks down into a more unregulated format, most men depart for home once they have had their turn on the dance floor.

Tayuban in Regional and Historical Perspective

Claire Holt has noted the traditional association in Indonesia between dance and rites of fertility and blessing, but has observed that in modern Java the sacral role of dance has declined. It has become "largely secular entertainment." The only art form that preserves an explicit religious function, she notes, is *wayang* shadow theater.¹⁸ However, Holt's assessment was handicapped

17. Compare Claire Holt's discussion of men's dance in her *Art in Indonesia*, p. 102.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 103-4.

by the general lack of detailed ethnographic information on art traditions in Java's less "central" rural terrains, and, in retrospect, it is clear that her observations on the desacralized nature of Javanese dance were short-sighted. In both his general work on Javanese *volksvertoningen* and his less widely read report on the culture and history of the *oosthoek*, Pigeaud's brilliant analysis of popular dance consistently indicates that *tayuban* and similar dance traditions have long been associated with rites of fertility and blessing, most commonly in the context of annual rites of village purification.¹⁹ More recent dance researchers in Central Java have confirmed that *tayuban* and rites of fertility and blessing are still linked in a good number of rural communities.²⁰

A similar linkage is also characteristic of the dance tradition in the *oosthoek* territories with which I am primarily concerned in the present article. Here however the picture is quite complex. Evidence from two regions in particular--Blambangan and the Tengger highlands--suggests that the present-day tradition of *tayuban* (or similar dances with different names) represents in fact a relatively recent development, in which *tayuban* displaced an earlier, more explicitly religious dance tradition, in part as a result of the increasing influence of Islam and Central Javanese cultural styles. Historical data from Blambangan and Tengger thus provide insights into several little-known dance traditions of rural East Java, and shed light on two of the most important currents of modern Javanese culture: the growing influence of Islam, and the decline of non-standard regional traditions. Dance tradition here can only be understood from the perspective of a larger regional history.

Blambangan and the Tengger highlands are both located in the *oosthoek* or eastern salient of East Java, Tengger just to the east of the city of Malang, and Blambangan in the far east across the straits from Bali. As with most of the *oosthoek*, both regions lay beyond the *nagara agung* and *manca nagara* territories controlled by the Central Javanese courts which rose to power early in the seventeenth century, and from which emanated many of the distinctive linguistic and cultural styles of modern Java. When Sultan Agung was first consolidating Mataram's power in central Java, Tengger and Blambangan were the last Hindu population centers on the island. Blambangan was an independent principality with strong ties to nearby Hindu Bali, and on several occasions its court was the target of Sultan Agung's armies.²¹ While returning from Blambangan to Mataram, Sultan Agung swept through the Tengger highlands, hauling off heathen slaves from the mountain territory.²² Slave raiding continued at

19. Th. G. Th. Pigeaud, "Aanteekeningen betreffende den Javaanschen Oosthoek," in *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde* 72 (1932): 271; idem, *Javaanse Volksvertoningen, Bijdrage tot de Beschrijving van Land en Volk* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1938).

20. See Soedarsono, *Tari-Tarian Rakyat di Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta* (Yogyakarta: Akademi Seni Tari Indonesia, 1976), pp. 14, 39, 144, 194; Ben Suharto, *Tayub: Pengamatan dari Segi Tari Pergaulan serta Kaitannya dengan Unsur Upacara Kesuburan* (Yogyakarta: Akademi Seni Tari Indonesia, 1980), pp. 32, 60-65.

21. See M. C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), pp. 79-96; Ann Kumar, "Javanese Historiography in and of the 'Colonial Period': A Case Study," in *Perceptions of the Past in Southeast Asia*, ed. A. Reid and D. Marr (Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979), pp. 187-206.

22. G. P. Rouffaer, "Tenggereseen," in *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indie* (Leiden: Brill, 1921), p. 300.

regular intervals from 1620 to 1650, forcing the region's remnant Hindu population farther up into the Tengger massif's more inaccessible terrain.²³ Here and in Blambangan, however, Mataram's attacks did not so much bring the *oosthoek* under the control of Central Java as simply decimate the local population and prevent the re-emergence of a regional rival to Mataram.

