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The Role of Visual Art in Indonesian Stage and Artistic Design: Perspective, Expressionism, Constructivism, and the Readymade

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ABSTRACT

Scenography has been theorised almost entirely from European and North American practice, while Indonesian writing on *tata panggung* has remained largely a practical literature of stagecraft; as a result, the traffic between movements in the history of visual art and Indonesian stage practice has seldom been examined as a historical problem in its own right. This article examines how four visual art movements — Renaissance linear and atmospheric perspective, German Expressionism, Russian Constructivism, and the Dadaist readymade — entered the practice of stage design (*tata panggung*) and artistic design (*tata artistik*), and asks how far each can be traced within Indonesian theatre. The study is a qualitative, historical-comparative literature study. Its corpus comprises art-historical and scenographic scholarship on the four movements, together with documentation of four Indonesian cases: the painted backdrops of Komedi Stamboel and the commercial troupes that followed it, Indonesian stage practice during the Expressionist period, the bamboo constructions of Nandang Aradea and Teater Studio Indonesia, and object-based staging in the play texts of Afrizal Malna and in Teater Sae's *Proyek Hamlet*. Each Indonesian case was tested against a three-level scale of evidence before any connection was asserted. The principal finding is that the relationship is not uniform but takes four distinct evidentiary forms — commercial transmission, non-transmission, documented training-based influence, and comparative resemblance — and that the familiar claim that Indonesian theatre actively adapted these movements holds, on the evidence assembled here, for one case only. The article contributes a procedure for distinguishing influence from analogy in the comparative history of local scenography.

KEYWORDS

Komedi Stamboel
Nandang Aradea
postdramatic theatre
scenography

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INTRODUCTION

In a hired hall in Surabaya in the early 1890s, a troupe called Komedi Stamboel would open a scene by lowering a painted cloth on which a corridor of horseshoe arches and marble pillars receded toward a single point on the horizon. The cloth was flat and the stage was shallow, yet the audience saw a palace stretching away into depth. Roughly a century later, in Serang in Banten, a company built a circular enclosure of bamboo poles, lashed at the joints and left deliberately exposed, and seated its audience inside it, within arm's reach of the performers and the wet clay they worked. Both are acts of stage design — *tata panggung* — and both borrow a way of organising space from outside the theatre: the first from the perspective construction of Renaissance painting, the second from the open steel and timber armatures of Russian Constructivism. Between them lies the problem this article addresses.

The dependence of theatre on visual art is old and well attested. Long before the word *scenography* entered academic use, the painter's craft — the handling of line, colour, texture, and illusion on a flat or three-dimensional surface — already determined how audiences perceived the space, the time, and the psychology of a dramatic event. From the painted *skēnē* of the Ancient Greek stage to the projected environments of contemporary performance, the boundary between the fine arts and stage design has repeatedly been redrawn. It should be said at the outset, however, that Indonesian performance was never a blank page awaiting this influence. *Wayang kulit*, the Javanese shadow theatre, possessed a highly conventionalised and frankly non-illusionistic scenographic grammar — flat leather puppets, a taut cotton screen, a single lamp, and a fixed vocabulary of scene types — centuries before Komedi Stamboel introduced perspectival illusion to the Indonesian stage (Brandon, 1970).

Existing scholarship approaches this terrain from four distinct positions. A first body of work treats scenography as a holistic compositional practice rather than as decoration: Howard (2002) defines it as a synthesis of space, text, research, art, performer, director, and spectator; McKinney and Butterworth (2009) as the manipulation and orchestration of the performance environment; and more recent collections extend the category outward to site-based, expanded, and post-theatrical practice (Aronson, 2018; Hann, 2019; McKinney & Palmer, 2017). This work has established scenography as a discipline with its own object of study, but it theorises that object almost exclusively from European and North American practice. A second body of work documents the technical and material development of stage design — Brockett et al. (2010) on the history of scenic technology, Aronson (2005) on stage space as visual metaphor, Pecktal (1995) and Crabtree and Beudert (2011) on the painting of scenery, Burris-Meyer and Cole (1971) on its construction. Its achievement is a precise genealogy of technique; its limit is that the genealogy stops at the borders of Europe and the United States.

A third body of work, within Indonesian studies, documents particular genres and companies in rich detail: Brandon (1970) on *wayang kulit*, Peacock (1968) on *ludruk*, Cohen (2006) on Komedi Stamboel, Hatley (2008) on Javanese performance, Bodden (2010) on politically engaged theatre under the New Order, and, for a single contemporary company, the doctoral and master's studies of Aberle (2014) and Agnesia (2016). Here scenography appears, but almost always as a support to social, political, or ethnographic argument rather than as the object of analysis. A fourth body of work is the Indonesian-language literature on staging itself. Padmodarmaya (1983, 2000) supplies the field with its working vocabulary and its practical handbook; Yudiaryani (2002) surveys the changing conventions of world theatre for an Indonesian readership; Soedarso (2000) provides the standard Indonesian account of modern art movements. These are indispensable, but they are a literature of instruction and of general survey, and they do not ask what happened when a specific movement in painting arrived at a specific Indonesian stage.

