

## Deconstructing the aesthetics of shadow puppet art in *Wahyu Katentreman* by Cahyo Kuntadi

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### Abstract

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This study analyzes the aesthetic deconstruction in *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet) performances, focusing on the *Wahyu Katentreman* play performed by puppeteer Cahyo Kuntadi. The study aims to identify the causes, processes, and implications of aesthetic deconstruction in *wayang kulit* performances and their impact on the sustainability of this traditional art form in the modern era. Using Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory as the primary approach, this research also references Jakob Sumardjo's paradoxical aesthetic theory and Sunardi's concepts of *nuksma* and *mungguh*. A qualitative research method with an interpretative analysis technique was employed, utilizing both primary and secondary data sources. The findings indicate that aesthetic deconstruction in this *wayang kulit* performance is driven by changing audience preferences influenced by materialism and hedonism. The deconstruction process is evident in the transition from sacred to profane elements, the fusion of various performance styles from Surakarta, Yogyakarta, and East Java, and the integration of spontaneous humor within the Punakawan characters. The implications of this deconstruction include the emergence of new references for young puppeteers, increased appreciation of *wayang kulit* among the millennial generation, and economic benefits for *karawitan* music groups and local communities. Thus, this study asserts that aesthetic deconstruction in *wayang kulit* also contributes to innovation in performing arts and plays a crucial role in maintaining the relevance of traditional culture amidst dynamic social changes.

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### Abstrak

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#### **Dekonstruksi estetika seni *wayang kulit* dalam *Wahyu Katentreman* karya Cahyo Kuntadi**

Penelitian ini menganalisis dekonstruksi estetika dalam seni pertunjukan *wayang kulit* pada lakon *Wahyu Katentreman* yang dibawakan oleh Cahyo Kuntadi. Studi ini bertujuan mengidentifikasi penyebab, proses, dan implikasi dekonstruksi estetika dalam pertunjukan *wayang kulit* terhadap keberlanjutan seni pertunjukan di era modern. Teori dekonstruksi Jacques Derrida digunakan sebagai pendekatan utama, serta teori estetika paradoks Jakob Sumardjo, dan konsep *nuksma* dan *mungguh* dari Sunardi. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan teknik analisis interpretatif, menggunakan sumber data primer dan sekunder. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dekonstruksi estetika dalam pertunjukan *wayang kulit* ini didorong oleh perubahan selera masyarakat yang dipengaruhi oleh materialisme dan hedonisme. Proses dekonstruksi tampak melalui transisi dari aspek sakral ke profan, penggabungan berbagai gaya pertunjukan dari Surakarta, Yogyakarta, dan Jawa Timur, serta integrasi unsur humor spontan dalam karakter Punakawan. Implikasi dari dekonstruksi ini meliputi munculnya referensi baru bagi dalang muda, peningkatan apresiasi generasi milenial terhadap *wayang kulit*, serta dampak ekonomi bagi kelompok karawitan dan komunitas sekitar. Dengan demikian, studi ini menegaskan bahwa dekonstruksi estetika dalam *wayang kulit* tidak hanya berkontribusi terhadap inovasi seni pertunjukan tetapi juga memainkan peran penting dalam menjaga relevansi budaya tradisional di tengah perubahan sosial yang dinamis.

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### Kata Kunci:

Cahyo Kuntadi; dekonstruksi; estetika; *Wahyu Katentreman*; *wayang kulit*

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## 1 Introduction

Art is a pattern of expression of a culture that is related to the worldview of the figures of that culture. The connection between art and life values, such as self-understanding of life and a basis or foundation in determining whether something is good or bad, so that these values can be applied to become a better human being. Mudji Sutrisno and Christ Verhaak (Sutrisno et al., 1993) state that there are two cultural dimensions (self-liberation), meaning that art is one of the human cultural processes that function as a process of self-liberation. Second, the functional dimension (useful, efficient, technical, and commercial) means that culture also has functional characteristics for survival. Hence, culture's measure or value is beneficial, useful, functional, efficient, and free, which makes a person more humane.

Appreciating beauty in performing arts requires works of art that contain the quality of beauty. One of the performing arts is that which contains the quality of beauty. One of the performing arts that can be absorbed by the senses of sight and hearing, and contains elements of beauty, is the *wayang kulit* performance. Shadow puppetry is a performing art that originates from Javanese culture as a medium for exploring life's values and the community's culture. The word is beautiful in a *wayang kulit* performance, not only describes the physical appearance, which is smooth, complicated, and colorful, but the sound of *gamelan* music accompanied by the melodious *swarawati* singing also completes the meaning of the word beautiful. Another thing that is no less important is the message from a puppeteer, which is conveyed in the form of a complete *wayang kulit* performance, either through statements about truth, evil, hardship, or joy that can touch the hearts of the audience.

