

# The Society's Reception of the Contemporary Art of Wayang Cilikmen In Pacitan Regency, East Java Province

Bakti Sutopo<sup>1</sup>, Wardo<sup>2</sup>, Sri Kusuma Habsari<sup>3</sup>, Titis Srimuda Pitana<sup>4</sup>

{bakti.sutopo@student.uns.ac.id<sup>1</sup>, wardo2013@staff.uns.ac.id<sup>2</sup>, skhabsari@staff.uns.ac.id<sup>3</sup>, titissrimuda@staff.uns.ac.id<sup>4</sup>}

Program Studi Doktor Kajian Budaya Sekolah Pascasarjana UNS  
Jl. Ir. Sutami No. 36 A Surakarta, Indonesia <sup>1,2,3,4</sup>

**Abstract.** The contemporary art in society can be born from the influence of traditional art such as Wayang Cilikmen which is influenced by Wayang Kulit Purwa. The purpose of this research is to describe the reception of the contemporary art audience of Wayang Cilikmen in Pacitan Regency. This research includes qualitative research because the data is non-numerical. Data collection was done by observation, recording/documentation, and interviews. The data in this study were analyzed using textual methods dialectically as the cultural circuit developed by Stuart Hall. Textual research method is one of the three types of research methods in cultural studies in addition to ethnography and hermeneutics. The results show that in the Pacitan Regency community there are various responses to Wayang Cilikmen, including Wayang Cilikmen as art as a form of interpretation of the Wayang Kulit Purwa tradition, Wayang Cilikmen as an art that is able to adjust the tastes of today's society so that it can provide entertainment for them, and Wayang Cilikmen is an art that can be collaborated with other performing arts. These diverse responses are evidence that the art of Wayang Cilikmen has been well received by the people of Pacitan Regency. Wayang Cilikmen as contemporary art is able to present the problems of human life that are always dealing with social risks in an uncertain society.

**Keywords:** art, cilikmen, contemporary, puppetry, response

## 1. Introduction

Traditional art is one of the areas that is now aggressively making artistic breakthroughs to be able to compete in line with global conditions. Therefore, there are many symptoms of performing arts that transcend creative processes and forms. This means that the traditional art is out of the old pattern zone that has been established in the community / mainstream. The tradition of Wayang Kulit Purwa has given birth to various artistic breakthroughs that are commonly called contemporary wayang. As contemporary art as well as packaging art, the new work of art has the characteristics of: (1) imitation of the original, (2) short or compact, (3) full of variations, (4) the values of sacredness, symbolic, and magic are put aside, (5) cheap price. [1] One of the contemporary artworks that emerged in the midst of society rooted in the wayang purwa tradition is Wayang Cilikmen.

The existence of contemporary art rooted in wayang has been welcomed by the communities in which it appears. One of these arts is Wayang Cilikmen. Wayang Cilikmen developed by Ki Fajar Arianto include wayang combo and Wayang Cilikmen. He has been doing this since he graduated from ISI Surakarta. At first he named his creations by the name of wayang combo (combo). Actually, the name wayang combo is also well known among the people of Pacitan Regency. In fact, Ki Fajar Arianto has become synonymous with his work, earning the nickname Fajar Combo. The uniqueness of Wayang Cilikmen makes it a contemporary art. The phenomena of contemporary wayang include (1) complex musical intersections, (2) radical adaptations of classical wayang stories to address contemporary issues, (3) expansion of the convention of comic interludes to scenes because they are the focus of the performance, (4) adaptation of Javanese wisdom to new settings, and (5) adaptation of productions, which have been presented in very diverse contexts. [2].

It is undeniable that Wayang Cilikmen is both a phenomenon and a fact in society that deserves to be examined. Ki Fajar Arianto's Wayang Cilikmen has been favoured by people in Pacitan Regency and its surroundings. In fact, not only the general public, but also government agencies and institutions respond to Wayang Cilikmen created by Sanggar Unggul Pamenang. The community invites Wayang Cilikmen to be performed at circumcisions, wedding receptions, birthdays, and also village clean-up events. Government agencies/institutions present Wayang Cilikmen in various activities that must bring in the masses. In other words, Wayang Cilikmen in Pacitan Regency is used as a medium of mass gathering for the government. In general, these activities include family planning counselling packaged in KB villages, socialisation of regulations, socialisation of election stages, and parties in commemoration of certain holidays. Wayang Cilikmen by Sanggar Unggul Pamenang is very popular among the people of Pacitan Regency because it is also disseminated through various social media that can be accessed by various groups of people.

