

The Role of the Puppeteer in Wayang Kulit Performing Art

Dwiki Setya Prayoga

(State University of Surabaya, Indonesia)

Abstract: The puppeteers try with all creativities they have to preserve the art of Wayang performance traditions. The concept form of the presentation in Wayang art performance contains aesthetic values for life. The puppeteers always present new story in the performance, this is done as an effort of Wayang tradition conservation. However, not all know the real role of the puppeteers. In an entertaining performance, there is a character that plays actively and innovatively in living the audience and connoisseur appreciation on Wayang kulit performance, the puppeteer. This is where the role of puppeteers in the art of Wayang performance must known by all people.

Key words: the puppeteer, performing art, shadow puppet.

1. Introduction

In creating an art performance which presents the performance that can entertain the audience and the connoisseur, it requires team work, preparation, hard work, and discipline. The people involved behind the art of Wayang performance is the puppeteer. The one who succeeds in hypnotizing the audience and the connoisseur is the puppeteer. The role of puppeteers, like a concert, they are the creative actors, the choreographers, the artists, the directors, and so on.

The puppeteers are the genius creators in the art of Wayang performance, however unfortunately there are many people that do not know yet who the puppeteers exactly are. Besides that, the puppeteers are always forgotten by the connoisseur of art. If the audience and the connoisseur like the art of Wayang performance, it is all not apart from the creativity work and the hard work of the puppeteers. The puppeteers always present the new story at once they can pretend, play dialogues, and do role play of many characters.

Taking a close look at the phenomenon nowadays in which the role of technology is getting faster, the information is easy to get. This is where the role of the puppeteers in the art of Wayang performance must be known by all people. Because the creative instinct which grows in artists likes the puppeteers, keep developing following the era by presenting the new modern story.

2. Discussion

2.1 The Puppeteer or the Shaman

A strange explanation about the position of a puppeteer is said such as: some puppeteers firstly crawl with smoky frankincense in a cage covered by sarong before they started their job. At the end of the “talun” (the introduction) the cage is moved then the puppeteers directly hold the “mountain” and start the performance to

Dwiki Prayoga, Bachelor of Design (S.Ds.), State University of Surabaya (UNESA); research areas/interests: art and culture education. E-mail: dwikiprayoga255@gmail.com, cntgart25@gmail.com.

bring the audiences into the imagination like what has been told in the “pakem” (the story), or during the talk with the souls when the shaman/puppeteer was in the cage (Mulyono, 1982, p. 46).

Until now the reinterpretation and the modification towards wayang performance have been done by the puppeteers nowadays. However various reinterpretation and the modification still do not touch the building of women’s image as the effort of gender equality. Most of the puppeteers modify the appearance and the plot of the story, which breaks the pakem (the story) merely as the popularity consideration, the demands of the era, and the entertainment for the audience, it does not touch the reinterpretation towards various systems of values and the ideology of wayang purwa yet which are patriarchal and feudal (Kresna, 2011, p. 11).

The puppeteers are human beings. The human being themselves are homo creators, it means that humans are the being that always make creation. To pour their creation, they must always create some work to fulfill their life needs. Human’s life has three levels, the first is (1) aesthetic; (2) ethic; and (3) religious. With aesthetic life, the human can catch the amazement of the world and their environment. Then they pour their feeling of amazement into an amazing art work. In ethic level, the humans try to improve their aesthetic life in the form of human action, which is act freely and take decision that can be accounted for to other human. At the last level, finally the humans realize that their life needs a purpose. All deeds then accounted for to the God the almighty (Endraswara, 2017, p. 52).

2.2 The Puppeteer as the Actor

Actor is the producer (creator) of culture, in which the actors’ political behavior influence the change and the sustainability of the values of local political culture. In other words, the roles of actors are one of the important keys in the success of democracy, because the behaviors of the actors and the policies made have important meaning and also influence towards the consolidation of democracy. In the correlation to democracy, the process of political transition occurring in Indonesia in last ten years had given container, at once placing the actors either at national level or local level.

According to Sutiyono, after the new order, the puppeteers succeeded in becoming the campaigner and win Golkar party in the regions as the purpose of the campaign. The successful puppeteers were given gifts by the ruler such as the luxurious car and given a chance to do pilgrimage. Because after the new order, the art of puppeteers was used to attract peoples’ attention. According to the ruler of the new order at that time, the art of puppeteers which the actor is the puppeteers themselves, thought that the puppeteers had potency to deliver message and invitation to the society. Through a wayang performance, a puppeteer can paint and express the picture of a country life wanted but also the policy and power practitioners of a country.