The art of *wayang kulit* performances has been proven to survive for centuries until now. *Wayang kulit* has gone through a long history in forming a construction that is increasingly integrated with the mindset of Javanese society. This process experienced several developments, namely starting from animist rituals as a ceremony to worship ancestral spirits, then the introduction of Islam to the island of Java through the kingdom of Demak, and the Purwa shadow puppet show, which was used as a medium for preaching the Islamic religion by the Guardians. Hazeu (in Sarwanto, 2007) during the Islamic era (Raden Patah became King of Demak), shadow puppets were used as a medium for da'wah, and were not made to resemble human forms so as not to conflict with the teachings of Islam. Still, the Guardians try to perfect the *wayang kulit* performances well. Several references have mentioned *wayang* performances as a medium for da'wah. Still, no references show evidence regarding the complete packaging and form of *wayang* performances at that time. Therefore, the acculturation process can run well so that the art of *wayang kulit* performance remains alive and develops into a cultural art that is full of meaning today. Over a long period of history, shadow puppets have been proven to have a flexible, adaptable nature while at the same time utilizing everything given to the environment to survive and continue to exist.

The development of shadow puppetry today emphasises technical matters, but aesthetic or essential works tend to be neglected (Sudarko, 2003). It is necessary to note that shadow puppet performances should include two social aspects and an aspect of morality. The social aspect, which is presented as kitsch art, is presented to meet market needs, while morality is a medium for conveying the values and teachings of life. Kasidi (2014) states that the renewal of *wayang kulit* performances certainly requires an understanding that does not simply abandon the spirit and substance of the art of *wayang kulit* performances, which are classified as classic and traditional. Challenges like this are why the art of *wayang kulit* performance must adapt to modern thought concepts. In addition, puppetry artists must be able to communicate their work with various modern paradigms.

Shadow puppet performances have changed according to the challenges of the times. This depends on an artist's ability to innovate amidst change. The challenge of culture is adapting so that



extinction does not occur. Updates and adjustments in shadow puppetry result from the puppeteer's creativity in responding to the challenges of the times. Shadow puppetry as a cultural product is not just an individual artist's business; everyone is involved. This kind of phenomenon cannot be avoided, so a puppetry practitioner must adapt to the pace of development of the times. Umar Kayam's thoughts regarding the necessity for the art of *wayang kulit* performance to adapt to changing circumstances are very productive of the discourse that developed around Javanese art, even in the Indonesian *Wayang* Art workshop in 1986; this idea emerged quite prominently (2001). Budiarjo, on that occasion, said that if shadow puppetry does not adapt to changing times, it will eventually lose its audience.

Ki Narto Sabdo was a puppeteer who first combined the two puppetry styles of Surakarta and Yogyakarta; apart from that, he also included musical compositions from various regions such as *Banyumasan*, *Pasundan*, *Surabayan*, *Semarangan*, and so on. What Narto Sabdo did received pros and cons from artists and people who enjoy shadow puppets; even though Narto Sabdo presented commercial performances, the essence of the play was still presented aesthetically, so that art lovers could absorb the play (Sudarko, 2003).

Ki Timbul Hadiprayitno is a puppeteer who is famous for his persistence in maintaining the Yogyakarta-style *wayang kulit* performance. Still, if you observe closely, his performance style has changed over a long time because several aspects of the *wayang kulit* performance from Surakarta influence it. Next, Ki Anom Suroto is a puppeteer who adheres to the understanding that the beauty and appeal of shadow puppetry lies in the sound. In his performance practice, Ki Anom Suroto has the power to adapt the audience's messages and the problems that occur in his performing arts. In this adjustment, Ki Anom Suroto departed from the standard to adapt to the world of modern education in an environment that responds (Kayam, 2001).

Cahyo Kuntadi is a puppeteer from Karanganyar who is famous on YouTube. Cahyo Kuntadi is one of the puppeteers who can renew the shadow puppet audience in the current era. The *wayang kulit* performance style combines the styles of Surakarta, Yogyakarta, and East Java into one, and this mixed style successfully attracts the audience's interest. The Surakarta style dominates Cahyo Kuntadi's performance style, but it is not presented in a strictly traditional style, and many come from other regions. Cahyo Kuntadi's *wayang kulit* performances often include a variety of spontaneous humor displayed by the characters in Punakawan so that they sometimes become controversial or go viral. This is one of Cahyo Kuntadi's unique features or creativity in packaging a performance to communicate with the audience so that they can receive and understand it easily.

The mastermind chosen for research purposes was Cahyo Kuntadi, with several considerations. First, puppeteers are popular and can attract the interest of shadow puppet audiences in the current era. Second, one of the puppeteers dared to develop and change the creativity of *wayang kulit* performances, which were considered to have been established by other traditional puppeteer artists. Third, Cahyo Kuntadi is a puppeteer who can read and incorporate various trends in society. Fourth, the aspects or language styles used in the performance are easy for listeners to understand. Fifth, the forms of creativity and communication packaged in the Cahyo Kuntadi shadow have their own style or characteristics.

Deconstructing the world of *wayang* with noble values is part of the imaginary creativity of the author (puppeteer) (Nurhadi, 2014). Deconstruction is courage in responding to the challenges of the times, which contains contradictions that imply resistance to the established conditions of the cultural construction or system. Deconstruction in the world of *wayang* influences efforts to dismantle established constructions, such as the conventions of traditional *wayang kulit* performances. All of



this is presented through the shadow puppet performance in the *Wahyu Katentreman* play presented by Cahyo Kuntadi.

