

## **The Humour and Novelty of Congwayndut Puppet Group: An Overview of Performance Studies**

**Gendot Dekanipa <sup>1✉</sup> and Aris Setiawan<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1,2</sup>Art Study and Creation Postgraduate Institut Seni Indonesia Surakarta  
✉ Jalan Ki Hajar Dewantara No. 19 Jebres, Surakarta, Jawa Tengah, 57126, Indonesia  
✉ [ninadeka01@gmail.com](mailto:ninadeka01@gmail.com)

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### **Article Info**

#### *Article History*

Received:  
May 2023  
Accepted:  
Oct 2023  
Published:  
Nov 2023

#### *Keywords:*

*Congwayndut, Cuteness,  
Novelty, Humor, Shadow  
Puppet*

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to identify and analyze the humorous and innovative aspects of the Congwayndut shadow puppet show, focusing on its contribution to social, economic, political, and cultural criticism in the village community. The object of this research is the distinctive Congwayndut shadow puppet show, a traditional art form performed with unique characteristics by the puppeteer Congwayndut. The theoretical framework comprises performance studies, social drama theory, and trickster character analysis to comprehend the structure, messages, and aesthetics of the Congwayndut shadow puppet show. The findings reveal that the performance exhibits a flexible structure and offers novelty, mainly through the puppeteer's improvisation on stage. Humour in the show originates from personal inclinations and effectively conveys critical messages regarding various aspects of village life. Furthermore, the performance cultivates a fresh image of the art of shadow puppetry. The novelty of this research lies in its interdisciplinary approach, integrating performance studies, social theory, and character analysis to analyze this traditional art form, providing new insights into how the Congwayndut shadow puppet show serves as a platform for social critique and delivers humour relevant to diverse age groups.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Puppet is a philosophical manifestation of cultural values that have accumulated as a reflection of Javanese life (Suyanto, 2009: 2). One of the contemporary phenomena of shadow puppet performing arts is the emergence of the necessity for artists to be creative through their works of art (Riyanto & Mataram, 2018). The form of creation is the exploration of unique and interesting performances for the public to show, to find novelty in the performances (Nathan, 2019), and to have urgency in the field of education (Suyanto and Setiawan, 2011). One of the practices of creating puppet art that the Congwayndut group has implemented among the people of Surakarta City and its surroundings is a contemporary-innovative shadow puppet performance.

Congwayndut can cross the boundaries of standard art and provide refreshing, authentic performances. The Congwayndut group's research has an important urgency to be studied from the perspective of humour and novelty using a performance study reading scheme, on the basis that all events, both social and cultural activities that appear different or receive special emphasis from everyday activities can be categorized as a performance. Performance terminology in this case is not limited to mere staging events (Schechner, 2007). This basic idea refers to the agreed understanding of performance studies which assumes that everything "outside of the normal" or every day can be studied as a performance or performance (Schechner, 2006). Borrowing Turner's idea, there is a specific difference between "is" performance and "as" performance, namely something that is considered "is" performance if, in the historical context and social context, rules, usefulness, and tradition, it is considered performance, which in this case including religious ceremonies, games, and also the rules of daily life (Schechner, 2006: 38). Meanwhile, "as" performance is used to view a broader context.

In this study, the context "is" performance, Congwayndut puppet performances are structured artistic activities containing elements of artistic layout, performance structure, delivery of language, messages, musical accompaniment, and even dramaturgy. Meanwhile, in the context of "as" performance, the performance can be understood as a dynamic process due to the interaction of various parties and has a broad goal of preserving culture. Therefore, efforts to study the cuteness and novelty of Congwayndut shadow puppets through performance studies can be described by borrowing theatre studies terminology as a tool for analysis. The existence of the Congwayndut shadow puppet group brings novelty value from before to after the presence of this liminal event. The situation of "abnormality" in a Congwayndut performance is likened to a liminal event, namely where an event exists as an arena that dissolves boundaries, destroys the rigidity of identity, and then makes efforts to reconstitute it as a new reality (Turner, 1967; Gennep, 1909).

All events within the boundaries of performance are intertwined with social construction, thus performance studies pay attention to the quality of "liveness" of the research subject which includes discussion of ritual practices to everyday life events and extraordinary events (Schechner, 2007: xvi-xvii). Schechner emphasizes performance in five aspects, namely: 1) a certain time, 2) a certain value given to the object, 3) non-productive nature, 4) certain rules, and 5) sometimes adding restrictions on place. Performance studies research on the cuteness and novelty of the Congwayndut shadow puppet group can be explored through people's behaviour in situations when the audience is enjoying and observing the Congwayndut shadow puppet show.

