

Identity Crisis: Leather Carving Art in the Hyperrealist Era Through Jean Baudrillard's Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Identity crisis occurs because humans receive perceptions or pressures that raise doubts about their character. The issue in leather carving art is marked by low awareness of the local culture significance in creating carved products. This occurs because of a hyperrealist phenomenon in society, which influences the perception and orientation of carved product creation. In this study, there are two crucial points as the focus of discussion. First, aesthetics beyond the Indonesian context are considered more valuable than local culture. Second, the two factors contributing to the strength of hyperreality in the art of carving leather are a form of the hegemony of superior countries. These two factors make carved products no longer oriented to the use-value but image consumptions.

Keywords: *Identity Crisis, Hyperreality, Leather Carving Art, Aesthetics*

1. INTRODUCTION

Craft science plays a strategic role in forming cultural identity. Craft, especially leather, has a powerful position to preserve and actualize traditional cultural values. This is indicated by the great handicraft products that tend to preserve local culture. The research and design made by academics and craftsmen show a clear passion for cultural conservation issues. However, this preservation has not yet been noticed in the products of leather carving, in terms of Indonesian context, regarding the political issue of cultural identity and nationalism.

This problem can be noticed in leather carvings that have not shown the Indonesian context. The leather craftsmen still create carved motifs with foreign aesthetics. Western Aesthetics or beyond the Indonesian context eventually become an obsession with amazing interests that can endanger Indonesian cultural identity.

The leather carving is meant as an art product, not a craft product because the carved ornaments for each product are not mass-produced. The researchers define this as a leather carving art, as it is different from craft. In other words, it is an art, not a craft because they convey different concepts. Raharjo in a National Seminar on Craft Art entitled *Gelora Semangat Hari Pendidikan dan Kebangkitan Nasional* mentioned that art is better known to be based on someone's personal expression. Thus, it comes from ideas that tend to be idealistic. Meanwhile, a

craft is somehow a product created by many people or is referred to as a collaborative product or mass-produced product. [1]

Like other craft products, carved leather products have been widely explored and experimented with. This exploration has provided an overview of people's life today, namely a hyperrealist society. Then, the impacts of hyperreality on leather carving arts in Indonesia are questionable. The hyperreality in society has made the art of carving leather no longer limited to decorating a product, but it creates an image that has shifted the product's use value. Referring to Baudrillard's notion, the phenomenon above is a hyperreality of the consumer society about a sign value system.

Baudrillard analyzes the consumer society in relation to the sign value system. He argues that signs are one of the important elements in today's consumerist society. Baudrillard states that current consumption has become the sign. The act of service and good consumption is no longer based on its use but based on signs and symbols attached to the goods and services themselves [2].

As a result of this hyperreality, the national cultural identity has also shifted, carving motifs which were associated with local culture are now dominated by foreign ideas which are out of the Indonesian context. In fact, many craftsmen are now ignoring the aspect of the usefulness of a product on the basis of aesthetics.

Therefore, the product is no longer oriented to its use-value as the image is the priority.

In this study, the researchers focused on how hyperreality phenomena in the community influence the development of leathercraft industries, especially in carving art, and the strong construction of hyperreality to the leather carving art.

1.1. Article Contribution

This article presents a description of hyperreality phenomena in society, which influence the art of carving leather, such as the popularity of western movies. The media's role in shaping perceptions has made western aesthetics have a higher selling value. Furthermore, the researchers focused on leather carving as an artwork, not as a craft because the carving is not mass-produced. Although a craftsman's expression is from idealistic inspiration, the ideas tend to be influenced by the condition around the craftsman.

1.2. Article Structure

This article is organized into several sections; the first section is an introduction which contains the background of the research, and then the next section is literature review, research method, and research results analyzed using supporting theories. The last part is the conclusion of the discussion.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.1. Jean Baudrillard's Hyperreality Concept

In this era, technological innovations have been developed to break the boundaries of reality. The boundaries between humans, machines, and other resources become increasingly blurred. The world is full of imitations, codes, symbols, and signs playing with rising freedom. During this situation, Jean Baudrillard, through simulation and hyperreality, explained how things appeared more real than others. Due to his concepts of "hyperreality" and "simulacrum", Baudrillard's name is often mentioned in discussion forums with the themes of mass media, information technology, contemporary culture, and postmodern discourse.