The play *Wahyu Katentreman*, presented by Cahyo Kuntadi, is very interesting to study. This play contains much deconstruction. Many conventions are dismantled from the beginning to the end of the play. The deconstruction in this play is relevant to the lives of the Javanese society. Examples of deconstruction in this play are depicted through dialogues with the characters Puntadewa, Wrekudara, Baladewa, Kresna, Antasena, Antareja, and others. *Wahyu Katentreman* is symbolized by Tirta Manikmaya Mahadi. Puntadewa received *Wahyu Katentreman*, which Trilocana gave.

Several previous studies have been conducted on the innovation and preservation of *wayang kulit* performing arts. (Irawan et al., 2023) studied the tradition of Javanese *wayang kulit* performances in Sidoharjo-1 Pasar Miring Village, Deli Serdang, focusing on cultural meaning, social roles, and efforts to preserve the tradition. The results showed that *wayang kulit* plays an important role in preserving local cultural heritage and strengthening social relations in the community despite facing challenges from changes in mindset and modern lifestyle. Wrahatnala (Wrahatnala, 2021) discusses innovation and genre-blending in the "Keroncong Wayang Gendut" performance in Surakarta, which combines *keroncong* music with *wayang* elements to create a more interactive and attractive form of performance for the younger generation. Widyastitieningrum and Herdiani (2021) explores innovation in the form of the Sriwedari Wayang Orang performance in Surakarta as an effort to preserve Javanese culture. This innovation includes working on aspects of the performance form, such as the play, dramatic plot, and stage design, so that the performance becomes more compact, attractive, and appealing to the tastes of today's audience.

Although the art of *wayang kulit* performance has been widely studied from various perspectives, most previous studies have emphasized aspects of preserving tradition, blending genres, and innovation of performance forms to attract the interest of the younger generation. Several studies have reviewed the social role and educational function of *wayang kulit*, including efforts to maintain the relevance of cultural values amidst the flow of globalization and changes in the tastes of modern audiences. However, there is a significant research gap in terms of in-depth philosophical and aesthetic approaches, especially regarding how *wayang kulit* performance art experiences deconstruction in the context of contemporary culture.

The novelty of this research lies in the aesthetic deconstruction approach to *wayang kulit* performance presented by Cahyo Kuntadi, a contemporary puppeteer known for his courage in overhauling traditional performance conventions. Through the play "*Wahyu Katentreman*," Cahyo Kuntadi not only presents an entertaining performance but also contains a transformation of values, narrative structures, and visual and auditory styles that reflect today's social dynamics. By adopting Derrida's deconstructive perspective, this study attempts to reread the hidden meanings, symbolic shifts, and resistance to old structures in *wayang kulit* performance.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to broadening the scientific horizon in the field of traditional performing arts, especially in the context of cultural change and adaptation to the challenges of the times. This study not only enriches the academic literature on puppetry but also provides conceptual guidance for artists, academics, and cultural policy makers in developing traditional arts that remain rooted but contextually relevant. In addition, the deconstruction approach used is able to open up new interpretative spaces for forms of cultural expression, showing that traditional arts are not static but dynamic and open to renewal of meaning. Based on the background and analysis, this study aims to examine in depth the forms of aesthetic deconstruction in contemporary *wayang kulit* performances, especially the play "*Wahyu Katentreman*" by Cahyo Kuntadi. This study also aims to explain how these forms of deconstruction affect the audience's



perception of *wayang kulit* performances and how this process contributes to the sustainability and revitalization of traditional performing arts in the modern era. The title of this study is "Aesthetic Deconstruction of *Wayang Kulit* Performing Arts in the Play *Wahyu Katentreman* Presenting Cahyo Kuntadi". Deconstruction is a term used to read a text based on James Derrida's philosophical views. According to Derrida, the search for the meaning of cultural texts is not based on logocentrism but on more than one form, function, and cultural meaning of cultural texts, although these meanings must be deconstructed to bring up new meanings from events of difference. The positive impact of deconstruction is the effort to destroy the boundaries between concepts and metaphors that have been maintained by structuralists between truth and binary opposition (Murniati, 2015).

## 2 Methods

This research is in the field of cultural studies and uses qualitative research methods and interpretative data analysis techniques. The interpretative qualitative method is an analysis method based on the value itself, but combined and ending with a process of interpretation. The basic consideration is that all human life is a language or text (Ratna, 2010). (Darmoko, 2020) believes that qualitative research interprets and relates existing data to the current social situation. In qualitative research, the problems studied refer to comparative studies and studies of the relationship between one element and other elements. This qualitative research activity includes data collection, data analysis, data interpretation, and conclusions, which refer to the data analysis carried out.

This study uses a hermeneutic approach. This approach is used to operationalize understanding and its relationship to the interpretation of the text. Theoretically, a study needs to have three of the six branches of Schleimacher's hermeneutic classification, namely (1) philosophical hermeneutics, the study must be able to interpret broadly and deeply about the object and its interrelationship with open, advanced, and forward-looking entities; (2) dream analysis, the form of the object is a construction of cultural symbols that at a certain time are represented in everyday life; and (3) social hermeneutics, the study can carry out a fundamental understanding of the reciprocal relationship between human beings and social actions, as well as the direction of the development of the intended mentality. (Pitana, 2014)

However, in addition to the hermeneutic approach, this study integrates deconstruction theory to dig deeper into the dynamics of change and shifting meanings in cultural traditions, especially in the art of *wayang kulit* performance. Derrida's deconstruction theory is used to identify and analyze the contradictions and ambiguities in the traditional structures found in *wayang kulit* texts and practices. In this way, deconstruction theory expands the space of interpretation, allowing for a more complex understanding of how traditions can survive and evolve over time without losing their essence.