Borrowing the ideas of Turner (1967; 1969), that in social drama can be associated with social situations, namely breach (normal life), liminality (transition), redress (recovery), and reintegration (reunification). These four processes are a unified phenomenon in the liminality analysis study of Congwayndut as a performance. The liminality phase is understood as a 'threshold' condition, uncertainty, or transition from one condition to another, in which a change, softening, or even deconstruction and reconstruction of a social hierarchy occurs. This is because liminal space is flexible, more fluid, and can be negotiated. These liminal traits can be situationally formed, depending on the needs and motivation of the performing arts performer. This gives rise to liminoid properties, namely having threshold flexibility and being permeable (Turner, 1967). Simply put, liminoid is the liminal nature of a social event, which is present

outside the ritual context. Both liminal and liminoid phenomena are often characterized by the presence of tricksters. Congwayndut's presence can be associated with the figure of a trickster or "tempter" as in ancient mythology, such as the figure Krishna in India or the figures Semar and Punawakan in Java who were present to accompany the Pandavas. Regarding tricksters, as mentioned (Scheub, 2012), they can be associated with celestial figures, gods, or famous figures who have made important contributions to the development and renewal of a civilization. In the results of previous research, Congwayndut has been studied from the perspective of structural functionalism, which includes aspects of music, art, puppeteering, and story scripts, but the essence of structural functionalism that has been studied tends to place artistic-social functional currents, making it an art conservation campaign agent and is oriented towards education and advocacy, that efforts to conserve Congwayndut wayang art through interactive communication are considered to be able to have a significant effect on the younger generation (Romadona, 2019; Wrahatnala, 2020; Wrahatnala, 2021). Meanwhile, from an industrial perspective, according to Prasetyo et al., (2022), it tends to reveal the Congwayndut study to digitize wayang so that it is accepted by the public. Several studies of previous research findings on Congwayndut have not and do not touch on issues that emphasize the cute aspect, the role of the trickster, and the cultural consequences. Therefore, a study of the cuteness and novelty of the Congwayndut shadow puppets' performance is important to show the essence displayed through the image of the performance.

## METHODS

The basis of the performance studies approach used is that the Congwayndut performance can be studied through the aspect of equality of form, as when studying a drama performance. Performance studies contain four key aspects, namely 1) human behaviour as the object of study; 2) artistic work practices as the main part of the study; 3) field research as a method like anthropological research, and 4) the principles of performance studies itself as an approach that actively involves researchers in the practices of social life (Schechner, 2006, p. 1–2). Apart from that, performance studies see performance as an organizing concept for studying behaviour in terms and medium (Bial & Brady, 2010, p. 43), so the liminal terms used in ritual studies can be used as a scalpel for reading the social phenomenon of Congwayndut performances.

The research of the Congwayndut shadow puppet group is qualitative, using ethnographic methods because it involves active cultural practices and not a passive study of artifacts or cultural objects so that cultural activities are not read as a cognitive map, but instead provide a series of principles for making navigation, so that in fieldwork practice, the researcher collected data on the Congwayndut shadow puppet group from three sources, namely (1) from what people say, (2) from the way people act, (3) from various artifacts that people use (Spradley, 2006, p. 9–10). Data was obtained from the main sources, namely Muhammad Subhan and Eko Aprianto Romadona who are musicians in the Congwayndut shadow puppet group. The role of the resource person is to dig up information about *entul* strategies, tactics for creating humour, and the role of music in Congwayndut puppet performances. The resource person for the Congwayndut shadow puppet master, namely Dwi Suryanto. The role of the resource person is to dig up information about the strategy of the issue or story that will be presented at each Congwayndut puppet presentation. Meanwhile, data in the form of sources from connoisseurs or performance spectators was obtained randomly to determine the orientation of the audience's perception. Apart from that, this research

also carried out video and photo documentation during performance sessions as supporting data for recording events in the field. Observations of behaviour were carried out on every occasion of Congwayndut performances in several village locations in Surakarta City and its surroundings when Congwayndut held its Stage Attack agenda. Data collection for the literature study was carried out by reviewing written references on internet networking sites and reviewing previous research cases that focused on studies related to the Congwayndut shadow puppet group and innovations in leather puppetry. Direct performance observation of Congwayndut performances aims to obtain information about the behaviour of the presenters and audience. Through observation, a picture of the reality of people's social lives in performance situations is obtained. Participant observer research in this case is the researcher's attempt to integrate into a situation without affecting the real conditions in a Congwayndut performance. In interviews, data was obtained based on unstructured questions but oriented towards one particular point, namely referring to the use of a reading scheme for the concepts of performance studies, social drama, and tricks so that the aim of this research was not only to read performance issues, but it also contained the essence. and cultural consequences.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Shadow Puppet Rejuvenation Innovation

As an illustration of the innovative practice of rejuvenating shadow puppets, Congwayndut is moving unique and authentic performances through the categorization of performances, one of which is Attack Stage. The concept of the Attack Stage performance is a form of collaboration through offering performances in villages and towns by adapting the organizers' abilities as a form of participation in the art movement. Through the concept of performance presentation, this research attempts to examine the innovative practice of rejuvenating the Congwayndut shadow puppet show by explaining it through the following aspects.