Even after Sultan Agung's death the *oosthoek* remained a strife-ridden no-man's land. In 1686, the famous rebel Surapati established himself in the coastal town of Pasuruan to the north of the Tengger highlands. In cooperation with the Balinese and Blambangan princes, he forged a loose alliance of principalities in the *oosthoek* which effectively opposed both Mataram and the Dutch. Although these two combined to attack and kill Surapati in 1706, many of his followers, operating from Blambangan and remote territories like Tengger, continued to put up resistance. On taking control of the region in 1743, the Dutch launched a series of pacification campaigns, finally ridding Tengger of insurgents in 1764. The Blambangan principality then fell to the Dutch after a series of assaults from 1767 to 1772.²⁴ To split the region's population from the Balinese, the Dutch actually encouraged Islamization in Blambangan, with the result that the only nominally Hindu ethnic Javanese population to survive into the nineteenth and twentieth century was the small peasant population of the Tengger highlands. Its Hinduism was a Hinduism without courts, castes, or most of the literary-aesthetic heritage of earlier Hindu civilization. A century of conflict, moreover, had radically depopulated much of the *oosthoek*, and, so as to exploit the region's economic potential, the Dutch encouraged Central Javanese and Madurese immigration to the area.²⁵ This contributed to the further decline of the *oosthoek*'s regional traditions, including those related to ritual and dance.

Although Dutch reports from Tengger and Blambangan note the existence of a strong tradition of ritual dance, by the beginning of the twentieth century this tradition was in a state of severe decline. In writing of the earlier existence of a dance tradition in Blambangan which, like Bali, involved invocation of ancestral spirits,²⁶ Pigeaud attributed its decline to the "increasing influence of modern orthodox Islamic faith" brought to the region by Central Javanese and Madurese immigrants. However, even at the time of Pigeaud's research (the 1920s), he noted that the *gandrung* dance--today a largely secularized, Blambangan version of *tayuban*--was still used in some communities during rites of village purification, known in this region as *muja*. Elsewhere the religious function of the *gandrung* had disappeared, and, although the women who danced at *gandrung* still sang ballads containing religious references, their original meaning was no longer taken seriously. The *gandrung*, Pigeaud concluded, was becoming a male amusement similar to that of *tayuban* in areas of Central Javanese influence.

23. On the impact of regional violence on precolonial Tengger settlement see Hefner, *Hindu Javanese*, p. 66.

24. On the fate of Surapati's followers in Tengger, see J. E. Jasper, *Tengger en de Tenggereezen* (Batavia: Kolff, 1926), p. 25. On Blambangan, see Ricklefs, *A History*, p. 96, and Kumar, "Javanese Historiography," pp. 190-92.

25. Ibid., p. 192; R. E. Elson, "The Cultivation System and 'Agricultural Involution'" (Clayton, Australia: Department of History research paper, Monash University), p. 26.

26. Pigeaud, "Aanteekeningen," p. 271.

In the Tengger highlands, a significant portion of the indigenous population has remained non-Islamic to the present day, and dance has continued to play a prominent role in religious ritual. Even here, however, the form of this dance has been strongly influenced by Muslim and pan-Javanese sensibilities, particularly as regards the role of local women. Early Dutch travelers to the region, for example, reported that the non-Islamic Tengger population did not engage in *tayuban*, although in nearby Muslim communities no wedding or circumcision was considered prestigious without the dance. Tengger reportedly regarded *tayuban* "with a great contempt."²⁷ According to these and other reports, however, Tengger regularly engaged in non-*tayuban* religious dance. During weddings, ritual purification of the dead (*entas-entas*), village festivals, and other rites in which the souls of ancestors were invoked, men and women alike joined in dance processions in which they greeted the descending family spirits.²⁸

