

Semiotics Study on the Oncer Dance Performance Art: A Charles Sanders Peirce's Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the results of Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic analysis of the Oncer dance. This research is a qualitative descriptive study with a semiotic approach. Discussion on semiotic analysis uses Peirce's triadic model. Data collection was carried out through the method of observation, interviews, and documentation, while the analysis consisted of the stages of data description, data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusions. Data validity was obtained by triangulation. The results of this study indicate the movements of the Oncer dance symbolize tactics in war, namely: 1) *Tinduk* (the movement of stepping forward, depicting the leave for battle, 2) *Bukaq jebak* (opening the door), dan 3) *Kadal nengos* (the movement signifies an alert against the enemy). The three dance movements have meanings. *Bucu sorok* represents war strategies, *kroton kombol* represents unity as an intact flower bud, *sandat kebak* represents progress as a blooming flower, and *cempake randang* represents the aftermath of war in which many die as a result of battle.

Keywords: *Semiotics, Performance art, Oncer dance*

1. INTRODUCTION

Art is an element of culture, as are economics, religion, politics, etc. Art contains a very subjective meaning, depending on the individual who interprets the art. The word *seni* or art in Indonesian comes from the word *sani*, which means a noble soul/sincerity of the soul. In English, art (artificial) refers to the goods or works resulted from human activity. Art refers to the aesthetic values which comes from the expression of human desire for beauty which can be enjoyed by sights or hearing. As creatures with high taste, humans produce various forms of art, ranging from simple to complex art forms.

Each region has one art form which becomes the identity of the region. Each regional art form has a distinctive feature which becomes the prominent cultural characteristic of the region where the art originates. Therefore, regional arts are the peaks of culture of each region which becomes the symbols of the people. The creation of art (performance) will conceptually be guided by the cultural value system that surrounds it and is specific to the culture of the region [1].

Dance is the most basic and oldest human expression. Through their body, humans think and feel the tension and rhythms of the natural surroundings,

and then use the body as an instrument to expresses their emotional responses to the natural surroundings. Through the structure of their perceptions and feelings, humans create dance. Through dance, humans can relate to each other and to the world [2]. Dance is an individual or choreographer's way of expressing him/herself.

The island of Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, which is inhabited by the Sasak tribe, is an island that has a variety of unique regional arts. Some of the local arts have survived, but some have begun to be displaced by modern arts. Local arts that are maintained by the community are arts that are full of values and reflect the noble culture and wisdom of the Sasak people in Lombok. One of the regional arts that still survive is the Oncer dance.

The Oncer traditional dance was first created by a prominent Lombok cultural expert named Lalu Muhammad Tahir in 1960 in the village of Puyung. Oncer comes from the Sasak word *ngoncer*, meaning "to swim like the blue panchax fish". The dance is still widely performed today as a welcoming dance, or in various festivals and events. As time goes, the Oncer dance still manages to compete with other modern dances, as evident by the high interests and the frequency of the dance performance among the community. For these reasons, this paper finds it

interesting to study and conduct a semiotic analysis in the Oncer dance performance. Further, this study discusses Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic analysis.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The word "semiotics" comes from the Greek word "*semeion*" which means "sign" or "*seme*" which means "sign interpretation" [3]. Semiotics is the science of signs, specifically an analysis method for studying signs. Semiotics is used to study the existing socio-cultural life tools in the society in order to better understand the meaning in the socio-cultural life. Signs refer to the tools humans use in the effort of searching for ways in the world, amidst people, and with people, so that the society will be able to understand and comprehend the values and functions of the existing signs in their respective social and cultural structure [3].

Semiotics is the study of signs. This implies that the signs have meaning. Peirce views the subject as an inseparable part of the signification process. Peirce's triadic model (representamen + object + interpretant = sign) shows the three main elements which form a sign, namely, the representamen (something that represents another thing), object (something that is presented), and interpretant (one's interpretation of the sign) [4].

3. METHOD

This research is a qualitative descriptive study with a semiotic approach. [5] According to Sugiyono, qualitative research method is a research method used to examine the conditions of a natural object. Such qualitative research is carried out by solving problems by describing the object under study, whether a person, an institution, a community, etc., based on the actual existing data at the time. Denzin & Lincoln stated that "qualitative research is research that uses a scientific background, with the intention of interpreting phenomena that occur and is carried out by involving various existing methods" [6]. [7] Semiotics is a branch of science that studies the problem of signs and everything related to signs, such as sign systems and processes that apply to signs. Peirce defines semiotics as the study of signs and everything related to signs, how to function (syntactic semiotics) and the relationship between signs (semantic semiotics), as well as the study of the sender and receiver by those who use signs (pansemiotics). For Peirce, the fundamental principle of the nature of the sign is the representative nature and the interpretive nature. Unlike Saussure, Peirce saw signs not as structures but as part of the understanding process (communication significance).

Signs and their meaning is not a structure, but a cognitive process called semiosis. The semiosis process goes through three stages, namely sign representamen (first through the senses) as the first stage; the second stage, in which a spontaneous association is made

between the representamen and the experience in the human cognitive which interprets the representamen (known as object); and thirdly, interpreting the object as they wish, which is also known as interpretant. The process of understanding signs through the relation between the representamen and object is based on the notion that the object does not necessarily reflect the reality offered by the representamen. Object emerges as experience gives meaning to a sign [8].

Peirce calls something that is used so that sign can serve its function as ground. Often, the ground of a sign is a code, although at times that is not the case. Code refers to a system of rules and have a transindividual nature (beyond individual boundaries). However, many signs originating from the ground are highly individualistic. In addition, the sign is interpreted, meaning that once it is associated with a reference, the original sign develops into a new sign known as the interpretant [3].