Actors here refer to the doers in the interaction with the society. The actors meant are the non-governmental actors or these actors are also called as the nation state. Because these actors are different in the political system, generally they lead to democratic country, in which the politics of the government are the representation of the people’s will. However, there are also many countries ruled by the elite government and the businessmen. Until it is as if apart from the people’s political picture. The system like this firmly influences the puppeteers’ art pamor or wayang art performance.

2.3 The Puppeteer as the Script Writer

Each work has its own privileges. When in a Wayang performance, which is delivered by the puppeteers, in other words the puppeteers must have broad knowledge in delivering a story or information orally. The puppeteers have roles for restoring the harmonic feeling or the heart of the readers or the people. This problem can be

correlated to the works delivered by the puppeteers lightly and as the entertainment purposes.

The puppeteers in delivering the story have commemorative purpose which is remembering, in each story there must be meaning and philosophy or even thought and other interpretation. All delivered by the puppeteers aim to educate and lead to the right path. The puppeteers can produce beneficial works as the reflection or the picture of the present time or the future.

The puppeteers as the part of the script writers. Script writers according to Elizabeth Lutters are the people who have expertise in making a film in the written form or creative worker who can develop an idea to be a written story which is visualized next. The role here, when the puppeteers build a good story and Wayang logic as the media or the humans' reflection who have character and attitude like the human. Until the puppeteers indirectly change the pace (the history) or even the new character, or using a character that has similar personality to deliver the message. Besides that, the task of a script writer is elaborating the ideas through the plot of the story and the language used. The role of the puppeteers as the script writers is very obvious in which each Wayang performance, they do not only become the writers but also play many languages and characters of Wayang in Indonesia.

2.4 The Puppeteer as the Comedian

According to Widjaja (1993), humor or jocularity prevails for normal human as the entertainment because the entertainment is the absolute need of human for their endurance in the process of life. Thereby, the existence of humor as the media of entertainment is very important. Humor can appear steady as thought and at once the inner conditioning, and stress releaser (Pramono, 1983). Humor can also deliver satire or humorous criticism that can cause laugh. Humor can also become the media of persuasion to ease the entrance of information or message wanted to be delivered as serious or forlorn thing (Gauter, 1989).

An art work will not be meaningful without the existence of public as the reader, listener, or the audience (Saidi Iwan, 2017, p. 36). The interesting art performance can get public attention broadly before or after the performance conducted. If an art performance succeeds in the presentation, then it will build a good image of it. It is all not apart from the component touch in wayang art performance, especially the puppeteers who can also present the entertainment condition such as when goro-goro act taking place. The puppeteers as the media do not only play role as the character or the antagonist character, protagonist, and others, they can create and present *guyonan* (the joke) that can entertain the audience which aims to eliminate bored feeling when the audiences watch the art performance.

2.5 The Puppeteer as Art Director and Creative Director

In a performance, the puppeteers play role as communicant who reflect a real condition that develops in the society nowadays. In the story of Epos Mahabarata or Ramayana delivered by the puppeteers in the art performance, it has firm correlation to the people's life such as politics, social, culture, and so on (Kiswadi, 2009). As artists, the puppeteers in facing the competition in this modern era, they are demanded to produce creative ideas that have communicative concept.

The art gives form at experience that does not have clear form (*amorf*). The art can display what was hidden, articulate the inarticulated (Sugiharto, 2013, p. 17). The artists as the organizers, as the actors/presenters are called as artists because they bring demanded roles and do not only bring what is written in the scenario, but in themselves there is a creative process which then emerges to the surface of the presentation (Kartika, 2017, p. 21).

The puppeteers as art directors and creative directors, as the artists they have obligation and responsibility to

coordinate with the pengrawit (gamelan players), pesindhen (the singers) and the societies to present the art performance. In wayang kulit performance, a set of gamelan is used as the music that has each function and role. Gamelan completed with its drummer called as niyaga and the puppeteers who play wayang kulit are one element that cannot be separated, because the puppeteers demonstrate wayang as the symbol or the reflection of human then gamelan is the symbol of life's rhythm, situation, and condition which always accompanies sadness, happiness, emotion, and so on. While pesindhen (the singers) sing the song supporting and leading the puppeteers to confirm the events or the pauses in wayang art performance. Puppeteers also give sign to pesinden (the singers) and otherwise, vise versa correlation.