Although today Tengger priests still perform the same rites of soul invocation, women no longer participate, and male dancing has been reorganized in a fashion consistent with the pan-Javanese *tayuban*. The style, format, and terminology for the dance are identical to patterns in nearby Muslim regions, and the *tledhek* who are hired (all of whom are Muslim) are drawn from the same regional pool. Some religious rituals still incorporate dance, but it now conforms to *tayuban* styles. At large household and village festivals, for example, *tledhek* are invited to the village spirit shrine (*sanggar*), and there, in the company of a Hindu priest, they dance before ancestral spirits invoked to the shrine by the incense, offerings, and prayer presented by the priest. Only when this dance ritual is complete may the *tledhek* return to the village to participate in general dancing. Even there, however, a small offering is kept at the side of the dance floor, to serve as a perch from which ancestral souls may enjoy the conviviality of the dance.²⁹ With regard to the role of *tayuban* in religious rite, Tengger priests comment that the dance is an offering (*sajenan*) to the spirits. They also point to the interaction of male and female in the dance, citing it as a symbol of a more general process of creation and renewal accomplished through the fertile interaction of man and woman, sky and earth, land and water, and other sacred dualities which are at the source of life itself.³⁰

Similar commentary is heard in nearby Muslim communities where, to this day, *tayuban* is also often used in religious rites. In Muslim communities, of course, instead of the Hindu priest's liturgy Arabic and Javanese prayers are offered. These are recited by the caretaker (*juru kunci*) responsible for maintaining the local shrine for village guardian spirits (*roh bau rekso*). The role of *tayuban* in ritual practice is otherwise very similar to that seen in

27. J. D. van Lerwerden, "Aanteekeningen Nopens de Zeden en Gebruiken der Bevolking van het Tenggers Gebergte," in *Verhandelingen van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen* 20 (1844), p. 69.

28. Ibid., pp. 69-72; H. J. Domis, "Aanteekeningen over Het Gebergte Tinger," in *Verhandelingen van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen* 13 (1832), pp. 347-52.

29. It is rare even in Muslim communities that *tayuban* would take place without the provision of some sort of *sajenan* offering.

30. This imagery of male-female and fertile dualities is common in much of popular Javanese ritual tradition, but it is perhaps no more fully elaborated than in Tengger ritual and mythology. See Hefner, *Hindu Javanese*, passim.



7. Hindu priest presenting offerings;
tledhek to rear.



8. Village official dances at a *dhanyang* spirit shrine.

Hindu Tengger. The dance is identified as an "offering," and during large festivals it is always held at the village shrine before being performed anywhere else in the community. At the shrine, the *juru kunci* recites prayers, presents offerings, and invokes the presence of guardian spirits, who are then invited to enjoy the dance. As I discuss further below, such syncretic religious activity has not gone unnoticed by more orthodox-minded Muslims, and over the past fifty years there have been strong pressures in many Muslim communities first to "secularize" *tayuban*, by abolishing the requirement that its initial performance should be at the spirit shrine, and second to ban it entirely.

It thus appears that local dance traditions in Blambangan and Tengger have been profoundly influenced by larger political and cultural developments of the past centuries. It is perhaps most remarkable that even in the one region of East Java which managed to preserve an explicitly non-Islamic tradition the dance was transformed to become more consistent with other areas of Java. Jasper's assessment of the causes of the change in Tengger dance styles is probably accurate in this regard: he writes that, under the influence of Muslim Javanese opinion that "good girls don't dance in public," the role of village women in dance was suppressed and the *tledhek* introduced in their place.³¹ The Tengger example provides a regionally specific solution to Claire Holt's "moot question" as to why the earlier heritage of male and female dance in Java gave way in Muslim times to a dance tradition in which ordinary women no longer danced.³² In an Islamizing Java, as female dance came to be regarded by many people as indecent, the use of an outsider-professional allowed men to continue to dance without compromising the good reputation of their women. Ironically, it is possible that in an area like Tengger the introduction of a professional woman dancer may have encouraged local dance to become more libertine. With a paid professional from outside the village, men would feel free of moral constraints which might bind them when dancing with local women. The "liberation" of dance from certain local mores in the long run, of course, might only serve further to antagonize the moral sensibilities of an increasingly influential orthodox Muslim community. The politicization of dance culture so dramatically evident in the nineteenth century only intensified in the twentieth.