Figure 1: Congwayndut shadow puppet performance room  
Gendot Dekanipa, 20 August 2022 [source]

### Artistic Performance Spatial Planning

The Congwayndut shadow puppet group is quite flexible in staging a show. In the artistic layout of the performance, Congwayndut can perform according to the capacity of the space, such as the yard of the guard post building, local residents' houses, or the narrow village road junction. The area used for the puppeteer to perform is not like the area used for the Purwa shadow puppet show in general, even with an area of 4x5 meters, there is enough space for the puppeteer to perform. Meanwhile, musical accompanists, including singers, can adjust by occupying the right and left

sides of the puppeteer. This flexible performance space creates closeness between the audience and Congwayndut when they are performing. In a Congwayndut puppet performance space on village stages, there is almost no distance between the performer and the audience. In conditions like this, the audience can freely observe the performance at close range to the performer. The audience can follow the puppeteer's speech while playing the puppet, giving money to the singer just like a Dangdut music performance (Nugroho, interview 20 August 2022).

### **Flexible Performance Structure**

Typically, a shadow puppet show certainly has Puppet Simpingan, Puppet Dhudhahan, and Puppet Ricikan (Sumanto, 2005, p. 7). In Congwayndut, puppet equipment can be adjusted flexibly, namely by compressing the duration of the performance to just a few hours, adapting the performance with flexible and witty storytelling, and even being able to perform story improvisations (Suryanto, interview 1 September 2022). The dynamics of improvisation on stage which is not always the same as planning behind the stage is an aesthetic of the Congwayndut shadow puppets performance. This is part of the unity and balance that is always maintained as a synchronization of the performance. Improvisation is not only related to the issue of Congwayndut's authority in performance but improvisation is needed to establish Congwayndut as a performance performer.

As stated by Mulyana (2013, p. 169), during the crowded Ngarot ceremony in Lelea, West Java, synchronization was carried out for all activities and interactions, controlling each other and confirming their position, and between subjects would be responsive if disturbances, deviations or errors occurred to be immediately resolved, restored, and attempted again as a synchronization effort. In Congwayndut puppet performances, the dynamics of improvisation are carried out as a form of synchronization and produce something "outside of planning", for example when the puppeteer runs out of energy to tell a story, the musician can replace the role of puppeteer and improvise as best he can, while the puppeteer instead goes off stage and blends into the audience. This is of course very different from conventional shadow puppet shows. Conventionally, the role of the puppeteer is at the forefront in leading the shadow puppets' performance (Groenendael, 1987). In Congwayndut, synchronization is carried out in every aspect of the performance, including musical accompaniment, wayang story issues, to certain strategies so that the performance can run well. Therefore, every Congwayndut personnel has the awareness to act to minimize the occurrence of errors in performance (Subhan, interview 22 August 2022).

### **Accompaniment**

In terms of the form of innovation and novelty displayed by the Congwayndut shadow puppet group, it is not only in the performance categorization system. Congwayndut can present the flexibility of puppet performances with a contemporary musical style. As illustrated by the Congwayndut shadow puppet group which can nimbly explore various musical genres from Jazz, Rock, Blues, Reggae, and Dangdut (Rachman & Lestari, 2012; Wrahatnala, 2020). The music accompanying the Congwayndut puppet group also acts as a conduit for the audience to feel the sensation of humour and even becomes entertainment in itself when the audience wants to sing and be watched by other audiences. Music players often increase humorous tension, for example when the puppeteer performs a slash, the bass and drum instrument players can perform a pun with the sound "takk nduuut..." which is similar to the sound of the *entul* instrument (Romadona,

interview 20 August 2022). This musical code will emotionally stimulate the audience to be more interested in feeling the tension of humour presented by Congwayndut.

### **Trickster in Congwayndut**

Tricksters in the performance studies reading of the Congwandut shadow puppets group can appear not only personally through the puppeteer, but can also be played communally by musicians, and tricksters can act out whatever performance they want to express when Congwayndut performs. The trickster's role is very important in enlivening the atmosphere of the performance, instilling the messages of the show, and cultivating a rejuvenated image of puppet performances that are of interest to all levels of society. Congwayndut's existence as a trickster is an agent of transformation in driving the dynamics of new arts and culture. In this context, Congwayndut personnel members do not just stand as a wayang group that carries the message and impression of renewal of the performance. His humour and flexibility become a means of discussing, evoking, and embodying socio-cultural issues from trivial matters to touching on strategic issues.