2.6 The Puppeteer as the Director

The puppeteer in the world of wayang is defined as someone who has particular expertise in playing wayang. Puppeteer artists have broad knowledge, they can tell the knowledge and give explanation to the audiences. They learn various disciplines of sciences because they will present a renewal stories which reflect or in accordance with the era development and the noble values nowadays.

According to Rais (2016), puppeteers always perform an act in an art performance, the act has been planned by the puppeteers at home, or bring the act ordered by wayang responders. This performance is done at a certain event such as circumcision, wedding or party, beside that this performance is also used as additional entertainment and existed tradition in the society. Generally this performance is conducted for 6 hours or more. During the night long this performance depends on the puppeteer who play wayang story. The performance is more exciting during the midnight. The puppeteers play a very important role in the art performance.

The puppeteer as the director, the script writer, a narrator, and a character player, gamelan music and pesinden (the singer) organizer, make up artist, the dancer, and so on. It can be concluded that the puppeteer is multitalent who is also a manager or even a leader in wayang art performance. Someone who can play role and have influence on the success of a performance. The puppeteer as the director play wayang behind "kelir" which is a screen made of white clothes projected by "*Blencong*" (oil lamps).

2.7 The Puppeteer in the World of Film

Artists as the messengers, through a traditional art performance play role as the puppeteers delivering messages (audio-verbal) and (visual-kinesthetic) drive wayang. The puppeteer as the story teller until handling all steps of the production process. Until the success of the failure is on the hand of the puppeteers, how they can attract the audiences' attention with their creative process.

The puppeteers in the world of film, they make the whole concepts, choose the actors/the actress and personal creative who is the pengrawit (gamelan player) and pesindhen (the singer) and also the elements existed in wayang art performance. The similarity between the puppeteers and the the directors, both of them work with actor/actress on the stage or the scene, then they give sign to change the script of the story. The puppeteers spend full one night on the stage while playing wayang delivering the story which has meaning and message and accounted for the coordination at each element in wayang art performance included pengrawit (gamelan player) and pesindhen (the singer).

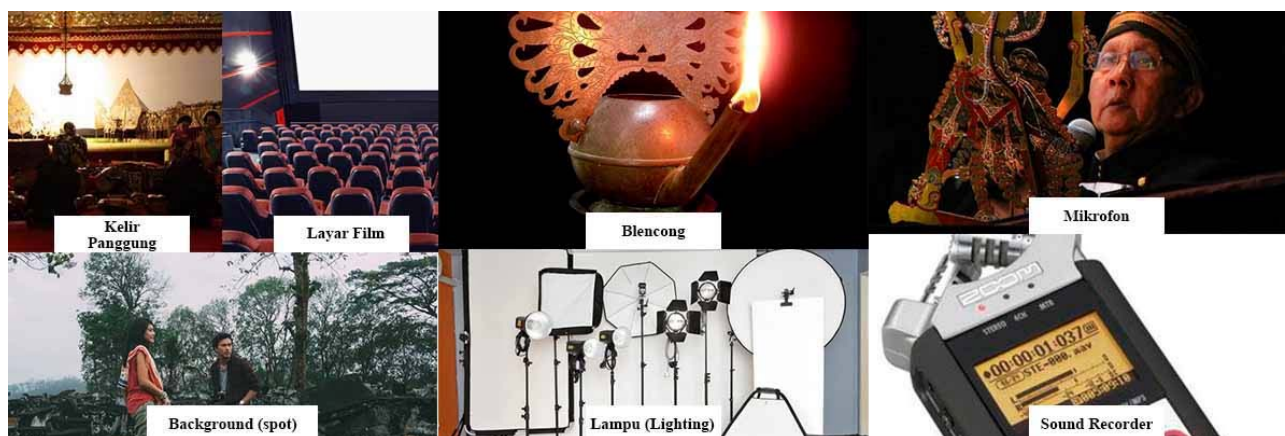
In the world of film, the directors lead the film that they produce in accordance with the manuscript. The manuscript functions to control the drama aspect and the art existed in the film. In the process of film production, the director manages the officers, the players, and other supporting parts to follow his or her instruction. The director also play role as the guide for all supporting parts in the film. On the other hand, the puppeteers are also

responsible for telling the story, choosing the players in charge as the gamelan player and the sinden (the singer), the puppeteers work with all elements to determine the narration in the art performance. Thus it can be concluded that the director is a creative person, the person who can conduct wayang art performance well, giving the soul by moving the wayang puppets at once dramatizing the role of various wayang characters. The puppeteers play many roles started from comedians, antagonist, protagonist, and developing the narration of the story until wayang kulit performance becomes interesting and must be watched by all people.