## 3 Findings

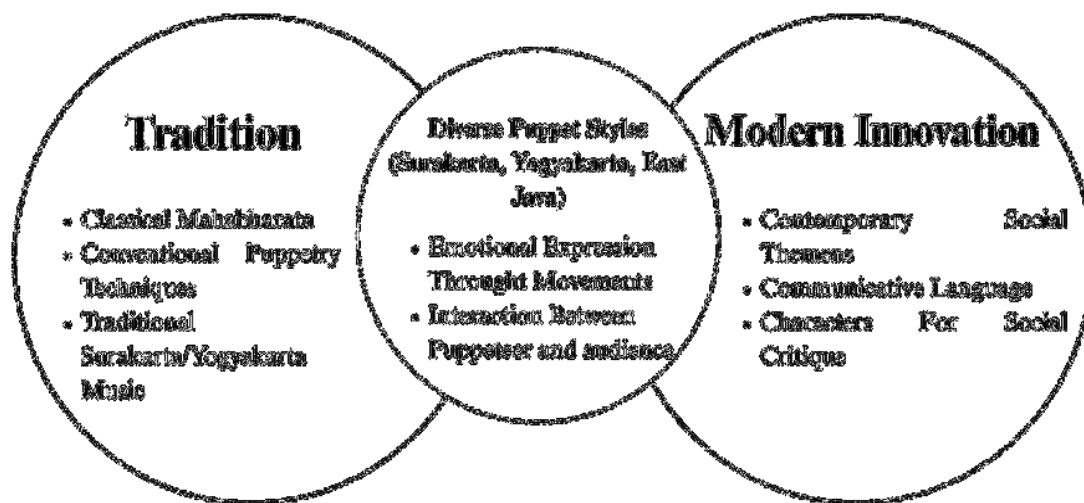
Presentation techniques in *wayang kulit* performances give rise to various performance styles according to the demands and aesthetic tastes of the audience (Kasidi, 2014). This is in line with the art of *wayang kulit* performances, which have many variations in style. Each puppeteer has his convention in seeing and expressing beauty. Thus, each *wayang kulit* performance has its concept and aesthetic sense.

The *wayang kulit* performance as a medium of aesthetic expression is a means for a puppeteer to express ethical values (normative) in social life, aesthetic values in spiritual life (psychological), and other life values that are useful for humans (Muhammad, 2003). The visualization of the aesthetic expression of *wayang kulit* performances can be seen through the creativity of the puppeteer in presenting the performance in an interesting and meaningful way for the audience. The creativity of the puppeteer's aesthetic expression is a measure of the integrity and honor of a puppeteer.



The *Wahyu Katentreman* shadow puppet performance by Cahyo Kuntadi demonstrates an extraordinary synergy between tradition and innovation. Cahyo Kuntadi successfully integrates elements of classical shadow puppetry with a more contemporary approach, making the performance relevant to today's audience. By combining various styles from Surakarta, Yogyakarta, and East Java, the performance becomes more dynamic and adaptive to the needs of modern audiences. This creates an experience that is not only entertaining but also provides a broader insight into Javanese culture.

**Figure 1. Wahyu Katentreman's shadow puppet performance by Cahyo Kuntadi**  
[Data source processed by researchers, 2025]



Cahyo Kuntadi, who acts as the puppeteer, utilizes his skills to effectively control the puppet's tempo, expression, and character, making each scene feel more alive and profound. The success of this performance lies not only in his storytelling ability but also in introducing moral values relevant to the developing social context. Through meaningful wayang characters, such as Punakawan, Cahyo Kuntadi provides sharp social criticism, conveying contemporary issues through humor and dialogue that is full of satire. Each character is not just a figure in the story but also carries a broader message about life, justice, and morality.

A *gamelan* group is a group of people supporting a *wayang kulit* performance. In general, each puppeteer has his/her group to help and make the performance successful. A *gamelan* group is formed by a puppeteer consisting of pengrawit, pesindhen, and penggerong (Sunardi, 2013). The gamelan music accompanying this performance plays a very important role in strengthening the atmosphere and theme of the story. The *gamelan* group led by Madhangkara accompanies each scene with a highly structured musical composition, adjusted to the emotions and conflicts in the story. The use of this music is not only as a background but as an integral part of the narrative that enriches the audience's experience. In addition, involving young pesindhen from the Indonesian Institute of the Arts (ISI) Surakarta also introduces a fresh nuance, bridging the younger generation with the *gamelan* tradition.

The selection of puppets used in the performance also provides a very strong visual dimension. Cahyo Kuntadi chose wayang from various regions, such as Surakarta, Yogyakarta, and East Java, with different characteristics, enriching the display and giving each scene a deeper layer of meaning. Each wayang has a color and shape that depict the nature and character of the character being played, giving the audience clear visual clues about the role and morality of each character. This also creates



a visual tension that further deepens the viewing experience, where the audience is interested in the story and the symbolism behind each movement of the wayang.

