

ABSTRACT

The background to this study was the idea that the life of Javanese shadow puppet theater performance cannot be separated from the context of change in Javanese society, in various aspects such as economic, political, and socio-cultural aspects. The Javanese community in general and the *wayang* community in particular will always continue to develop and experience changes. Likewise, classical shadow puppet theater will undergo changes and developments in accordance with the developments and changes in the meaning to its audience.

The aim of this study is to obtain a more in-depth explanation regarding the problems in the life of classical shadow puppet theater from a sociological-artistic angle, in the face of changes that have occurred in the environment during the post *Orde Baru* era. Nevertheless, in order to gain a clear picture about the changes during each era, this study also covers the life of classical Javanese shadow puppet theater during the two previous era, namely the era preceding the *Orde Baru* and the *Orde Baru* era itself. This problem includes a general picture of the life of classical Javanese shadow puppet theater during these three periods, in particular at the time of this research. The next problem is concerned with the possibility of change occurring in the pattern of classical shadow puppet performances during the same period, and the nature of these new patterns, including which aspects, and with what substance. Likewise, to what extent are the aspects related to social change and social phenomena reflected in shadow puppet performance a response from the puppeteer, in connection with preserving his existence.

In accordance with its goal, this study uses a sociological-artistic approach, from the result of Arnold Hauser's ideas in his book *The Sociology of Art*. This approach principally looks at the relation between a community and its art. Classical Javanese shadow puppet theater is made up of a number of different elements, including its group, equipment, and audience. Arnold Hauser explains that social changes in a given area will result in a unique artistic style, in accordance with the form of the community at that particular time. An art form which in a certain period may be categorized as ritual art can in the following period become a form of popular art.

From the point of view of the social strata of the audience, Arnold Hauser also states four categories of art. Firstly, high or classical art, which has a high aesthetical value and is only enjoyed by the cultural elite, namely members of the aristocracy, officials, party leaders, and so on. Secondly, folk art, which is usually enjoyed by the agrarian community and is a collective product although originally produced by individuals. Folk art is usually not required to contain aesthetical values due to its spontaneous nature. Thirdly, popular art, which is usually enjoyed by the urban community and is inclined not to pursue aesthetical values but places more importance on providing a sense of relaxation so that it is easily digestible. Fourthly, mass art, whose performance is produced by mechanical equipment such as radios, cassette players, televisions, and so on, and has a heterogeneous audience.

Based on the results of the research, shadow puppet theater performance has a tendency to stand alone in each of the three eras, according to the changes in its environment. During the era prior to the *Orde Baru*, shadow puppet theater was enjoyed mainly by the agrarian community, who were influenced by arts from the court. During the *Orde Baru* era, performances were not only enjoyed by the agrarian community but also by the urban community as it spread to towns outside the court territory. At the present time, shadow puppet theater performances are coloured by government development policies and for this reason are often used as a government tool for conveying messages about development. In addition, during the *Orde Baru* era, other art forms began to penetrate and influence the form of shadow puppet theater. In the post *Orde Baru* era, its form has become more open, as a result of the euphoria created by an excess of reformation, and it has become difficult to identify. Furthermore, it is evident that audiences can no longer respond to the moral messages conveyed in a shadow puppet theater performance. Communication between the performance and the audience is only able to take place during the *Limbukan* and *Gara-gara* scenes.

Key words: shadow puppet theater performance, group, audience.