Performing arts, including the contemporary art of Wayang Cilikmen, are closely related to the audience. Even the existence of an art will last a long time or only a moment is determined by the response of the audience. In other words, Wayang Cilikmen art needs the response of its audience in order to develop and continue to be in the midst of society. [3]. Wayang Cilikmen can be said if it does not get the response of its audience. Conversely, Wayang Cilikmen is categorised as a successful performance art if it gets audience response and the audience is able to understand the performance.

The audience is the people who watch the Wayang Cilikmen performance. The audience consists of various groups and backgrounds that also influence various responses to Wayang Cilikmen. These responses are not only limited to the structural elements seen in Wayang Cilikmen but also to the meaning contained by Wayang Cilikmen. Wayang Cilikmen as a work of art can also be interpreted from different perspectives, resulting in a variety of meanings. The meaning is not only embedded by the puppeteer, but also arises from the people who enjoy it. In other words, the audience as well as the audience of Wayang Cilikmen can interpret Wayang Cilikmen according to their imaginative abilities, knowledge, knowledge and understanding so that Wayang Cilikmen can be accepted by the community. [4].

The diversity of responses of the community (audience/viewers) of Wayang Cilikmen in Pacitan Regency is important to be researched. This is based on several things, among others, the responses of the audience/viewers of Wayang Cilikmen as a contemporary art in Pacitan

Regency, Wayang Cilikmen as a contemporary art is very interesting because it provides alternative entertainment rooted in tradition for the people of Pacitan Regency, Wayang Cilikmen apart from being a contemporary art is also an art of innovation and creation that dares to break the boundaries of traditional rules, and Wayang Cilikmen as a contemporary art has not been widely reviewed, especially in terms of scientific research. Based on these reasons, this research will raise the issue of the audience's response to Wayang Cilikmen.

Research into contemporary art rooted in the past has been conducted by previous researchers. These include a study entitled "Wayang Kulit Glow In The Dark" by Akbar (2014). Akbar's research focuses on the form of puppets that are different from existing puppets in terms of the shape of the puppets. [5]. These creations aim to preserve the traditional art of wayang. Also research "Wayang Kulit Joblar in Ngepop Style in the Perspective of Cultural Studies". The research was conducted by I Made Marajaya. What is meant by Wayang Kulit Joblar in the study is an innovative shadow puppet created by puppeteer I Ketut Muada from Badung, Bali Province. The research concluded that Wayang Joblar as an innovative puppet can survive and be able to entertain the public unlike traditional shadow puppets that can only survive in a series of religious ceremonies and emphasise guidance rather than guidance. In addition, Wayang Kulit Joblar carries the aesthetic tastes of the present. [6]. Both studies open a discourse and can be used as a reference to conduct research on Wayang Cilikmen.

To reveal the public's response to Fajar Arianto's Wayang Cilikmen contemporary art, reception theory is used. Basically, reception theory is identical to literary research, but the theory in the present era is not only used to examine literary works but can also be used to examine other works of art because between works of art there are similarities in character, namely having an attachment to the audience.

The audience's response to the artworks they enjoy is the main focus of reception theory. Reception can also be said to be a science of beauty that is based on audience responses to works of art. When associated with the orientation towards works of art as proposed by M.H Abrams, reception is included in the pragmatic orientation because it relates the work of art to its audience. [7]. The emergence of reception theory is influenced by the assumption that literary works as well as other works of art are closely related to connoisseurs of works of art because basically they are created to be addressed to the interests of readers / audiences as connoisseurs of works of art. readers or audiences will give meaning or meaning to a literary work or theatre performance. The response can be passive, that is, the reader or audience is able to understand the work, or see the aesthetic essence in it. It may even be active, that is, the reader or audience [8].

The placement of readers/viewers as an important element related to the existence of works of art is very reasonable because various genres of artworks are like a form of communication between the artist and the reader/viewer/enjoyer of the artwork. Therefore, in artworks there is a "blank space" intended for readers/viewers/enjoyers to make meaning because basically the "blank space" is polysemic which promises a variety of meanings, various impressions, and various responses. [4].