Creativity in processing the play, better known as the term *garap pakeliran*, is the freedom of expression of a puppeteer in pouring out his creativity in arranging the *wayang kulit* play. Sunardi stated that the elements of *garap pakeliran* can be traced through the elements that form it, namely *lakon*, *catur*, *sabet*, and *karawitan pakeliran* (Murtiyoso, 2004). The flexible structure of the performance adds another dimension to the success of *Wahyu Katentreman*. Despite using the "garap malam" shadow puppet format that usually lasts all night, Cahyo Kuntadi can adjust the performance duration to better suit the habits of modern audiences limited by time. This shows a smart adaptation to the times without reducing the performance quality. This duration adjustment allows the narrative to develop dynamically and gives the puppeteer the freedom to explore the tempo and rhythm of the story more freely. This adjusted performance structure also shows the ability to maintain the relevance of tradition amidst changing social demands.

The *Wahyu Katentreman* play performed by Cahyo Kuntadi, the chess presentation form that includes the three elements, has undergone development from the existing standards. The development carried out by Cahyo Kuntadi stands out in using effective and communicative language to the audience. *Nuksma* and *Mungguh* in the Negara Hastina plot are displayed through skill in forming the composition plot of the *garap sabet*; in the performance, the souls of all the characters appear *nuksma* or united. The *tancepan* pattern depicts the social status and character of the characters. *Janturan* depicts the country and the inner state of the characters. The conflict in the composition of *ginem* and *gendhing* supports the dramatic plot of the performance, and the representative movements of all the characters seem to live in reality (*Mungguh*). The impressions in the scene are viewed from a romantic aesthetic perspective that contains three philosophical values, namely the value of beauty that appears in the form of the Duryudana puppet, who is brave and majestic as a king, the *tancepan* pattern of the lines of Duryudana, Parekan, Sengkuni, Druna, Kartamarma, Baladewa, and Trilocana, and the movements supported by speech and accompaniment that appear to be united and soulful (*Nuksma* and *Mungguh*). The value of goodness is reflected in the development of Baladewa's character, who is tough and upholds the truth. Sengkuni's cunning attitude influences Duryudana and each character's behavior in the Hastina line. The value of truth is reflected in the depiction of the character's inner self, namely, Baladewa's belief in upholding the truth to fight Trilocana.

The dialogue or chess used in this performance is composed in simple language but rich in meaning. Cahyo Kuntadi created a strong interaction between the puppeteer, the puppet, and the audience. This chess is a tool to continue the story and a medium to convey moral messages and social criticism. The Punakawan characters, often considered entertainers, in "*Wahyu Katentreman*" appear with a more critical role towards social and political conditions. The humor present in the dialogue usually contains sharp satire towards contemporary issues.

The puppet movements in this performance are also important in communicating the story's emotions and meaning. The movements not only clarify the characters' physical actions but also describe their psychological or emotional state. Each movement has a deeper purpose than just action because it reflects the nature and purpose of each character in the story. Cahyo Kuntadi carefully controls the puppet movements to ensure that each scene expresses the exact message he wants to convey. This adds an expressive dimension to the performance, giving the audience a more profound and meaningful experience.

*Gamelan* music in wayang performances, known as *karawitan pakeliran*, is the main support and must be present to support the success of the performance. Sunardi (2013) said that the form of *karawitan pakeliran* in wayang kulit performances can be traced from the use of *gendhing*, *sullukan*,



and *dhodhogan keprakan*. In the *wayang kulit* performance with the play *Wahyu Katentreman* performed by Cahyo Kuntadi, the processing of *karawitan gendhing* is combined with various styles. At the beginning of the performance, *gendhing patalon laras pelog* is used, followed by *gendhing ayak hong laras pelog* for the *bedhol kayon* scene by Blacius Subono. The *bedhol jejer* scene uses *gendhing Santi Mulya laras pelog* by Ki Narto Sabdo and in the *tancep kayon* scene, *gendhing ayak pamungkas laras slendro* in the Surakarta style is used. From several types of *gendhing*, it can be seen that the *wayang kulit* performance performed by Cahyo Kuntadi in the *Wahyu Katentreman* play combines various *pakeliran karawitan* styles. Cahyo Kuntadi's ability to display a sense of grandeur, tension, sadness, and romance can be enjoyed through the *ginem*, *janturan*, *pocapan*, *sulukan*, and *sabean* methods. Cahyo Kuntadi's success in communicating aesthetic feelings can be seen through the audience's reactions when watching his performance. Each *gendhing* played is by the context and mood of the scene, enriching the emotional atmosphere and deepening the message.