The gap is therefore not an absence of publications but a deficiency in knowledge. No study has yet set the movements of visual art and the record of Indonesian stage practice side by side and asked, case by case, what kind of connection actually obtains between them — whether documented influence, historical transmission, or a resemblance identified retrospectively by the analyst. In the absence of that question, comparative claims in this field tend to be phrased in language that can be read either way: an Indonesian work is said to echo a European movement, or to align with it, without the reader being told whether anyone involved had ever heard of it. This article is the first to examine four visual art movements alongside four corresponding episodes in Indonesian stage practice and to classify each connection explicitly by the strength of the evidence that supports it.

The aim of the study is accordingly twofold: to trace how Renaissance perspective, German Expressionism, Russian Constructivism, and the Dadaist readymade each reshaped the practice of stage design and artistic design; and to determine, for each of them, what kind of relationship holds with Indonesian theatrical practice. Three questions organise the enquiry. What formal principle did each movement carry into the space of performance? What Indonesian practice, if any, corresponds to it? And on what evidence does that correspondence rest?

METHOD

Research Design and Approach

The study was designed as a qualitative, historical-comparative literature study (*studi pustaka*). The design follows from the research question: the object of enquiry is a set of historical relationships between movements and practices, most of them no longer observable, and the evidence for them survives in published scholarship, artist documentation, play texts, and press reporting rather than in living practice. Ethnographic or performance-analytical designs were considered and rejected, since three of the four Indonesian cases are closed — Komedi Stamboel ceased in 1903, Teater Sae is no longer active in its original form, and Nandang Aradea died in 2013.

Three theoretical positions frame the analysis. Panofsky's (1991) account of perspective as a symbolic form, rather than as a neutral optical technique, is used to read the painted backdrop as a construction of a particular way of seeing. Aronson's (2005) argument that stage space functions as an autonomous visual metaphor, articulating the psychological and thematic structure of a play rather than its geography, is used to read the Expressionist and Constructivist stages. Lehmann's (2006) theorisation of the postdramatic, in which the object acquires a poetic autonomy on a par with the performer, is used to read object-based staging. These positions are brought to bear at the interpretive stage only, after the formal principles of each movement and the documentary record of each case have been established separately.

Site, Period, and Corpus

The study involved no field site and no informants. Its corpus consists of thirty-four published sources, assembled and read during 2024 and the first half of 2025, comprising art-historical and scenographic monographs, two unpublished university theses, one collection of play texts, one festival artist profile, and one newspaper report. To this is added a set of four Indonesian cases reconstructed from those sources: the painted backdrops of Komedi Stamboel (1891–1903) and their diffusion to *ketoprak*, *ludruk*, and *sandiwara*; Indonesian stage practice during the period of German theatrical Expressionism (c. 1905–1925); the bamboo constructions of Nandang Aradea and Teater Studio Indonesia (c. 2006–2013); and object-based staging in the play texts of Afrizal Malna and in Teater Sae's *Proyek Hamlet*.

Sources were included where they either discussed a stage or artistic design practice falling within one of the four historical episodes, or documented an Indonesian theatrical practice

that could be placed in relation to one of those episodes. Sources concerned only with dramatic literature, acting technique, or critical reception, with no reference to stage or artistic design, were excluded, as were general histories of the four movements that contain no material on performance. The four Indonesian cases were selected on two criteria: each had to be documented in at least one scholarly source, and each had to correspond to a distinct one of the four episodes, so that the set would test the comparison across its full range rather than confirm it at a single point. All materials are published and publicly accessible; no restricted or unpublished archival collection was consulted.

Data Collection

Three techniques were used. First, art-historical reading was used to extract, for each of the four movements, its defining formal and conceptual principles as stated in the specialist literature; this produced a one-line statement of principle for each movement, reported in Table 1. Second, scenographic-historical reading was used to trace how each principle was carried into the practice of stage design in Europe and the United States, and what technical apparatus carried it. Third, documentary reconstruction was used to assemble each Indonesian case from the available record, which differs in kind from case to case: secondary scholarship for Komedi Stamboel, university theses and festival and press documentation for Nandang Aradea, and published play texts and performance description for the object-based staging. No performance discussed in this article was observed directly by the author; every Indonesian case is a documentary reconstruction, and the limits of that procedure are stated in the conclusion.

Data Validation and Analysis

Credibility was established by source triangulation. Each factual claim about an Indonesian case was required to appear in at least two sources of different type — for example, a scholarly thesis and an independent press report — before being carried into the argument; where a claim rests on a single source, the text says so. One factual error in the earlier draft of this study was corrected in this way: Vladimir Tatlin's dates were verified against the specialist literature and corrected to 1885–1953.