Reception theory also assumes that the audience is in the same position as the producer of discourse. If the artist is able to create a message through the artwork, the audience has the authority to recreate the meaning of the message. Reception is aligned with the concept of encoding and decoding in the communication model. The term encoding refers to the creation

of media texts in creating specific communication messages through language codes originating from the producer, while decoding refers to the process of translating these codes by the receiver to find the meaning of the text. [9].

## **2. Research Methods**

This research was conducted by applying the descriptive qualitative research working method because the data of this research is not numbers but words and sentences. In addition, this research can also be categorised as experimental research because it aims to reveal the effect of the emergence of contemporary art of Wayang Cilikmen on the reaction or response of its audience. The technique of data collection is done by observation, recording/documentation, and interviews [10].

Observation is carried out by researchers by being directly present at the performance venue by observing and recording three things area, action, and actor related to the object of research. [11]. By observation, information related to the contemporary art of Wayang Cilikmen as a phenomenon or event that has or is happening can be obtained objectively.

The documentation technique in this research is practised by documenting the object of research in the form of photos and videos of Wayang Cilikmen contemporary art performances. The existence of photos and videos can help researchers get a picture/form of contemporary art of Wayang Cilikmen. The results of observation and documentation can also be the basis for mapping informants who may be able to answer questions related to research problems.

Interviews with selected informants, namely from the audience/viewers of Wayang Cilikmen contemporary art that has been mapped based on observation and documentation. Interviews were conducted both planned and unplanned. This includes planned interviews when the researcher prepares questions systematically for each informant to find out the informant's views on Wayang Cilikmen contemporary art. As for unplanned interviews, interview activities with informants who are considered capable as sources to answer questions that are prepared and not planned in advance.

Data analysis in this study used descriptive analysis techniques. The use of descriptive analysis is because the research data is not in the form of numbers but in the form of words. In addition, all data collected can be the answer to research problems. Researchers used descriptive analysis, namely research data collected in various ways were analysed in accordance with the main research problem, namely public reception of Wayang Cilikmen. The steps taken as developed by Milles and Huberman, namely data reduction, data display, and research conclusions.

## **3. Results And Discussion**

### **3.1 The existence of Wayang Cilikmen**

The existence of Wayang Cilikmen as a cultural product has a contextual dimension with its social life. Wayang Cilikmen developed by Ki Fajar Arianto began with Wayang Combo. He has been doing this since he graduated from ISI Surakarta. At first he gave the name of his creation with the name wayang combo (combo). Actually, the name Wayang Combo is also

well known among the people of Pacitan Regency. In fact, Ki Fajar Arianto has become synonymous with his work so that he gets the nickname Fajar Combo. However, in 2019 Ki Fajar Arianto named his work Wayang Cilikmen. During the pandemic, Wayang Cilikmen was still performed by Ki Fajar Arianto virtually through the YouTube platform, Instagram, and tvkabel channels. Wayang Cilikmen which is displayed virtually is packaged as online puppets. Despite the pandemic, Ki Fajar Arianto is still able to work and not give up by the situation so that Wayang Cilikmen can be enjoyed by his fans who are not only from Pacitan Regency but also from other regions in Indonesia such as Sumatra. Until now, Ki Fajar still names his art product as Wayang Cilikmen. [12].

To obtain information on the public's reception of contemporary art "Wayang Cilikmen" in Pacitan Regency, East Java Province, three methods were used: direct visits to the performance venue, documentation, and interviews. When making observations at several Wayang Cilikmen performances, researchers obtained data that Wayang Cilikmen performances became an attraction for certain activities or events such as the socialisation of government programs, the closing of the end of the school year, community celebrations, and art performances. Observations were made from the beginning of the implementation of the activity in which there was a Wayang Cilikmen performance to the end of the activity. Before the performance began, all the equipment and tools of Wayang Cilikmen had been prepared in such a way. The puppets were neatly lined up on the banana tree which was used as a medium to install the puppets. Although the puppets are not all directly involved in the story told by the puppeteer, gamelan instruments combined with modern devices are used to accompany the puppeteer to tell his story. The gamelan musicians are dominated by the younger generation who, along with the sinden, sit in their respective places in an orderly fashion ahead of the puppeteer. Based on observation, Wayang Cilikmen is performed after the ceremonial activities are over or at the end of the event. The audience positions themselves at the front, right and left of the performance stage. Wayang Cilikmen puppeteers have a certain pattern/sequence for developing stories. The story is developed with the means and elements of the story that are related in harmony so that it can be enjoyed by the audience. In general, based on observations, Wayang Cilikmen is like the art of puppetry. However, there are differences in Wayang Cilikmen when compared to similar existing art.