The interaction between the puppeteer and the audience is also an inseparable aspect of the success of this performance. Cahyo Kuntadi, with his expertise, managed to create an intimate relationship between himself and the audience. By using humor and satire in the dialogue, especially through the Punakawan character, he managed to touch the audience more personally, inviting them to reflect on various ongoing social issues. This creates a space for the audience to enjoy the entertainment and reflect on their social conditions so that this performance is more than just a spectacle but also an invitation to think critically. The *Wahyu Katentreman* shadow puppet performance, directed by Cahyo Kuntadi, is a concrete example of how tradition can survive and develop amidst the dynamics of an ever-changing era. In this case, "*Wahyu Katentreman*" not only maintains the noble values of the traditional art of shadow puppetry but is also able to adapt these elements by presenting contemporary issues relevant to society's current social and cultural conditions. This shows that traditional art can survive in its original form and develop according to the needs of the times without losing its essence.

#### 4 Discussion

##### 4.1 Aesthetic Deconstruction of *Wayang Kulit* Performing Arts in the Play *Wahyu Katentreman* by Cahyo Kuntadi

Deconstruction in *wayang kulit* performing arts, especially in the play *Wahyu Katentreman* by Cahyo Kuntadi, is an aesthetic and ideological response to socio-cultural changes in contemporary society. Through Jacques Derrida's theory, we can understand how this performance becomes a field of resistance and negotiation of meaning. Derrida, with his deconstruction theory, rejects the existence of a single center of meaning in the text. He argues that every text is always open to rereading, delay of meaning (*différance*), and instability in representation (Gustafson, 2023). This opens space for artists like Cahyo Kuntadi to reinterpret cultural heritage that was previously considered sacred and untouchable.

Derrida states that logocentrism, the belief that there is one authoritative central meaning in a text, has dominated Western thinking (Baga, 2022). In the context of *wayang kulit* performances, logocentrism manifests in the form of rigid puppet story structures and conventions, which are considered the only legitimate way to present a performance. Deconstruction destroys the dominance of this single meaning while introducing other possibilities of meaning that were previously marginalized.

The fundamental reason for this aesthetic deconstruction can also be viewed through the crisis of representation in traditional art. When old forms can no longer represent complex and rapidly changing social realities, a new approach is needed to accommodate a diversity of meanings. Derrida calls this an effort to open up a productive aporia of uncertainty. In this context, Cahyo Kuntadi does



not provide a single answer or meaning about *Wahyu Katentreman*, but instead invites the audience to grapple with the meanings and values that emerge in a dialogical and open manner.

The aesthetics dismantled by Cahyo Kuntadi also touch on the realm of experience. In traditional performances, aesthetics often become a sacred and exclusive domain, which can only be enjoyed or understood by a limited circle. However, through a deconstructive approach, Cahyo Kuntadi democratizes the aesthetics of the performance: elements of humor, contemporary music, and audience participation become a form of affirmation of the desire to embrace a wider and more diverse audience. This is not just an artistic strategy but also a cultural strategy to expand the reach and relevance of performing arts. Cahyo Kuntadi deconstructs by modifying aesthetic elements and challenging traditional performing arts' narrative and ideological structures. Cahyo Kuntadi shifts the function of *wayang kulit* from merely a means of entertainment and cultural inheritance to a place for critical expression of social reality. Today's society lives in an artistic order that has experienced a value shift from the sacred and collective to more profane and individualistic. The values of capitalism, hedonism, and pragmatism often dominate the way society views art. Traditional arts such as *wayang kulit* experience an existential crisis in this landscape. Therefore, the deconstructive approach taken by Cahyo Kuntadi is not destructive to tradition but rather an effort to maintain cultural relevance through the transformation of meaning and form.

#### **4.2 The Process of Deconstructing the Aesthetics of *Wayang Kulit* Performing Arts in the Play *Wahyu Katentreman* Presented by Cahyo Kuntadi**

According to Derrida, deconstruction is a method of reading and dismantling the structure of signs in a text. It starts from the assumption that there is no single or final meaning. Every text or performance is always in a network of constantly shifting signs. In Cahyo Kuntadi's performance, the play *Wahyu Katentreman* is not read as a fixed text but rather as a structure that can be dismantled and reassembled to create new meanings.

The deconstruction process in this performance takes place in two dimensions: first, at the narrative and ideological level; second, at the performative and aesthetic level. In the narrative dimension, Cahyo Kuntadi shifts the structure of the puppet story from grand mythological narratives to narratives that reflect today's social reality. The puppet characters, which were previously positioned in a certain moral hierarchy, are now reinterpreted with a more critical and humanistic approach. Judging from Derrida's spirit of difference, the meaning of a character is not essential but rather continues to be delayed and shifted depending on the social, cultural, and historical context (Casey, 2018).

Cahyo borrows the classical structure only as a basic framework and then dismantles it from within by inserting contemporary themes such as corruption, environmental crisis, identity conflict, and urban unrest. This creates a double-reading space: one side connects with cultural heritage, and the other becomes a means of social criticism. This is what Derrida calls the practice of double reading, namely, reading the text simultaneously on two levels: conservative and subversive (Corson, 2020).

At the performative level, deconstruction is carried out through aesthetic innovation: lighting, sound, costume, performance duration, and interaction with the audience. Cahyo breaks down the boundaries between puppeteer and audience, between performance and reality. He inserts contextual humor, popular music, and everyday language to negotiate a more intimate and down-to-earth form of communication.