3. The Conclusion

The puppeteers, the human is also called as social beings, in experiencing the spiritual way then someone will know the term of the real teacher. The puppeteer as the real teacher is someone who can give the knowledge or the teachings so that someone can understand themselves until it can be beneficial to achieve the life goals. The puppeteer acts as someone who is respected and has high spirituality like a “*kiai*” (Islamic scholar). *Kiai* (Islamic scholar) is the leader of religion who is in charge to protect and guide during Wayang art performance. It also can be said as rising star in performing arts, only a puppeteer who can sit behind kelir almost a night long and plays Wayang. The puppeteers have intellectual intelligence because they can do reasoning, planning, problem solving, abstract thinking, and using the language and learn.

4. Interesting Facta the Puppeteer as the Director and the Actor in Wayang Kulit Performing Arts



Picture 1 Kelir and the Stage/the Scene and the Place — (Shadow Puppet Performing Art/Filming)

The Source: (<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Puppet-shadow-1.jpg>)
(<https://rzeszow.onet.pl/po-kilkumiesiecznej-przerwie-do-jasla-wraca-kino/klmf4>)
(<http://brbagi.com/list-place-spot-tourism-way-love-and-rangga-in-film-aadc-2/>)

Blencong/Lamp (Lighting) – (Shadow Puppet Performing Art/Filming)

The Source: (<http://patinafolkart.blogspot.co.id/2014/08/blencong-javanese-shadow-puppet-oil-lamp.html>)
(<https://emkokamera.blogspot.co.id/2014/02/maintain-tools-lighting-videografi.html>)

Mikrofon/Sound Recorder – (Shadow Puppet Performing Arts/Filming)

The source: (<https://normantis.com/2016/06/04/padang-kurusetra-shortstory-cak-nun/padang-kurusetra-shortstory-cak-nun/>)
(<http://2v-filmmakers.blogspot.co.id/2016/02/7-tools-needed-making-for.html>)

Kelir has firm correlation to the art of Wayang kulit performance, this tool is white which is usually used by the puppeteer to play wayang puppet or frequently called as the shadow puppet (wayang). Panggung (the stage) is a room for the theater performance which usually used by the puppeteer to deliver wayang story to the audiences.

Layar Film (The Screen) is usually used or the place to watch the performance by using white wide screen then the film picture is projected by using the projector (living picture). Tempat (The Background) is called as the background of a room and the situation of an occurring event or story, the background can also describe happy, sad, or romantic situation. Blencong in Wayang performing art, this tool is used as the tool for lighting during Wayang performance, the fuel used is the palm oil. Lampu (Lighting) is a very important part from the theater or a film, at each scene there is also certain technique to deliver the feeling of the actor/actress. Microphone is one of the tool to help the communication, it is usually used at the recording equipments, hearing aid, beside that this too is also used by the puppeteer to deliver the content of the story. Sound Recorder or audio recorder is the tool used after professional film production which records the audio to the recording tool then synchronized with the visual usually used by the actor during filming the movie.



Picture 2 Cempala and Keprak/Clapperboard – (Shadow Puppet Performing Art/Filming)

The source: (<http://www.disparbud.jabarprov.go.id/wisata/ensiklo-det.php?id=19&lang=id>)

(<https://www.slideshare.net/keithreyesmesa/wayang-kulit-and-nang-shadow>) -

(<https://www.shutterstock.com/video/clip-6548240-stock-footage-clapper-board-on-green-screen.html>)

Gamelan Sindhen/Music Audio Editing – (Shadow Puppet Performing Art/Filming)

Sumber: (<https://hiveminer.com/Tags/gareng,player> - <http://picssr.com/tags/aryanto/page2>)

(<https://www.pictaram.org/hashtag/eifeliminlove2>)

The Director/Actor (Dalang) – (Shadow Puppet Performing Art/Filming)

The source: (<http://www.tribunnews.com/images/seleb/view/634841/hanung-bramantyo-sutradara-film-soekarno>)