For the puppeteers of Wayang Cilikmen, introducing the art in the midst of people who are already familiar with the art of Wayang Purwa is a challenge as well as a form of filling the empty space that exists in this great art. Although the people of Pacitan Regency understand that Wayang Cilikmen tends to be more realistic, it can be utilised as an educational vehicle for the government, the community and the world of education. The purpose of such education varies, including for the public to understand government programmes, introduction to certain institutions, moral education, awareness of environmental sustainability.

### **3.2 Public Understanding of Fajar Arianto's Wayang Cilikmen**

The target audience of Wayang Cilikmen contemporary art is not divided into age categories but for all the public and for all groups. Public understanding of Wayang Cilikmen art still varies. Some understand it as a positive art and some consider Wayang Cilikmen art with a minor tone. The following are some understandings of Wayang Cilikmen art from several people as community lovers and performers. This community understanding was obtained from observations and interviews during this research.

### 3.2.1 Wayang Cilikmen Art As A Form of Interpretation of Purwa Shadow Puppetry

The art of Wayang Cilikmen is an art that is rooted in the tradition of Wayang Kulit Purwa. Therefore, people who are the audience of Wayang Cilikmen understand the art of Wayang Cilikmen as watching a traditional art performance of Purwa Wayang Kulit. It's just that Wayang Cilikmen is understood as a form of Ki Fajar Ariyanto's interpretation of Purwa Wayang Kulit. This was conveyed by Amin (2023) in an interview with researchers, that Wayang Cilikmen also uses the medium of leather puppets like Wayang Kulit Purwa so that the existence of Wayang Cilikmen cannot be separated from the existence of Wayang Kulit Purwa as a model for Ki Fajar Ariyanto to create Wayang Cilikmen.

In this context, Ki Fajar Ariyanto makes Wayang Cilikmen as a form of aesthetic response to Wayang Kulit Purwa. Aesthetic response is related to the process of an audience's aesthetic response in suggesting the potential meaning of the text produced through communication between the text and its readers, namely the contextualisation of a text into meaning for its readers. This question relates to (1) the relationship between the text and relitas (facts), the relationship or partnership in communication; (2) the interaction between the text and the reader, the way or act of reading. [13]. The reader should react to the text, not just accept what the text conveys. The reader has an active role in the process of interpreting the text and as a responder.

Although Wayang Cilikmen was created based on Wayang Kulit Purwa, it differs from Wayang Cilikmen Purwa in several ways. These include the accompaniment equipment, song accompaniment, performance time, theme, and character names.

**Table 1.** Differences between Wayang Cilikmen and Wayang Kulit Purwa

| No. | Wayang Cilikmen   | Wayang Kulit Purwa  |
|-----|---|---|
| 1   | Themed according to the dynamics of society   | Theme according to the rules that are followed  |
| 2   | The number of gamelan accompaniments is smaller and tends to utilise modern instruments.    | More gamelan because all types of gamelan are utilised.                                     |
| 3   | Dolls vary. Some are three-dimensional and resemble actual humans                           | Dolls are made of animal skin and are two-dimensional only and prioritise dolls as symbols. |
| 4   | The puppeteer freely interacts with the audience  | The puppeteer is not free to interact with the audience because it is very distant.         |
| 5   | The duration of the show is very short, at 2.5 hours  | Lasts all night   |
| 6   | Typically accompanied by songs that are popular in the community with various <i>genres</i> | Accompanied by the music that has been set in the guideline                                 |
| 7   | The puppeteer uses language that is commonly used in everyday life.                         | Dalang uses Javanese pedalangan language, known as High Javanese.                           |

### 3.2.2 The Art of Wayang Cilikmen Is Very Adaptive And Able To Entertain The Community

Some viewers mentioned that based on the play, the musical accompaniment and the language used by the puppeteer, Wayang Cilikmen is a contemporary art form that was produced due to factors that developed in society. In today's society, there are different characters from those of the past. Today's society tends to be characterised by time keeping, future orientation, dynamic nature, mobility, open tolerance, and progressive culture. [14].