This is Derrida's idea of play, which is free play in a field of signs that is never stable. In this context, aesthetics becomes an arena for experimentation, not just the inheritance of form. This process is also a practice of disseminating the spread of meaning in various directions, not towards a



particular center of meaning (Rahariyoso & Rohiq, 2022). Thus, this performance rejects a single meaning and opens up the possibility of other, more pluralistic and contextual interpretations. Cahyo's performance also carries an intertextual approach, connecting wayang texts with other discourses such as politics, economics, and popular culture. In this context, wayang is not only in dialogue with classical canons but also with the everyday reality of society. The use of everyday language and contextual humor interludes is part of a deconstructive strategy to break down the boundaries between high art and low art, between the elite and the masses.

With this approach, deconstruction also becomes a means of resistance to traditional authority in puppetry. The rules are no longer the sole source of legitimacy but are instead questioned. A critical attitude towards these rules shows that tradition is not a frozen entity but rather a constantly moving field of contestation of meaning. This creative process allows for negotiation between preservation and innovation.

Derrida explains that every sign and symbol in a performance always contains an ambiguous meaning. Therefore, the deconstruction process in *Wahyu Katentreman* can also be understood as dismantling the representation system itself. Cahyo Kuntadi shows that wayang does not only talk about the past, but also the present and the future that are continuously negotiated. Through this process, performing arts become a living medium, not only to entertain but also to build critical awareness. Cahyo Kuntadi not only remodels the external form of the performance but also deconstructs the ideology hidden behind the narrative and aesthetics of the wayang performance. Thus, this deconstruction process is total: it touches on the structure, meaning, function, and ideology of the performance itself.

#### 4.3 Implications of the Aesthetic Deconstruction of *Wayang Kulit* Performing Arts in the Play *Wahyu Katentreman* Presented by Cahyo Kuntadi

The development of *wayang kulit* performances is an inevitability that cannot be avoided. As a cultural product, *wayang kulit* performances continue to develop in society's changing times and tastes according to prevailing values. This change is a form of response from a puppeteer to the values that apply in society. *Wayang kulit* performances are never free from symptoms of change because rapid changes are feared to destroy established values, which slowly disappear. However, these changes allow puppeteers to develop and express their creativity. There is no *wayang kulit* puppeteer without society, and *wayang kulit* performances develop according to the tastes of society.

As the social life of society continues to develop, the form of the art of *wayang kulit* performance also shows changes. If it had only functioned as a ritual previously, now it has begun to shift to efforts to satisfy the tastes of society. This is proven by the emergence of various new concepts of *wayang kulit* performances that prioritize communication between artists and audiences. Therefore, the orientation of art is aimed at fulfilling community commodities, and *wayang kulit* performances are aimed at fulfilling society's needs and satisfaction. When *wayang kulit* performances become commodities, two consequences arise. First, on the aesthetic quality of *wayang kulit* performances. Second, the emergence of new values in *wayang kulit* performances. The emergence of these new values is in line with changes in the function of wayang performances and community needs.

The shadow puppet show that is still alive and developing in society now is not a guarantee that the shadow puppet show will last forever. The communication gap between the shadow puppet show and the audience is the main factor in the problem of conveying the messages and values contained in the shadow puppet show. In this millennial era, young people are starting to have difficulty understanding the language of the shadow puppet show. Still, young people also lack insight into the cultural background and art of the shadow puppet show. This problem is a challenge for a puppeteer



because the main task of the puppeteer as a performing artist is to convey messages and values through the shadow puppet show.

It is undeniable that the onslaught of materialistic and hedonistic culture is getting stronger in society. The onslaught of this new culture creates new obstacles for puppeteers. Obstacles regarding the aesthetic aspects of *wayang kulit* performances are also quite a big problem for the sustainability of *wayang kulit* performing arts. Pressure from various factors is not easy for puppeteers to face in maintaining the existence of *wayang kulit* performances. When faced with multiple problems in *wayang kulit* performances, a puppeteer must be able to find solutions so that society can understand and view *wayang kulit* no longer based on its quantity but its quality. The development of *wayang kulit* performances without being balanced by the growth in quality can be seen in the increasing number of jokes in each scene without considering the atmosphere of the characters, the appearance of *gendhing-gendhing* that does not match the scene, and the addition of the duration of goro-goro and limbukan.

The symptoms of popular culture and the tastes of the public who love the art of *wayang kulit* performances that are influenced by the hegemony of materialism and hedonism, and the rules of *wayang kulit* performances that are starting to fade, are the causes of the deconstruction of the aesthetics of *wayang kulit* performances in the play *Wahyu Katentreman* presented by Cahyo Kuntadi. From the deconstruction process, there are implications for the sustainability of *wayang kulit* performances today. These implications can be described as follows:

First, the presence of the *wayang kulit* performance of the *Wahyu Katentreman* play presented by Cahyo Kuntadi provides a new reference for young puppeteers who are still looking for a performance concept that suits the tastes of the *wayang kulit* performance community. The problem young puppeteers face today is the classical learning method, which is less effective. This classical learning method is Tantrik. Young puppeteers who do nyantrik tend to be more passive because they only do what their teacher has done. Students are only required to observe the teacher when performing the puppet. The disadvantage of this Nyantrik method is the lack of references for developing wayang performances because students are only required to observe and memorize everything that the teacher practices without any development.