Analysis then proceeded in four steps. In the first, the formal principle of each movement was stated independently of any theatrical application. In the second, candidate Indonesian practices were identified for each principle. In the third — the step that distinguishes this study from earlier comparative accounts — each candidate was tested against a three-level scale of evidence. A connection was classified as *documented influence* only where a biographical, institutional, or training link could be shown together with a statement by the practitioner acknowledging the source; as *historical transmission* where the technique demonstrably travelled through a commercial or institutional channel but no practitioner is recorded as engaging with the movement as a body of ideas; and as *comparative resemblance* where only a formal similarity can be shown and no evidence of contact exists. A fourth outcome, *non-transmission*, was recorded where no corresponding Indonesian practice could be identified at all. In the fourth step the argument was composed episode by episode, and the outcomes were tabulated. This scale is the analytical instrument of the study, and the reader may apply it to the evidence presented and disagree with the classifications reached.

Research Ethics and Positionality

The study involved no human participants, no fieldwork, no interviews, and no restricted or sacred material, and it therefore required no ethical approval; the basis of this judgement is stated here rather than left implicit. All sources are published and publicly accessible, and no images of identifiable persons are reproduced. Figure 1 is the author's own schematic diagram and depicts no actual production. As to positionality, the author works within the field of

Indonesian theatrical artistic design rather than observing it from outside, and the four Indonesian cases were selected from within that field of practice; readers should weigh the selection accordingly.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Four Terms and Their Different Scopes

The first result is terminological, and it conditions everything that follows. What is meant by artistic design (*tata artistik*) and by stage design (*tata panggung*) is not settled, and alongside them several further terms remain in use: *tata pentas*, scenery, and scenography. The term now most widely invoked, though least consistently implemented, is the last. Etymologically, *scenography* is rooted in the Ancient Greek *skēnē*, meaning the stage or the stage building, and *graphō*, to depict or to write. In Aristotle's *Poetics* the concept appears as *skēnographia*, denoting specifically the art of painting scenery on the backdrop of the Greek stage.

That narrow sense did not survive the expansion of the practice. Howard (2002, p. 130) formulates scenography as a synthesis of space, text, research, art, performer, director, and spectator that together constitute a theatrical creation — a definition she arrives at by setting thirty-three practitioners' own formulations against one another. McKinney and Butterworth (2009, p. 4) define it as the manipulation and orchestration of the performance environment, through which architectural structure, lighting, projection, sound, costume, and properties are woven together so as to interact dynamically with the performer's body in space; they add that scenography is no longer a matter of presenting a passive image but is bound to the spectator's reception and kinetic engagement. Aronson (2005, p. 12) presses further: stage space is an autonomous visual metaphor, articulating the psychological and thematic structure of the play rather than its geographical location, so that the scenographer operates as a visual dramaturg and every element on stage — texture, line, mass, even emptiness — carries a semiotic charge.

Scenery has a separate history. The Greek *skēnē* (σκηνή) meant a tent, a hut, or a sheltering structure, and in early Greek practice it was a functional building behind the playing area, used by the actors for changing. Its audience-facing wall came in time to be painted to indicate the location of the action — a palace façade, a temple front — and from this the concept of the visual backdrop was born. The word passed into Latin as *scaena* or *scena*, broadening to denote the structure against which a drama was staged; English used *scene* from the sixteenth century for a division of a script or a setting; and only around the 1770s was the suffix added to form *scenery*, denoting a view or landscape and, specifically, the apparatus of theatrical decoration — painted backdrops, flats, platforms, and furnishings — that transforms the stage into the fictional world the script requires.

The Indonesian terms divide the same territory differently. *Tata panggung* corresponds closely to the Anglo-American *set design*: the design of physical and architectural structures on stage — walls, staircases, platforms, furniture, backdrops — and the creation of the environment in which the performers act. *Tata artistik* is broader, covering the whole of the visual dimension of a production, so that stage, lighting, costume, and make-up design all fall within it and the artistic director coordinates all four. *Tata pentas* is Padmodarmaya's (1983, pp. 4–5; 2000, p. 4) coinage: the arrangement of inanimate objects within the space and time that govern the stage, the stage being understood as a place used to present an enactment that consciously signifies an artistic value.

That these terms coexist is usually explained by geography, and in part it is: the Anglo-American tradition speaks of set, lighting, and costume design and of designers in each; the Eastern and Central European tradition uses scenography to cover stage, lighting, costume, make-up, music, and sound. But the Indonesian case qualifies the developmental narrative implicit in much of the English-language literature, in which set design is superseded by an

expanded scenography (Aronson, 2018; McKinney & Palmer, 2017). In Indonesia the terms did not succeed one another; they accumulated, and each retains its own scope in current usage. Padmodarmaya did not coin *tata pentas* because scenography had not yet reached him, but because neither *set design* nor *scenography* named what Indonesian practice required a term for. The expansion of the category, in other words, is not a single chronology that all theatre cultures run through at different speeds. Figure 1 sets out schematically the four spatial logics examined in the sections that follow.