(<https://www.hipwee.com/hiburan/aktor-terbaik-indonesia-saat-ini-reza-rahadian-film-film-ini-jadi-buktinya/>) –

(<http://kumpulan-berita-unik.blogspot.co.id/2014/04/Dalang-Wayang-Paling-Terkenal-Di-Indonesia.html>)

Cempala Keprak is the tool used by the puppeteers to hit the wayang box (dog.. dog..) the sound is like that. This wayang box is usually used to keep wayang. While the function of cempala is to give the clue to the gamelan player and the pesindhen (the singer) and building the situation in the performance. Clapperboard or slate board is used in the process of film production, when this tool is sounded then the voice and the picture will be synchronized or united. There are also boxes in the clapperboard contain the title of the film, the slate, the shot, the scene, take, and so on. *Gamelan* the assemble music is one whole unity created and sounded together by a group of players usually used at the events, official events, wedding party, and performing arts. *Sindhen* is the name for the female singer who sings the song along with the gamelan orchestra, who has vocal expertise and ability to sing the songs. Music Audio Editing, the process of sound editing usually uses digital software. This editing is done in the form of short scene and the supporting component like the voice or the sound effect and the music. *Sutradara* (the director) or called as the film maker is the person in charge in leading the film in accordance with the manuscript, his or her job is to give instruction, control, and guard the production process. Actor, often called as

the role player which is divided into two; the actor and the actress are the people who play certain role in certain stage of action in the television program or the film. *Dalang* (the puppeteers), the puppeteers in the world of wayang are the people who play wayang puppets and their job is to manage the situation of the stage, they sit down behind kelir and control the process of the art during the performance. Beside that, they also play all wayang characters during the show being performed.

References

- Endraswara Suwardi (2017). *The Anthropology of Wayang: Symbolism, Mysticism, and Life Realism*, Morfalingua Publisher.
- Gauter Dick (1988). *The Humor of Cartoon*, New York: A Pegrige Book.
- Handayani Aris Muslih (2006). "The study of film role in world of education", *The Journal of Educational Alternative Thought*, accessed on 4th February, 2018, available online at: <https://media.neliti.com/media/publications/73315-ID-study-role-film-in-world-education.pdf>.
- Kresna Ardian (2012). *Punakawan: The Symbol of Javanese Modesty*, Narasi Publisher (member of IKAPI).
- Kartika Sony Dharsono (2017). *Modern Fine Arts Revised Edition*, Publisher: Publisher: Science Engineering, Bandung.
- Kiswadi (2009). "The final assignment: The work system of art director at PT. International Matari Advertising Jakarta", accessed on 3rd January, 2018, available online at: <https://eprints.uns.ac.id/6997/1/103201709200910301.pdf>.
- Mulyono Sri Ir (1982). *Wayang the Origins, Philosophy and Its Future*, Publisher PT Gunung Agung Jakarta.
- Nurgiyantoro Burhan (1998). *The Transformation of Wayang Components in Indonesian Fiction*, Publisher Gadjah Mada University Press.
- Pramono (1983). *Caricatures 1970–1980*, Jakarta. The Light of Hope
- Rais Amien (2016). *Reading Wayang from the Islamic Point of View*, Publisher CV Farishma Indonesia.
- Saidi Acep Iwan (2017). *The Design of Media and Culture*, Publisher ITB.
- Sugiharto Bambang (2013). *What is an Art for?* Publisher MATAHARI Bandung.
- Sutiyono. (2017). "The hegemony of power towards the art of puppeteers", accessed on December 28th, 2017, available online at: http://staff.uny.ac.id/sites/default/files/131808675/Jurnal-Imaji_0.pdf.
- Sulanjari Bambang (2018). "The ideology and the identity of puppeteers in the selection of professional puppeteers: Yogyakarta", *The Journal of Art Study*, accessed on 1st January, 2018, available online at: <https://jurnal.ugm.ac.id/jks/article/view/30045/18117>.
- Widjaja A.W. (1983). *The Communication and The Society Relation*, Jakarta: Bumi Aksara.
- Wicaksana Ketut Dewa I. (2015). "The ideology and the strategy of the puppeteers in the creativity of Wayang performing arts", accessed on 17th December, 2017, available online at: <http://www.isi-dps.ac.id/article/ideology-and-strategy-artist-puppeteer-in-creativity-art-show-wayang/>.