Aesthetic needs are not universal, but some people in every culture seem to be motivated by the need for beauty and aesthetically pleasing experiences. Wayang Cilikmen provides an aesthetic experience to the people who watch it. The aesthetic experience in question includes enjoying the beauty of puppetry so that they feel happy, joyful, and carefree after watching Wayang Cilikmen. This is as told by Gayuh (12 years old) that she saw Wayang Cilikmen for the first time. Although it was her first time, she was able to understand the story and message narrated in Wayang Cilikmen. She also felt entertained after watching Wayang Cilikmen and promised to watch it again if there was a similar performance. In addition, with simple language, according to his experience and telling as things that exist in his life make Wayang Cilikmen bring him as if diving into real life / facts in reality.

There are several general requirements required of a person to gain aesthetic experience; first, there is a strong desire and willingness to unite with the object of beauty. Second, the sincerity and willingness to give a good time to follow the whole as a unity of things, elements, art values that exist and are inherent in the object of beauty. [15]. Furthermore, the time used to gain aesthetic experience when someone creates, listens to, or presents the work of art is called virtual time.

The procedure for obtaining aesthetic experience, namely: the observer/art enthusiast or art presenter, when listening to, or presenting a work of art gives single attention, gives special or real time, and involves himself personally (body and soul) in the work of art. The characteristics of someone who has had an aesthetic experience are, firstly, an outpouring of body and soul. Second, there is a desire to return to enjoy the beauty of the art. All of this confirms as stated by Barker that the social nature of art levelled the experiences and feelings of an artist to other people who thanks to art humanise themselves more perfectly. [16]. In the context of Wayang Cilikmen, this art is able to present a fresher performance because the audience is able to imagine what is shown in Wayang Cilikmen both in terms of physical puppets and themes and storylines. This condition plays an important role during the duration of the performance, the audience enjoys and feels that they are getting an aesthetic experience.

Wayang Cilikmen as a performing art cannot stand alone internally. However, besides being supported by the elements inherent in itself, Wayang Cilikmen is also formed by various elements of art and performance elements that exist in it. The existence of Wayang Cilikmen is related to the form of Wayang Cilikmen's work, the Ungul Pamenang studio, and also various phenomena that exist in modern society to determine the theme/story of puppets that will be displayed in a performance. The existence of Wayang Cilikmen as a contemporary art cannot be separated from society and at the same time carries a multidimensional function.

Contemporary puppets that emerge due to the influence of Wayang Kulit Purwa have varied forms both in terms of puppets and themes narrated in the story / play. Puppetry is the physical form of images of characters used as a medium for character containers by KI Fajar Arianto to move the storyline in the Wayang Cilikmen performance. Puppets are not just pictures but symbolise various human characters. In addition, puppets are also used as a means of communication between the puppeteer and the audience. [17]

### **3.2.3 Wayang Cilikmen is able to collaborate with other arts**

As a contemporary art form that is a radical adaptation of Wayang Kulit Purwa, Wayang Cilikmen is more flexible when juxtaposed with other performing arts. When Wayang Cilikmen

is juxtaposed with the arts of campursari and rontheK, it is able to perform in harmony without disturbing the story presented in the story. Not only in the gara section but almost at all stages of the story, Wayang Cilikmen can be collaborated with other arts. Even campursari songs can be used as accompaniment to the agenda in the Wayang Cilikmen story.

The accompaniment to Wayang Cilikmen does not always have to use gamelan songs. Wayang Cilikmen's collaboration with other arts is not extinct by the times, with the combination of other performing arts it will attract the audience to watch Wayang Cilikmen performances. Sukatno (61), who is also an artist, believes that the flexibility of Wayang Cilikmen, by being able to collaborate with other arts, has a positive impact on the development of the art of Wayang Cilikmen and also Wayang Kulit Purwa. Wayang Cilikmen is increasingly accepted by today's society. Wayang Kulit Purwa will also be preserved because in Wayang Cilikmen there are also characteristics of Wayang Kulit Purwa. In other words, Wayang Cilikmen is able to dialogue between tradition and modernity by presenting various elements in performances that are a form of innovation, creation and elaboration between traditional and modern things.