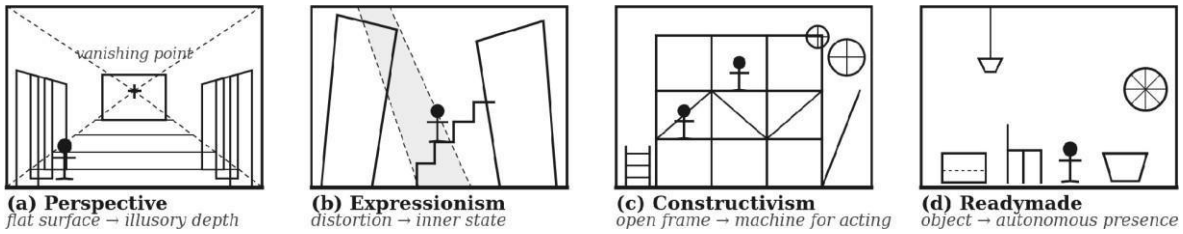


Figure 1. Four scenographic logics: the illusionistic backdrop, the Expressionist interior, the Constructivist frame, and the field of autonomous objects

Schematic diagram by the author, 2025. The panels are analytical abstractions and do not reproduce any particular production.

Perspective and the Illusionistic Backdrop: From Serlio to Komedi Stamboel

In Greek and Roman theatre the setting of a performance rested on the architecture of the amphitheatre itself. From the Renaissance to the nineteenth century the painted backdrop took over that function, and it could do so because of the discovery of the laws of perspective, which allowed illusion to be constructed on a flat plane. The backdrop did not merely establish the locus of the action; it produced visual depth and dramatic atmosphere through the manipulation of a flat surface (Brockett et al., 2010, p. 245). Its success depended on the scenic painter's technique — the layering of colour, the building of visual texture, and the play of light and dark, or *chiaroscuro* — by which a flat piece of cloth became solid stone architecture, a wooded landscape, or a magnificent interior (Crabtree & Beudert, 2011, p. 152). Linear and aerial perspective together allowed the designer to break through the physical boundary of the proscenium, deceiving the eye (*trompe l'œil*) so that the stage seemed to extend far beyond the architecture of the building (Pecktal, 1995, p. 88); converging lines and graduated colour were calculated to lead the spectator's eye to a predetermined vanishing point. The calculation had to be aligned with the stage layout, the direction of the lighting, and the sightlines of the auditorium, or the illusion would distort and collapse (Burris-Meyer & Cole, 1971, p. 112). What the artist produces by these means is an artificial world that appears real because a flat surface has been turned into a mathematically engineered projection of reality (Panofsky, 1991, p. 27).

The technique itself was formulated outside the theatre. Filippo Brunelleschi conceived linear perspective in the early Renaissance, and Leon Battista Alberti gave it written form in *De pictura* (1435): parallel or orthogonal lines receding from the observer's eye appear to converge at a single vanishing point on the horizon line, and geometric projection calculates the scale of objects so that they diminish proportionally with distance (Alberti, 1991, p. 54). Leonardo da Vinci added atmospheric perspective, producing depth through the fading of colour, the reduction of contrast, and the loss of sharp detail with distance. By the sixteenth century these painterly concepts were being adapted to theatre architecture in Italy: Sebastiano Serlio pioneered single-point perspective in flat backdrop design and in the placing of angled wings on a floor raked upward toward the rear (Brockett et al., 2010, p. 62), and Vincenzo Scamozzi at the Teatro Olimpico in 1585 combined *trompe l'œil* painting with physical architecture built

to an artificially reduced scale — streets rising steeply, ceilings sloping sharply down — so that a depth of no more than five metres read as dozens (Aronson, 2005, p. 45).

The Indonesian counterpart is Komedi Stamboel, a form combining Parsi theatre, European opera, and local material, accompanied by Western music with European march rhythms, waltzes, and Malay *keroncong* (Cohen, 2006, p. 15). The troupe was founded in Surabaya in 1891 by Auguste Mahieu, drew at first on the *Thousand and One Nights* and on Persian and European stories, and later took up local legends. It played on a proscenium stage and used a painted backdrop, or *layar tonil*, to indicate the setting; given the lighting available at the time, the painting on that cloth was the only means of telling the audience where and when a scene took place (Cohen, 2006, p. 84). Because Stamboel performance was episodic and long, three-dimensional scenery was impractical — changing it took time and broke the rhythm of the evening — so a backdrop that could be flown in and out was the efficient solution.