According to Baudrillard, simulation or simulacrum is the construction of a concept or model of reality (second reality) with no origin or reference of realities, which is then imitated and made into reality. Meanwhile, hyperreality is a condition where imagination (the second reality/reality model) blends with real reality without considering the true value [3]. According to Kasiyan, hyperreality is a state of reality collapse, taken over by

the model manipulations (images, hallucinations, and simulations), which are considered more real than reality itself; thus, the difference between the two becomes blurred [4].

According to Baudrillard, the simulation mechanism is that reality has merged with signs; images of reproduction models are no longer possible to find a real reference and make a distinction between representation and reality, images and realities, signs and ideas, and the pseudo and the real [5].

The term 'simulation' in the context of mass culture is introduced by Baudrillard to explain how production, communication, and consumption intersect in consumer societies in the West. The culture of consumerism is the heart of capitalism in which there are illusions, dreams, hallucination, artificiality, and surfaces, in the form of a commodity through an image strategy, and then socially constructed as the sign strength of the product. For the consumer society, (over) production, (over) communication, and (over) consumption are new strategies of gaining power [6].

Eventually, society only consumes the images of the goods (no longer in its use); therefore, consumer society is never satisfied and will trigger continuous consumption because the daily life of each individual is observed based on their consumption activities, goods, and services purchased and used, which is also based on the product images [7].

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed the descriptive qualitative method. The primary data were collected from social media. The researchers observed several Instagram accounts during the period of learning leather carving art. Meanwhile, the secondary data were obtained from a literature review of other sources. Instagram is an application to share photos and videos. The main feature of Instagram is photos, so communication and interaction will not be present without photos in the Instagram timeline. Photos convey both literal and symbolic messages which are compelling. Instagram is increasingly popular as an application to share photos and videos thus making many users who are involved in online business promote their products via Instagram [8]. There were three Instagram accounts observed by the researchers, namely @hozpit, @cetulleatherart and @Ismail_am_leather. Those accounts were chosen because they have many followers, active, and periodically post photos and videos. All those account owners create leather products using carving techniques, and they are often invited to several events in several cities.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1. Carving Art in Hyperrealist Era

Carving art is one of the techniques to make ornaments used to decorate products. Wijono and Soedjono name it a technique of decorating the leather [9], and Alam states it is carving or decorating with chisels [10], while, in her book, Saraswati names the art of pressing on leathers [11]. Meanwhile, Al Stohlman, in his book entitled "How to Carve Leather," names this technique as Leather Carving [12]. The researchers name it leather carving art, not leather carving craft because the works are based on personal expression. Moreover, the products are the results of collaborative works or mass-produced.

A lot of explorations and experiments have been conducted on carving products, the results of which have provided an overview of people's lives today, namely a hyperreality society. Hyperreality has shifted the nation's identity, and as the result, the carving motifs no longer contain the local culture. Recently, the carvings tend to present popular culture.

Hyperreality becomes more evident when technology is very advanced. Its popularity is the result of images created by the media. The media as the channel of messages have distributed a lot of pseudo-reality to society. Manipulating meaning in media has successfully made simulation falsehood seem true. The language used does not function as a natural reflection of the use-value of services and goods, but it becomes a means of instilling the capitalist ideology. The nature of the use-value of services and goods offered is lost due to the value of images. Piliang states that hyperreality media have created various sociocultural problems related to knowledge, values, and meanings namely disinformation, depoliticization, information banality, information fatality, schizophrenia, hyper-morality [13].

The phenomenon of hyperreality in society has made the carving leather art function not only as a product decoration but also as the main image that shifts the use-value of the product. In fact, it is not uncommon for a craftsman to ignore the aspect usefulness of a product on the basis of aesthetics. In addition, carved products have more economical values than those without any carvings. Therefore, people who use these products no longer aim to usefulness but the image.

In this analysis, researchers collected data from Instagram. Recently, Instagram is used as an image formation through photos and videos. It is used by online businesses to promote their products. Through Instagram, the researchers can measure the popularity of leather carving products based on the number of followers and likes in each post (photos and videos). Instagram

provides digital traces of a person's activities, including the creation of leather products. There are three Instagram accounts that were observed in this study, namely @Hozpit, @cetulleatherart, and @Ismail_am_leather. Those accounts are active, focus on leather carvings, and have a large number of followers.

First, the @hozpit (House of Pirates) account from Yogyakarta is one of the most recognized brands by the leather product community. In other words, it is the most productive accounts in creating carved products. From the photos posted on Instagram, hozpit's works are dominated by western aesthetics as found in Figures 1 and 2.