Aesthetic Politics in the Modern Era

Although Muslim reformists criticized *tayuban* dancing even in the colonial period, efforts to curb the dance increased in the first years of Indonesian independence. Like so many issues of the time, the issue was eventually drawn into the competition between national political parties, with the result that, under the Old Order, regional governments in East Java never proposed a uniform dance policy. In the early 1950s, few important parties in East Java openly defended *tayuban*, since almost all could find something they disliked about it. Nationalist Party (PNI) leaders, for example, complained about its expense and libertine sexuality. Communist officials criticized both its expense and the exclusion of village poor. According to the reports of officials I interviewed, however, neither nationalist nor communist activists were interested in calling for the outright abolition of the dance. They recognized that it was popular among a significant portion of their constituency, and integral to syncretic

31. Jasper, *Tengger en de Tenggereezen*, p. 69.

32. Holt, *Art in Indonesia*, p. 112.

ritual traditions with which they were themselves frequently in sympathy.³³ Officially, therefore, PNI and PKI officers criticized what they regarded as the dance's excesses. In practice, however, they usually looked the other way and allowed the dance to continue unimpeded.

Attitudes among Muslim party leaders in East Java appear to have been equally complex. Urban-based reformists associated with Muhammadiyah, the Islamic social welfare organization, had spoken out against *tayuban* even in the 1930s. After independence they joined forces with like-minded critics in the Muslim political party, Masyumi, and in the mid-1950s managed to have the dance effectively banned in such East Javanese cities as Pasuruan, Probolinggo, and Malang. Their achievements were less dramatic, however, in rural areas, where Masyumi tended to be weaker than the party of Muslim "traditionalists," Nahdatul Ulama. Of all the major political parties in East Java, NU had the most complex dance policy, and it would undergo considerable change over the years. During the 1950s, higher-level NU officials tended to be highly critical of *tayuban*, much like their counterparts in Masyumi and Muhammadiyah. In many areas of the countryside, however, local NU leaders quietly tolerated or even defended the dance, citing the fact that in many communities it was a long-established *adat* custom. Although Clifford Geertz reports that in Pare *tayuban* was an exclusively *abangan* habit,³⁴ this was by no means the case in the districts of Malang, Pasuruan, Probolinggo, and Lumajang. In this region the dance was often popular in traditionalist Muslim communities solidly committed to Nahdatul Ulama. Significantly, it also appears to have been found in both ethnic Javanese and Madurese communities. In some such villages, moreover, the dance was also celebrated in conjunction with annual festivals at shrines of first-founding village ancestors (*cikal bakal*), a fact which is remarkable only because many Javanese regard *tayuban* at ancestral shrines as an index of *abangan* culture inconsistent with traditionalist orthodoxy. Since the tumultuous events of 1965-66, however, much of this has changed. Higher-level NU officials in these districts have intensified their efforts to abolish *tayuban*, and their efforts appear to have met with considerable success. Although even in 1985 I encountered *tayuban* dancing in some NU-oriented communities in these districts, in general the dance was in a state of severe decline. The development is symptomatic of other changes occurring among supporters of Nahdatul Ulama in this region, where "traditionalists" are adopting programs previously regarded as "reformist," thus muting the schism between these two sectors of the Muslim community.

Under the New Order government, Golkar officials in the region have vacillated in their attitude toward *tayuban*. On the one hand, Golkar's national policy stresses the positive role of traditional arts, their importance as symbols of regional and national identity, and their potential profit as objects of domestic and international tourism. In line with this position, lower-level Golkar officials with whom I spoke in 1979 and 1980 generally defended *tayuban*, criticizing what they regarded as the meddling assaults of Muslim reformists on established village traditions. District and subdistrict officials, moreover, were a common sight at large *tayuban* festivals. When I returned to East Java in 1985, however, I found that many of these same officials had become more

33. For a discussion of the role of PNI officials in the spirit cult tradition in mountain Pasuruan during this period, see Hefner, "Islamizing Java? Religion and Politics in Rural East Java," *Journal of Asian Studies*, in press.