Second, with the presence of a *wayang kulit* performance within the play *Wahyu Katentreman* presented by Cahyo Kuntadi, millennial youth who previously did not know *wayang kulit* are now starting to get to know *wayang kulit* performances. Undeniably, the rapid development of technology and the unstoppable mixing of cultures have caused young people to forget or even not see the art of *wayang kulit* performances is old-fashioned and not in line with current trends. Witnessing this phenomenon of young people, Cahyo Kuntadi tried to read and reinterpret the *wayang kulit* performance and gave birth to a new performance concept to attract the interest of the younger generation to watch *wayang kulit* performances again.

Third, the economic impact of Cahyo Kuntadi's creativity in the *wayang kulit* performance with the *Wahyu Katentreman* play provides an alternative source of income for the *Karawitan* Madhangkara group and the community in other industries (1), increasing the economic income of the *Karawitan* Madhangkara from Cahyo Kuntadi's *wayang kulit* performance with the *Wahyu Katentreman* play. This performance has become one of the financial pillars for Madhangkara artists during the pandemic. High intensity, how wide the reach of the *wayang kulit* performance is staged, and the media used can be an alternative source of income amid the difficult economic situation to survive; (2) improving services to viewers of the *wayang kulit* performance by meeting the demands of market tastes; (3) when the performance takes place, it provides business opportunities for the



community. This happens because, in every *wayang kulit* performance with this play, a group of small traders will follow as occurs at the night market.

Thus, the deconstruction of the *wayang kulit* performance art aesthetics in the play *Wahyu Katentreman* presented by Cahyo Kuntadi can positively impact socio-economic life, culture, and the sustainability of shadow puppet performing arts today. Through deconstruction, *wayang kulit* performances no longer have to be tied to standard concepts because they can limit a puppeteer's creativity and freedom of expression. Essentially, the art of *wayang kulit* performance creatively expresses the puppeteer's reflections on people's lives. A puppeteer with creative expression processes imagination into work in the creation process, which is expressed through shadow puppet performances.

## 5 Conclusion

In the era of globalization marked by the fading of cultural boundaries, the performing art of *wayang kulit* faces major challenges related to its relevance and sustainability in modern society. Cahyo Kuntadi, as a contemporary puppeteer, responds to this challenge by deconstructing traditional *wayang kulit* performances that maintain their cultural roots but are adapted to the tastes and dynamics of today's audience. Through his work, *Wahyu Katentreman*, Cahyo Kuntadi shows that the transformation of traditional art does not have to mean losing its essence, but rather enriching its meaning and expanding its audience reach. Several significant changes found in the *Wahyu Katentreman* performance include the extension of the limbukan and goro-goro scenes, designed to include elements of humor and social commentary. In addition, the use of a more flexible carangan structure allows for the development of the narrative without abandoning its attachment to the Ramayana and Mahabharata epics. Cahyo Kuntadi also integrates various performing styles from several regions, including Surakarta, Yogyakarta, and East Java, which enrich the audience's aesthetic experience. Furthermore, the interaction between the puppeteer and the audience is enhanced, and the presence of sindhen and guest stars also enriches the commodified entertainment elements. The use of modern technology, such as lighting, sound systems, and stage technology, also plays an important role in determining the success of the performance.

This study provides significant new insights into the study of performing arts, including the importance of narrative deconstruction that not only involves changes in form but also functions as a dialogical space for moral discourse, especially as represented by the Punakawan character. In addition, pakeliran as a form of resistance shows that changes in the structure of the performance, such as the use of garap malam and carangan, can be a medium of resistance to rigid traditions. The socio-cultural flexibility demonstrated by Cahyo Kuntadi proves that adaptation to changing times can actually extend the life of tradition, while maintaining its relevance in the ever-evolving social and economic context.

The implications of these findings are quite broad. From a theoretical perspective, cultural products such as *wayang kulit* should be analyzed in the context of their evolution, not only seen from their formal form. The use of Derrida's deconstruction theory combined with Jakob Sumardjo's paradoxical aesthetics and Sunardi's *nuksma-mungguh* offers a rich framework for understanding the ever-evolving tradition. Meanwhile, from a practical perspective, efforts to preserve *wayang kulit* as a cultural heritage require collaboration between puppeteers, cultural institutions, and the government. Support for the creative freedom of puppeteers, adaptation to technology, and audience education, especially through digital platforms and formal learning spaces, are key to ensuring the sustainability of this traditional art.

As a suggestion for future research, a more in-depth analysis of audience reception, especially young audiences, needs to be conducted to explore how they interpret and respond to deconstruction



in *wayang kulit* performances. Comparative studies between puppeteers from different cultural backgrounds can also provide insight into how innovation and resistance in traditional arts are translated differently. Finally, integration with digital media studies will provide a more comprehensive perspective on changes in the way of consumption and participation in *wayang kulit* performances in the internet era. Overall, *Wahyu Katentreman* by Cahyo Kuntadi not only functions as a creative adaptation of traditional *wayang kulit* art but also as a manifestation of a living tradition, which negotiates with the changing times to ensure its continuity and relevance. Thus, traditional arts such as *wayang kulit* can remain alive, not by rejecting change, but by actively and meaningfully engaging in the process of change.

### Disclosure Statement

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