Based on the interpretant, sign (sign, representamen) can be grouped into rheme, dicent sign or dicisign, and argument. Rheme is a sign which allows people to interpret it based on choice. Dicent sign or dicisign is a sign that is in accordance with the reality. Argument is a sign which immediately provides a reason on a particular issue [3].

The semiotic method is essentially qualitative-interpretative (interpretation), which means that the method focuses on the signs and texts as the object of the study, as well as how the researcher interprets and understands the codes (decoding) behind said signs and texts. Nevertheless, as evident later, there are methods that are extensions of the semiotic method which is more qualitative-empirical and focuses on the subject of text users (readers, audience, and users) [4].

In this study, the data collection techniques included observations, interviews, and documentation. To obtain a better research on the objective of the study, the researcher employed a combination of data collection techniques, in addition to inductive data analysis based on the data found in the field.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The Oncer Dance Performance Art

The Oncer dance is a Sasak traditional dance in the Lombok region of West Nusa Tenggara. The dance was first created by Muhammad Tahir in the village of Puyung, Central Lombok Tengah in 1960.

The Oncer dance is a group dance which involves three groups, namely the *kenceng* dancers, which consist of 6 to 8 dances who read *kenceng*; 2 dancers playing the *gendang beleq*, also known as the gendang player; and 1 dancer who carries *petuk*, also known as the *petuk* dancer. The Oncer dance can be performed by male or female dancers, although the role of the dancer is male.

Stage makeup is used for the dance, while the costume is quite simple, namely *bapang* and *songket*, with the addition of accessories such as *sapug* or a headband and bracelets.

The musical instruments incorporated in the *gendang beleq* involve traditional percussion instruments such as *ceng-ceng*, a flute, *rincik*, gong, *reong*, and a small drum (*gendang*). [9] *Gendang beleq* is a Lombok traditional musical instrument that is shaped like a long drum that was used as an accompaniment prior to battle to give encouragement to the warriors. *Gendang beleq* is suitable for such occasion as the drum is enormous (*beleq*) and produces a great (*beleq*) and resounding sound which can raise the spirit of the soldiers at war, hence the name *gendang beleq* (large *gendang*). Today, *gendang beleq* serves as a part of welcoming dance for guests with a presentation structure of two dancers of *gendang* players entering the stage, resulting in a dynamic and magnificent performance, followed by 4 to 6 Oncer dancers, while the *gendang* dancers take the left and right side of the stage as a background. Then, the Oncer dancers take a sitting position while singing the *Pampang Paoq* song. At the end of the dance, the Oncer dancers exit the stage, followed by the *gendang* dancers.

4.2 Oncer Dance Movements in Semiotics

As expressed by Lalu Suryadana, the son of Lalu Muhammad Tahir, the meaning and essence of Oncer dance movements represent battle tactics/strategies as the result of the war of movements in the *Oncer* dance. The first movement is *bucu sorok*. In Sasak, *bucu* means “the corner,” while *sorok* means “to catch”; therefore, *bucu sorok* refers to a tool for catching fish with a triangular shape and represents war strategies. The second movement, *kroton kombol*, symbolized the bud of hibiscus flower (*kroton kombol*), which depicts unity, just as an intact flower bud. The third movement, *sandat kebah* or the blooming Cananga or ylang-ylang, shows progress, as reflected by the blooming flower. The fourth movement, *cempake randang*, means the falling petals of magnolia, symbolizing the aftermath of war where death is inevitable.

The Oncer dance is accompanied by *gendang beleq* gamelan, which is played while dancing at the end of the show. All dancers move together in a particular motion. The Oncer movements represent battle tactics which are divided into 3 scenes. The meaning of the dance movements, based on Charles Sanders Peirce, can be elaborated as follows.

Table 1. Trichotomy of Peirce’s Semiotics

| Representamen | Object | Interpretant |
|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Lifting the leg forward | <i>Tinduk</i> | Taking steps depicting the leave for battle |
| Waving the hand forward | <i>Bukaq jebak</i> | Opening the door |
| Looking at the left, the right, the front, and the back | <i>Kadal nengos</i> | An alert state against the enemy |

The meaning of Oncer dance lies in the way it represents war customs/strategies, hence the 3 scenes in the dance. The scenes contain signs as meanings in a battle, namely *tinduk*, *bukaq jebak*, dan *kadal nengos*. Overall, the dynamics and movements of Oncer dance are rhythmic and monotonous; however, this certainly does not reduce the meaning of the dance. The monotonous movements influence the simplicity and humbleness of the dance costume, which consists of *bapang* and *songket*, with *sapug* and bracelets.

5. CONCLUSION

The Oncer dance, created by Muhammad Tahir in the village of Puyung, Central Lombok in 1960, is a special dance of the Sasak tribe in the Lombok region, West Nusa Tenggara. The dance is closely related with the *gendang beleq* gamelan, which is played while dancing in a distinctive way.

The Oncer dance movements represent war strategies, consisting of 3 scenes. The meaning of the movements, based on Charles Sanders Peirce’s triadic model, is as follows: 1) *Representamen*: lifting the leg forward, object: *tinduk*, interpretant: taking steps depicting the leave for battle, 2) *Representamen*: waving the hand forward, object: *bukaq jebak*, interpretant: opening the door, 3) *Representamen*: looking at the left, the right, the front, and the back, object: *kadal nengos*, interpretant: signifying an alert state against the enemy.

The meaning of Oncer dance movements refers to the way they represent war customs/strategies and the results of war movements in the Oncer dance. First, the *bucu sorok* movement represents war strategies. Secondly, the *kroton kombol* movement symbolizes unity as a flower bud. Thirdly, the *sandat kebah* movements depict progress in the form of a blooming flower. Finally, the *cempake randang* movement suggests the death as the impact of battle or war.

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