Debate

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Tall Tree, nest of the wind is an extraordinary, rich volume in which Ben Arps develops and explicates a new field of study: a philology of performance. The principal purpose of this book is to demonstrate what a philological manner of investigation can offer to the study of performance (p. 27). Arps's study, however, is no mere defence of philological practices but instead, in presenting and illuminating a ‘reformed philology’, points towards a revisioning of philological methodology as a whole.

Both philology and wayang are concerned fundamentally with interpretation and contextualization. From this basic premise, the book’s core descriptive and analytical focus is brought to bear on performance through the lens of five key characteristics of philological method that consider both written and performance texts to be artefactual (that is, they are not just material but also made), interpretable, intertextual, contextual, and historical. These interconnected domains of enquiry help to explain why a single historical performance of a shadow-play, in this case a performance by Ki Anom Soeroto of the wayang shadow-play Dewa Ruci in Amsterdam in 1987, has the form it does, and why modes of philological enquiry enable a deeper, more extensive understanding of its noetic and affective dimensions.

At first glance, Arps’s choice to present his study of a specific historical wayang performance as an artefact, wrapped up in the mantle of philology’s foundational form—the text edition—seems somewhat idiosyncratic. This is particularly the case because the philological format has far-reaching effects since it transmutes and monumentalizes the performance and creates a philological object for careful study and reflection (pp. 8–9). In moving beyond the transient materiality of the performance event, the philological approach thus creates a textual artefact for readers that transcends the experience of its original live audience. Arps’s philological treatment of performance as an edition, with its introduction, translation, transcript, illustrations, and explana-
tory commentary, therefore becomes a way to study historical performance in all its fullness.

Yet, the 1987 *Dewa Ruci* performance in Amsterdam was ‘not particularly exceptional’ (p. 19). Why, then, is it deserving of so much scholarly, and, especially, philological, attention? There are a number of reasons. The *Dewa Ruci* is ‘an emblematic play in an emblematic genre’ (p. 6). Bratasena’s quest for enlightenment embodies Javanese multistranded and multilayered ‘Buddhic’ religiosity. Such intricate philosophical and mystical exegesis is not for the faint-hearted. One of the singular achievements of this book is in opening up such a rich vein of understanding about the ways in which this religiosity continues to appeal to the traditionally inclined in predominantly Islamic Indonesia. Like wayang itself, Arps’s philological project on ‘narrative worldmaking’ becomes ‘indexical’ by pointing to, and calling up, innumerable intertextual historical and contextual associations from ‘wayang’s storehouse of knowledge about the past for the present’ (p. 61).

The very fine translation is the key entry point to ‘the form and craftsmanship’ (p. 7) of the historical performance. It is possible to read this book simply for the delight of its story and language. But unlike traditional textual philology, the philology of performance also requires the representation of ‘non-textual modalities’. The result is the inclusion in the edition of explicit information on music and musical atmosphere, on settings and action, and on illustrations that bring the play to life. The story and characters, already familiar to me from classical Javanese poetic traditions, are enhanced by the performative elements of this edition.

Access to metatextual information and detail is provided by the extensive annotations which clarify particular instances of language, music, and puppetry. The annotations provide access to the performance process, to the interpretation of the *dalang* (puppeteer), and, especially, to the wayang traditions and stories on which the performance is built. The annotations do more than point out the metaphorical and allegorical elements that a reader (or an audience member) would never notice. They also explicate borrowings from, and responses to, performance practices and to Javanese textual traditions more broadly. Allusions, often comic or risqué, to the social and political context of the original 1987 performance, including to the development and social policies of the New Order period and to the presence and experiences of the performers themselves in Amsterdam, are woven into the performance and are equally deserving of explication for twenty-first-century readers.

Extensive annotations of this kind both help and hinder the reader. Some may even consider these annotations, which run to 136 finely printed pages, to