What resulted is the system known in the scenographic literature as stock scenery. Troupes such as Komedi Stamboel did not paint a new backdrop for each play but maintained five to eight standard sets, mixed and matched as the scenes required. A grand interior used one-point perspective to open a long corridor into depth, with Moorish arches, horseshoe openings, marble pillars carved with calligraphy or *arabesque* motifs, heavy red or gold curtains painted as though drawn back, and a chequerboard floor. A second showed a royal garden with date palms, a tiered fountain, birdcages, and a small domed pavilion, the sky painted at dusk or under stars for melancholy effect. A third showed a city — Baghdad or Basra — in rows of flat-roofed clay houses, narrow sandy streets, and market stalls of jugs, carpets, and jars, with the silhouette of a minaret and a great dome behind. A fourth supplied dark forests of tangled roots and tendrils under mist, and caves of stalactites and heaped treasure, painted in a dark palette of deep brown and mossy green, with *chiaroscuro* contrast for an eerie effect and gold powder for the gleam of the hoard. These backdrops were combined with wings at left and right to build the illusion of space, and the combination in turn supported entrance technique and spectacle: a genie appeared against the cave backdrop amid sulphurous smoke, a magical effect for audiences who had at that date no familiarity with cinematic trickery (Cohen, 2006, p. 109). From Komedi Stamboel and the other commercial spectacles of the period, the technique passed to traditional troupes with a commercial orientation — *ketoprak*, *ludruk* (Peacock, 1968), and *sandiwara* — among them Ketoprak Siswo Budoyo, whose stage design became a selling point in its own right.

Two points of discussion follow. The first concerns the durability of the technique. Brockett et al. (2010) present the painted perspective backdrop as a European lineage that is progressively displaced by electric light, by box sets, and by stage realism. The Indonesian evidence qualifies this. In the colonial commercial circuit the backdrop was not displaced; it was transmitted onward and persisted in popular genres for decades after it had become residual in Europe, because the conditions that made it efficient — episodic dramaturgy, touring, minimal lighting, limited capital — persisted too. Cohen's (2006) account of Komedi Stamboel as a commercially hybrid form supports this reading; what the present analysis adds is that the obsolescence of a scenographic technique is not a property of the technique but of the production conditions around it.

The second point concerns what exactly was transmitted, and it is the reason this case is classified in Table 1 as historical transmission rather than as influence. What travelled to Surabaya was a craft procedure for constructing depth, carried by itinerant European and Eurasian scenic painters and by the commercial circuit itself. There is no record of any Stamboel painter engaging with perspective as the theory of vision that Panofsky (1991) shows it to be, and no evidence that Alberti's name meant anything in that hall. A technique crossed; a doctrine did not. This distinction matters for the wider argument, because it is precisely the distinction that comparative accounts phrased in terms of echo or alignment obscure. It is

worth adding that the illusion so constructed was never fully under the designer's control: as Howard (2002, p. 116) observes, an actor who moves too far upstage destroys, by the simple constancy of the human body, the proportions of the miniature architecture behind them. Perspectival illusion on stage is a collaboration with the performer, or it fails.

Expressionist Distortion and the Stage as Psychological Interior

Expressionism emerged in Germany and Austria from about 1905, in rejection of Impressionism and of calculated academic technique. Where Impressionism sought the optical impression of its subject and saw the world as a beautiful place full of colour, Expressionism looked into the soul and found there a *Sturm und Drang* whose emanation was a darkness enveloping the world (Soedarso, 2000, p. 100). Its central premise was absolute subjectivity: art was no longer a window onto the outer world but a mirror of the artist's interior. The first group, *Die Brücke* — the bridge — was founded in Dresden in 1905 by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and his colleagues, who sought to bridge earlier German art, particularly the woodcut, with the art to come; they favoured harsh contrasting colour and distorted form. As *Die Brücke* waned, *Der Blaue Reiter* formed in Munich in 1911 around Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, turning toward spirituality and abstraction, with livelier colour and musical, curving line — altogether less gloomy and less harsh than the earlier group (Soedarso, 2000, p. 103). Across both, accurate proportion and natural colour were refused in favour of distortion and contrast, and the brushwork was spontaneous, forceful, and rough, laying bare the trace of the act.

Carried into theatre, the same premise produced a stage that was a projection of a psychological condition rather than a location. Expressionist theatre rejected materialism, industrialisation, and the bourgeois order, and concentrated on subjective truth; the stage presented slanted walls, sharp corners, and oversized, disproportionate objects, composed along steep diagonals and asymmetrical points — an outsized chair, a ceiling on the verge of collapse — to produce an effect that was oppressive and threatening. The visual manner of the woodcut, with its rigid jagged line and its abrupt tonal gradation without soft transition, was adopted directly from the painters. Leopold Jessner's *Jessnertreppe*, the stepped and otherwise empty stage, allowed movement to be read vertically as domination, oppression, or despair. Lighting worked by sharp contrast, large shadow, and saturated colour, isolating the figure and constructing the emotional landscape of the character (Patterson, 1981, p. 55); light cut through darkness to isolate the performer in empty space and to negate any logical relation between space and time (Styan, 1981, p. 12). The stage here is Aronson's (2005) autonomous visual metaphor in its most literal form.