34. Geertz, *Religion of Java*, p. 300.

circumspect in their comments, sometimes even acknowledging the validity of Muslim criticisms and joining in calls for the dance's abolition. Their change of heart does not appear to be product of a clear and uniform shift on the part of Golkar strategists, but may very well have come about because of the growing influence of Islam in this region of East Java, where, in recent years, there has been a spectacular increase in religious orthodoxy even in former centers of nominally Islamic Javanese tradition.³⁵ Village officials in the districts of Malang, Pasuruan, Probolinggo, and Lumajang have in many instances initiated anti-*tayuban* policies of their own. Such initiatives have not been confined to NU-oriented communities, where, as noted above, leaders have recently taken a harder line on both *tayuban* and spirit shrine activity. Even in many former PNI strongholds, the past few years have witnessed a significant decline in *tayuban*. For example, in two mountain subdistricts in the district of Pasuruan where I had worked during 1979-80, more than half of the sixteen communities which in 1979 still sponsored *bersih desa* festivals with *tayuban* had by 1985 either abolished the dance or restricted it by prohibiting alcohol consumption or cutting back on the number of nights of dancing. Private sponsorship of *tayuban* festivals has similarly declined. Almost all of these were communities which in the 1950s had been regarded as strongholds of the PNI and Javanese spirit-cult traditions.

Just as the social supports for *tayuban* traditionally were complex and multivariate--linking status, ritual, and economic concerns--so too the forces contributing to the dance's decline today are multi-layered and uneven. *Tayuban*, one must remember, was never a "pure" art form. It had always also been a peculiar form of conspicuous consumption, in which sponsors and dancers alike expressed and sustained a certain image of social standing. Ribald and sexual, the dance was, at least in some communities, also a vehicle of religious piety. Even prior to Indonesian independence, Muslim reformists challenged the sacral pretensions of the dance, criticizing it as indecent and wasteful. As these criticisms intensified after independence, they were also politicized along party lines, and the political stalemate of the Old Order held reform Muslim efforts in check. During the first years of the New Order, a heightened sense of conviction and, for a short while, expanded political influence allowed critics of the dance to make headway. Nahdatul Ulama leaders pursued the anti-*tayuban* and anti-spirit cult campaign more vigorously. Meanwhile, the collapse of nationalist and left-wing ideologies effectively eliminated some of the most important defenders of spirit cults and, indirectly, *tayuban*. Golkar's emphasis through government, education, and media on the importance of religion also encouraged many once-nominal Muslims in this region of East Java to take their faith more seriously. As I have discussed elsewhere,³⁶ a heightened sense of Islamic orthodoxy among once-nominal Muslims has also been abetted by a crisis of faith among village youth with regard to the *adat* custom and traditional beliefs of their elders. Identifying themselves less and less in terms of simple village allegiance, a new generation of village youth is skeptical of ancestral and spirit-cult beliefs which earlier provided a social idiom for village relations.

These cultural changes have also been influenced by important changes in rural political economy, in a way which has also undermined *tayuban*'s appeal. Political changes of the 1960s combined with the "green revolution" of the

35. See Hefner, "Islamizing Java?"

36. Ibid.

1970s have encouraged middle- and upper-income farmers--those most likely in the past to be sponsors of *tayuban*--to channel their productive surplus into goods which produce wealth rather than those which disperse it in several days of spectacular excess. During this same period, affluent villagers--freed of the political threat posed by the mobilized peasantry of the early 1960s--have come to appreciate new, more privatized forms of conspicuous consumption associated with the flood of luxury goods which swept into rural Java in the 1970s.³⁷ These goods do not benefit from the sanction of being identified with local *adat*, and the standards of social excellence which they reflect are similarly linked to a much less parochial village status system. Under changing political and cultural conditions, a new economy of social distinction is taking shape, with new patterns of exemplary pleasure little interested in the traditional arts. Like the political order of which it is part, this economic and status system is far more regional, indeed national, in scope than the old ritual festival scheme, anchored as it was in village social relations. There is a political economy to this aesthetic transition.

What of the village poor in all this? Always excluded from the pleasures of the dance floor, they have neither the interest nor the influence to preserve an aesthetic tradition toward which they often felt keen resentment. In most of this region of East Java, we are unlikely to witness any mass-based effort to defend *tayuban*. As in traditional times, the key to an understanding of the resilience and/or decline of the dance still lies not in the pure play of internal form, but in the larger network of relations linking dance activity to political, religious, and economic order.