Figure 1 Carved ornament on a long wallet [14]



Figure 2 Carved ornament on a long wallet [14]

In figure 1, the carvings are made to give ornament to long leather wallets. The ornaments made resembles two people fighting. However, the battle dress worn is not of culture but rather from the foreign culture (Greek). Meanwhile, Figure 2 shows the figure of the Joker. He is a character from an action movie produced in the United States. Both characters are popular among society especially leather products enthusiasts. People are familiar with Joker as the movie was remade in 2019.

Secondly, it was taken from the Instagram account @cetulleatherart. Unlike hozpit, cetulleatherart focuses more on custom products. Also, @Cetulleatherart presents performance art in various automotive events,

one of which is a motorcycle modification event such as a customfest. Figures 3 and 4 are examples of products made by @cetulleatherart.



Figure 3 Carved ornament on a motorcycle seat [15]



Figure 4 Carved ornament on a long wallet [15]

Figure 3 is a carved motorcycle seat; the ornament design embraces dragon mythology, but the dragon is from Japanese cultural mythology. Although there is also a dragon figure in Indonesian culture, other elements such as water and lotus clearly show Japanese aesthetic characteristics. Moreover, this character is very popular among tattoo enthusiasts because many people are fond of Japanese culture for tattoos. Meanwhile, Figure 4 shows the ornament of Frankenstein as the main character in Mary Shelley's novel, which often appears in movies.

The third Instagram account is @Ismail_am_leather. Through its digital footprint, this account's domicile is Bandung. The products made are bags, wallets, and motorcycle seat covers. All of its products are carved. The ornaments created vary from flora and fauna to mythology. However, from the various ornaments, the nuances of the local culture are still invisible. External cultural characters still dominate every product, as shown in Figures 5 and 6.



Figure 5 Carved ornament on a long wallet [16]



Figure 6 Carved ornament on a long wallet. [16]

Figure 5 shows the influence of Japanese culture as it is represented in koi fish, water, and flowers. The characters are vastly used by tattoo enthusiasts. Meanwhile, figure 6 shows a fictional character (Popeye) which is created by Crisler Segar.

4.2. Construction Factors of the Strong Hyperreality in Carving Art

The results of the observations of the selected Instagram accounts show that the ornaments created have some similarities in terms of patterns. The ideas proposed by the craftsmen tend to be influenced by trends and popular fictional characters. This indicates that aesthetics out of Indonesian contexts are considered to have higher values. The popularity has shifted local cultural values, and this shows that media have successfully made an image and falsehood seem true. The image created by the media raises a false reality to society

Besides, the hegemony factor of the superior countries provides influences. Kasiyan said that the hegemonic syndrome of Western aesthetic tastes in Indonesia is closely related to the history of colonialism in this nation. The images of the superior Western colonizers and inferior natives have been preserved until modern and postmodern times; therefore, it is not surprising that almost all Western cultural systems were imitated and appreciated by Eastern countries [17].

The solution to the hegemony problem requires strategic and complex actions, one of which is to do the deconstruction. One of the interesting works of deconstruction-culturation is, as suggested by Smith, through 'methodological decolonization' of all the socio-cultural historical epistemic constructs that this nation has ever had [17].

The deconstruction and decolonization of this cultural methodology can be done by strengthening the bargaining position of the local culture owned by the subaltern; thus, they can make a willing suspension of disbelief when dealing with the dominant culture, according to Spivak in Kasiyan [17].

With the awareness of local culture, various encounter processes with global culture are expected to be able to produce an ideal formula, which according to Bhabha is marked by the creation of the third space or the in-between: a promising space for the growth and development of intercultural dialectical justice [18]. Hence, hyperreality no longer shifts the cultural values of the nation but becomes a cultural reinforcer.

5. CONCLUSION

Craft science plays a strategic role in the process of forming cultural identity. However, this preservation has not yet been noticed in leather carving products, particularly in the Indonesian context, regarding the political issue of cultural identity and nationalism. The leather craftsmen still produce carved motifs with foreign cultural aesthetics. Aesthetics beyond the Indonesian context in carving art is the impact of hyperreality that occurs in society. Ornamental creation is no longer purely from local culture but is influenced by simulation in consumer society. The strong hyperreality in the art of carving leather is part of the hegemony of powerful countries. The solution to the hegemony problem requires strategic and complex actions, one of which is to do deconstructions.

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