For this episode, no Indonesian counterpart could be identified, and that absence is reported here as a finding rather than passed over. None of the Indonesian sources consulted — Cohen (2006), Peacock (1968), Hatley (2008), Bodden (2010) — records a stage design programme of Expressionist distortion in Indonesian theatre, whether in the colonial period or after independence. Three conditions plausibly account for this. First, the institutional carriers of theatrical Expressionism had no colonial-era Indonesian equivalent: the movement travelled through the subsidised German municipal theatre, the figure of the director as designer, and an art press that argued about both, and none of these existed in the Indies. Second, the dominant Indonesian theatrical circuit of the period was commercial and depended on illusionistic spectacle to sell tickets; anti-illusionistic distortion had no market in it. Third, the formative period of Indonesian modern theatre came after 1945, by which time German Expressionism had already dispersed into cinema and into postwar abstraction, so that what was available for borrowing was no longer a scenographic programme.

Reporting a non-transmission may appear to weaken a comparative argument, but it strengthens it. A comparative history that finds a local counterpart for every metropolitan movement is not describing a historical process; it is applying a template. The value of the

evidence scale set out in the method is precisely that it can return a null result, and the fact that it does so here is the best available warrant that the three positive classifications in Table 1 were not produced by the design of the study.

Constructivist Construction and the Bamboo Frame of Nandang Aradea

Constructivism arose in Russia between about 1913 and 1920, across the upheaval of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Its pioneer was Vladimir Tatlin (1885–1953), followed by Antoine Pevsner, Naum Gabo, Lyubov Popova, and Varvara Stepanova. The movement reacted against the elitist tradition of classical European art and against art for art's sake, holding static painting and sculpture to be unsuited to the modern age, and sought instead abstract three-dimensional forms in modern building materials — wire, iron, wood, plastic (Soedarso, 2000, p. 124). Art had to serve a real social purpose and to reflect an age of industry, machinery, and technology, which meant entering mass production: graphic design, propaganda posters, clothing, typography, architecture. Stepanova stated the position flatly — the era of pure art had ended and the artist must go into the factory to make goods for mass need (Lodder, 1983, p. 75). Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*, a design for a spiral tower of iron and glass, remained unbuilt yet became the movement's emblem; Popova and Stepanova, its leading women, applied its principles to textiles, functional clothing, and the stage.

The link to theatre is direct and documented. Popova designed the setting for *The Magnanimous Cuckold* (1922), directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold: a three-dimensional construction of gears, ladders, and platforms that moved kinetically with the performers. She and Stepanova built multi-level structures of wood and steel that functioned purely as instruments for movement — open frames of scaffolding, ladders, gangways, inclined planes, levers, and rotating wheels, a machine for acting rather than a picture of a place. Meyerhold, who adopted Constructivism most fully, was at that moment developing *biomechanics*, a physical training method built on acrobatics and mechanical movement that treated the performer's body as a machine. Stage and body were theorised together.

It is at this point that the Indonesian record supplies a case of a different evidentiary order from the others examined here. Nandang Aradea (1971–2013), founder of Teater Studio Indonesia in Serang, Banten, studied theatre in Moscow between 2002 and 2006, including at the Russian Academy of Theatre Arts (GITIS), and stated that he was drawn to Meyerhold's Constructivism and to the conception of the performer's body as a biomechanical instrument (Agnesia, 2016; Festival/Tokyo, 2013; The Jakarta Post, 2013). The company's *The Bionarration of a Disjointed Body! (Emergency)* won the F/T Award in the Emerging Artists Programme at Festival Tokyo in 2012; a further bamboo-set production, *Overdose: Psycho-Catastrophe*, was in preparation for the same festival when Aradea died in October 2013, and the company performed it in Tokyo the following month (The Jakarta Post, 2013). In an earlier touring production, *Earthenware Maker* (*Perempuan Gerabah*), shown domestically and abroad including in Gdańsk, Aradea built a circular bamboo enclosure with the audience seated inside it, placing spectators in immediate physical proximity to the performers, the mud, and the pottery (Aberle, 2014; Agnesia, 2016). Across these productions the poles, joints, and rope bindings were left exposed rather than concealed behind cladding — a material honesty consistent with the Constructivist principle that the art object should work like a legible machine rather than disguise its own making.

Because the connection rests on a documented institution, a documented period of training, and the artist's own statement of the debt, it meets the highest level of the evidence scale and is classified in Table 1 as documented influence. Two consequences follow for the wider literature. The first concerns the channel. Comparative accounts of non-Western modernism commonly assume diffusion by image — that principles travel through reproductions,

catalogues, and photographs. Here they travelled through an institution and a body technique: Aradea did not copy Popova's setting, he was trained in the tradition that produced Meyerhold's biomechanics, and the scenography followed from the training. The documentation assembled by Aberle (2014) and Agnesia (2016) supports this reading of the route.