Conclusion

The general lesson from this overview of popular dance in an area of East Java is a familiar one: that to understand the organization and change of an aesthetic tradition, we need situate it in the larger world where it plays a social role and finds its meanings. In a certain sense, this lesson has long been understood in studies of Javanese art. Students of the courtly arts, for example, have always appreciated the role of the *kraton* in sustaining Java's best-known art traditions. Some of those same students, however, have been less successful, or perhaps less interested, in exploring the social worlds which have sustained Java's popular arts. Too often, in fact, there is a tacit assumption that the courts have been the fount from which all of Java's important art traditions have sprung. This assumption ignores the message of earlier scholars of Java's arts, such as Pigeaud, and it has also resulted in the unfortunate neglect of those rural aesthetic traditions which are least directly linked to court patrons and, all too often, fastest changing in modern times. The *tayuban* example shows clearly that--whatever the very real stylistic influences exercised by the court--dance activity itself was not a product of popular efforts to imitate what was always done better at the courts. The resilience of the dance tradition in an earlier East Java derived from its being woven into a way of life which had its own richly contoured status concerns, spiritual views, and political-economic investments. This larger configurational perspective on the dance also helps us to understand the seeming inevitability of the continued decline of *tayuban*. The village world in which this form of aesthetic consumption made sense is giving way to one with new luxury goods, an altered

37. I discuss elements of this shift in "consumer taste" away from ritual festival goods in "The Problem of Preference."

sense of popular identity, and new forms of political power. In studies of this aesthetic and social transition, it appears that the cultural influence of *priyayi* and the courts has often been exaggerated, while that of Javanese Islam has been neglected.

Finally, the *tayuban* example provides one more cautionary lesson for our understanding of the arts, in Java or elsewhere. Some years ago, Claire Holt and Gregory Bateson commented that dance offers unusually rich "corroborative materials" for the study of cultural personality, since its intense stylization provides a heightened image of the features of temperament which people value.³⁸ A similar assumption runs through many discussions of Java's arts. Anyone who has witnessed a finely wrought dance performance in Java cannot help feeling that in some sense it is powerfully expressive of more general Javanese notions of self, emotion, and grace. The *tayuban* example, however, suggests we should be cautious about overextending such a characterization. All dance has a history and social organization, and in our effort to appreciate its visible form we must also take into account its prior (and largely invisible) genesis. In the case of "high" art traditions like those of Java's courts, this means we must explore the link between art and personality with much greater attention to the social organization and communication involved in performance, including the cultural politics which determine for whom it is presented and whom it excludes. Looking at art performance in this more sociological fashion helps us to recognize that in all societies there is more than one aesthetic sensibility, and it encourages us not to project automatically the values expressed in a performance on all members of society. It is largely because of such a tacit repression of Java's social and aesthetic diversity that a dance form like *tayuban* appears anomalous, and that Java's Islamic aesthetic traditions have been so little studied.

The same cautionary note--not to project too quickly the ideals of temperament and expression seen in an art form on all members of a society--applies equally well to popular arts like *tayuban*. Historical and ethnographic evidence clearly indicates that the dance's appeal in the *oosthoek* was product of an evolving cultural politics, in which some aesthetic sensibilities were repressed and others highlighted. In Tengger, the role of village women in dance was abolished. Similarly, the exclusionary status ranking integral to the dance caused deep resentment among many village poor. Finally, to many Muslim Javanese, the drinking and sexual flirtation of the dance were not expressive of shared sensibilities, but simply irreligious and indecent. As the example suggests, the arts emerge from society and culture, but they are not necessarily a privileged beacon of collective meanings or common temperament. They are always a product of a cultural politics which makes "reflectionist" accounts of their relation to personality extremely problematic. As public representations, they are just one among several evocative possibilities. It is a cultural politics which determines just which expressive possibilities in a society come to the fore and become public traditions. It was such a politics which gave *tayuban* its earlier appeal, and which today, in a changing Java, seems certain to bring about its demise.

38. Claire Holt and Gregory Bateson, "Form and Function of the Dance in Bali," in *Traditional Balinese Culture*, ed. Jane Belo (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), pp. 322, 329.