#### **3.2.4 Wayang Cilikmen and the Representation of Modern Man**

Wayang Cilikmen as a work of performance art is never neutral from the influence of aspects outside itself. Art is always linked to the context in which it exists. These include politics, economics, and social dynamics. [18]. Therefore, art, including Wayang Cilikmen, can not only be seen as formal art but also as a representation of social group identity.

Representation is the most important part of producing meanings that will be exchanged with other group members in the communication process in various areas including performing arts. [19]. Representation occurs because of language mediation of thoughts, ideas, and feelings so that it manifests in a culture. Language plays a central role in the production of meaning. Identity can be understood as a difference in individuals or groups when compared to other individuals or groups. Identity is dynamic in accordance with the changes that occur in society. Identity is our creation, something that is always in process, a movement towards and not an arrival. [16]

In Wayang Cilikmen, representation is mediated by language in the form of images, narration, and action. The three media are interconnected in order to produce a language that functions to convey messages by Ki Fajar Arianto to the audience. In addition, through language, the identity represented in Wayang Cilikmen can also be understood. Wayang Cilikmen consists of two things, namely elements of tradition that exist in Wayang Kulit Purwa and elements of contemporary art. Traditional elements that are still adopted from Wayang Kulit Purwa include puppets and storylines. Of course, these two things have been adjusted by Ki Fajar Arianto in line with the purpose of Wayang Cilikmen. The elements of contemporary art can also be seen in the puppets and the packaging of Wayang Cilikmen when performed.

The representation of identity in Wayang Cilikmen is the identity of a social group in modern times that is a single identity but a plural or split identity. Plural or split identities are experienced by modern humans because on the other hand they have to maintain tradition but on the other hand they also have to adjust to the pressure of the adverse effects of modernism. [20].

In the play *Salah Bakal Seleh*, identity is split in Juna, who is a vessel for human characters who experience identity problems in the modern era. Juna is trapped in a free and individual lifestyle, which is shown by Juna when he experiences emptiness in his life, he channels it into drugs, alcohol, and addiction to playing games / online gambling. Juna no longer considers other



people's feelings so he does something that satisfies himself. As a binary opposition, Juni is also Juna's younger brother. Unlike Juna, Juni tries to get out of his neighbourhood to the city to fight for a better fate. After being in the city, he becomes a good policeman and his life is more organised than Juna. The illustration is a description of the condition of modern society whose objective reality is determined by the agent's ability. Juna as a form of modern man's failure in creating a peaceful life and even experiencing downturn. In the end, Juna has to use the structure which is none other than Juni who is the police to make Juna realise. If it fails to be realised the structure must take the extreme path, namely obliteration.

The oppositional relationship between Juna and Juni in Wayang Cilikmen is a representation of the dynamics typical of modern society, which is also caused by globalisation. The societal change in question is a change that exists at a double point between negative, positive, and destructive. Modern society cannot avoid social risk because the world is in an uncontrollable state (runway world).[20].

#### **4. Conclusion**

The contemporary art of Wayang Cilikmen is present in the Pacitan community as a creation of the Unggul Pamenang studio led by Ki Dalang Fajar Ariyanto. The work has been performed in various activities and in almost all sub-districts in Pacitan Regency. The existence of Wayang Cilikmen is functioned by various parties according to the context of the purpose of the activity. However, in the community there are various responses to Wayang Cilikmen, including Wayang Cilikmen as art as a form of interpretation of the Wayang Kulit Purwa tradition, Wayang Cilikmen as an art that is able to adjust the tastes of today's society so that it can provide entertainment for them, and Wayang Cilikmen is an art that can be collaborated with other performing arts. These diverse responses are evidence that the art of Wayang Cilikmen has been well received by the people of Pacitan Regency. In addition, Wayang Cilikmen as contemporary art is able to present the problems of human life that are always dealing with social risks in an uncertain society.

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