The second consequence concerns material, and it qualifies rather than confirms the Constructivist model. Constructivist material honesty was inseparable from industrial modernity: iron, steel, and glass were honest because they were the materials of the factory that the artist was enjoined to enter (Lodder, 1983). Aradea's bamboo is honest in exactly the same formal sense — exposed, load-bearing, undisguised — but it is a locally available, renewable, hand-worked material whose associations are agricultural and domestic rather than industrial. The principle is transposed while its politics is inverted: not the factory but the village workshop. This is an adaptation in the strong sense of the word, and it is adaptation of a kind that the other three episodes examined here do not exhibit. On the contemporary stage the interaction between the performer's body and the bamboo structure becomes the theatrical event itself, directing the audience to see the stage simultaneously as a process of artistic production and as a performance.

The Readymade and the Autonomous Object on the Indonesian Stage

The readymade appeared in the 1910s, bound up with the First World War and with Dada. The Dada movement was a protest against bourgeois values, capitalist logic, and aesthetics themselves; it dispensed with rationality in favour of nihilism and anti-aesthetics, and its works accordingly discarded the prevailing standards of beauty. The readymade was also a product of mass industrialisation, which made everyday objects available in identical multiples; Duchamp used factory-made objects to challenge the concept of originality and the exalted status of artistic genius that the Renaissance and the classical tradition had glorified (Tomkins, 1996, p. 158). In April 1917 he took a porcelain urinal, signed it R. Mutt, titled it *Fountain*, and submitted it to an exhibition of independent artists in New York. The committee refused it as aesthetically unconventional; Dada artists, Tristan Tzara among them, immediately defended it, and the episode is widely treated as a decisive moment in the emergence of Dada in the United States (Camfield, 1989). Man Ray's *The Gift* made the same move differently, fixing a row of tacks to the sole of a flatiron and so rendering it unusable for its purpose.

On the European stage the consequences are visible in two well-documented instances. Tadeusz Kantor's *The Dead Class*, working from his notion of the reality of the lowest rank, took decayed wooden school benches and mannequins as its scenographic material (Kobialka, 1993). Pina Bausch's *Café Müller*, with scenography by Rolf Borzik, scattered dozens of café chairs and tables across the stage so that they became physical obstacles the dancers had to confront and negotiate (Climenhaga, 2009). In both, the object is not a prop in the service of a fiction; it is a presence with which the performer must deal.

A comparable tendency is legible in Indonesian theatre. It appears first as description within the *nebentext* of a play text: motorcycles, bicycles, *becak*, and cars enter the stage one by one and the house becomes a highway; someone brings a traffic light, someone a steering wheel, someone a bicycle tyre, someone an exhaust pipe; a bridal couple is photographed on top of a car; someone is giving a speech (Malna, 2017, p. 283). It appears again in performance, in Teater Sae's staging of *Proyek Hamlet*, where a basin functioned not as a container for food but as a vessel for washing Hamlet's feet, where the performance opened with a toy robot moving and sounding mechanically, and where a block of ice served as a place for Hamlet to lie while it was pulled across the stage. Lehmann (2006, p. 157) describes precisely this condition in the postdramatic: objects appear with a poetic autonomy of their own, on a par with the performer.

The classification of this case requires care, and it is the point at which the present study departs most sharply from the way such comparisons are usually made. No evidence has been found that Afrizal Malna, Teater Sae, or the makers of *Proyek Hamlet* were working within, or citing, the specific tradition of Duchamp's readymade. The parallel drawn here is therefore analytical: both bodies of practice treat the everyday object as newly autonomous and meaning-bearing, whether on stage or in the gallery, and the resemblance is real, but it is a resemblance and not a lineage. It is classified in Table 1 as comparative resemblance. Moreover, at least two alternative explanations fit the Indonesian evidence at least as well. One is economic: Indonesian independent theatre has worked for decades with found, cheap, and portable material because that is what was available, and a scenography of everyday objects is what such a material economy produces. The other is indigenous: non-representational objects of concentrated significance are long established in Indonesian ritual and traditional performance, the *gunungan* of *wayang kulit* being the obvious instance, and a theatre formed in that environment does not need Duchamp in order to put a basin on stage and mean something by it. Lehmann's (2006) account of the postdramatic therefore offers a better theoretical bridge between the two bodies of practice than any supposed line of descent from Duchamp, because it describes a condition rather than a transmission.

The Evidentiary Status of the Four Connections

Table 1 collects the outcome of the analysis. Read across, it shows that the relationship between Indonesian stage practice and the movements of Western visual art is not one relationship but four, and that they differ in kind and not merely in degree.

Table 1. The four episodes and the evidentiary status of their Indonesian counterparts

Movement and period	Principle carried into stage design	Indonesian counterpart	Evidentiary status
Renaissance perspective, 15th–16th century	Mathematically constructed illusion of depth on a flat or shallow surface	Painted backdrops of Komedi Stamboel (1891–1903) and their diffusion to *ketoprak*, *ludruk*, and *sandiwara*	Historical transmission: the craft procedure travelled through a commercial circuit; no engagement with perspective as doctrine is recorded
German Expressionism, c. 1905–1925	Distortion of form and cut light as the projection of an inner state	None identified	Non-transmission: no corresponding programme of stage design is documented in the sources consulted
Russian Constructivism, c. 1913–1925	Open, kinetic construction; the stage as a machine for acting	Bamboo constructions of Nandang Aradea and Teater Studio Indonesia (c. 2006–2013)	Documented influence: training at GITIS, Moscow (2002–2006) and the artist's stated debt to Meyerhold
Dadaist readymade, from 1917	The everyday object as an autonomous, meaning-bearing presence	Play texts of Afrizal Malna; Teater Sae, *Proyek Hamlet*	Comparative resemblance: formal parallel only; local material and ritual conditions are at least as plausible a cause

Source: compiled by the author from the sources listed in the references. Classification follows the three-level evidence scale set out in the Method.

The pattern has a consequence for how the argument of this article, and of comparative scenographic history more generally, may legitimately be stated. It is tempting to conclude that Indonesian theatre has not been a passive recipient of these movements but has actively adapted their principles to local material and dramaturgical concerns. On the evidence assembled here, that formulation is warranted for one case. Aradea's substitution of bamboo for steel, made by a practitioner who had been trained in the tradition and who said so, is active adaptation in the full sense. The Stamboel backdrop is better described as the efficient local use of an imported craft procedure, which is a different achievement and not a lesser one. The object-based staging is a convergence whose causes are more probably local than imported. And German Expressionism did not arrive at all. To assert active adaptation across all four would be to credit the analyst's framework to the practitioners, which is the specific error this study was designed to avoid.

CONCLUSION

Stage design and artistic design cannot be understood in isolation from the history of visual art. Four principles, each formulated outside the theatre, entered it and changed what a stage could be: perspective made a flat surface yield calculated depth; Expressionism made distorted form and cut light into the visible shape of an inner state; Constructivism replaced the picture with an open frame that the performer operates; and the readymade granted the everyday object a presence of its own, answerable to no fiction. These are not four styles but four distinct proposals about what stage space is for, and the terminological distinctions among *tata panggung*, *tata artistik*, *tata pentas*, and scenography track them more closely than is usually recognised.

The answer to the second question is that the Indonesian relationship to these movements is heterogeneous, and that its heterogeneity is the finding. One case is documented influence, carried through an institution and a body technique and acknowledged by the practitioner. One is historical transmission, in which a craft procedure crossed a commercial circuit while the doctrine behind it did not. One is comparative resemblance, in which a real formal parallel is more plausibly explained by local material and ritual conditions than by contact. And one is non-transmission, an absence with identifiable historical causes. The familiar claim that Indonesian theatre actively adapted the movements of Western visual art holds, on this evidence, for the first of these only. It is also worth recalling that none of the four displaced what was already there: the non-illusionistic scenographic grammar of *wayang kulit* predates Stamboel's painted illusionism by centuries and continued alongside it.

The contribution is therefore as much procedural as historical. The three-level scale used here — documented influence, historical transmission, comparative resemblance, with non-transmission as a possible null result — is a portable instrument, and it can be applied to any comparison between a metropolitan movement and a local practice. It disciplines the vocabulary of echo and alignment that allows a comparative reading to be mistaken for a claim about history, and it obliges the analyst to say which claim is being made. For the teaching of *tata artistik* it suggests a syllabus organised by spatial logic rather than by chronology of movements, and for curators and companies it offers a defensible basis for describing a work's relation to an international tradition without overstating it.

The study's limitations follow from its design. It is documentary throughout: no performance was observed, no surviving backdrop was examined, no member of Teater Studio Indonesia or Teater Sae was interviewed, and every Indonesian case is therefore a reconstruction at one remove from the practice it describes. The sample of sources is purposive rather than exhaustive, and four episodes are a selection, not a survey: Symbolism, Futurism, the Bauhaus, and digital and projection-based scenography are all absent and would each bear the same treatment. Three lines of research follow directly. The first is archival and urgent: surviving

painted backdrops from *ketoprak*, *ludruk*, and *sandiwara* troupes exist in private and institutional hands and have not been catalogued, and they will not survive indefinitely. The second is oral-historical, with the surviving collaborators of the companies discussed here, which would allow documented influence to be tested where this study could only infer it from published statements. The third is to extend the same evidentiary scale to Indonesian digital scenography, where the question of influence against convergence arises again and in a much faster-moving form.

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