Through the Congwayndut puppet performance, the phenomenon of liminality or what Turner calls anti-structure can be observed when the puppeteer acts as a village head and conveys messages of harmony about the existence of diversity in a village which is told through his puppet performance. A musical accompanist can come on stage to replace the puppeteer in a turban costume and wearing a koko shirt like a traditional Arab dress. Then he speaks Javanese and conveys moral-social messages through his actions of playing puppet. However, with the nuance of the performance which presents novelty, flexibility, and humour, Congwayndut arouses the audience's feelings to re-read the inner situation and the surrounding social environment (Putranto, interview 20 August 2022).



Figure 2: A musician acts as a puppeteer in the Congwayndut performance  
Gendot Dekanipa, 20 August 2022 [source]



Figure 3: The puppeteer comes down from the stage to become an audience  
Gendot Dekanipa, 20 August 2022 [source]

### Creating Humor Through *Entul*'s Role

The speciality of the Congwayndut shadow puppet show is the presence of humour to attract the audience's interest. Humour, in other words, buffoonery, jokes, or slapstick, became more institutionalized after Indonesia became independent (A.W. Widjaja, 1993; Gono & Rakhmad, 2021). In terms of terminology, according to (Pramono, 1983), the categorization of humor is grouped based on its appearance which consists of verbal humor, visual humor or images, and body movements; Meanwhile, based on the purpose of the message, it is divided into humor with critical content, humor that lightens the load of the message, and humor that merely conveys the message.

Humour is not as simple as being understood as the audience's reaction to the humorous stimulus expressed by the humorist. In McAuley's (2002, p. 238) view, humorous performances involve an energy exchange that takes place between the presenter and the audience. Meanwhile, Simatupang (2013, p. 69) agrees with McAuley (2013, p. 69), who believes that the orientation of humour presentation lies in the audience's burst of laughter at humorous events so that audience participation plays a role in determining the success or failure of a humorous performance. In the Congwayndut show, humour is part of the storyline packaging strategy, thus influencing the audience's attention level to enter the humorous state. As illustrated in the strategy of the dice gambling game, such as the role of the dealer and *entul*, in the Congwayndut puppet show this strategy is also applied through the role of the performer. The role of the puppeteer is to start the puppet performance, raise the tension of the performance to the next stage, and play out the plot of the problem, then the story told by the puppeteer is responded to by the role of *entul* played by other musical players. *Entul* also has a role in responding to the puppeteer's speech, either supporting or even replying to the puppeteer's speech with a sarcastic speaking style (Romadona, interview 20 August 2022). In this performance, *Entul*'s role can be seen as a provocateur to communicate with other personnel and stimulate the audience's attention.

The appearance of humour in the Congwayndut shadow puppet show is not a matter of "who" will be the "victim and perpetrator" to stimulate the audience's laughter response. Even though it could be created spontaneously, in reality, the impression of humour is a matter of "who" "wants" to be the "victim and perpetrator" to arouse laughter in the audience, and humour is deliberately scripted as an important part of the characteristics of the Congwayndut performance (Subhan, interview 22 August 2022). Humour events in the performing arts are an extraordinary or extraordinary condition, Plato, Cicero, Aristotle, and Francis Bacon in Gauter (1988) stated that

someone can laugh if there is something ridiculous that is outside of everyday habits and a joke can arise from a mistake or oversight, thereby triggering other people to laugh.

Humour can also be created by deliberately making mistakes, namely the puppeteer playing a puppet that does not match the character of the puppet (Wulandari, 2019). This is a unique fact because the Congwayndut group's puppet collection is not as complete as leather puppets in general. This deficiency was exploited by the puppeteer to create a humorous atmosphere. In line with James Danandjaya, as cited in Suhadi (1989), that humour functions as a catharsis or loosens a person's inner self caused by various life problems, such as social injustice, political competition, economics, sex, and the desire for freedom of expression, then in Congwayndut shadow puppets performances usually It is also related to issues of political, economic, social criticism, freedom of expression, and the expression of inner freedom in social life.

### **Popular Socio-Cultural Expressions**

The diversity of issues raised by the Congwayndut shadow puppet group in each performance act reflects a popular socio-cultural event. Through the analysis of performance studies, by adapting the thoughts of Arnold van Gennep and Turner, in the concept of the performance of Attack on the Stage, Congwayndut shadow puppetry also takes place through three stages, namely separation, liminal, and reintegration (Simatupang, 2013, p. 110).

The stages of separation or separation can be seen when the audience enters a situation that is different from their daily life, which can be identified from the performance space, namely changes in behaviour or adjustments in the behaviour of the audience when entering the performance area until they fill the entire performance area. In one experience, researchers witnessed that when Congwayndut performs in densely populated rural areas, they usually use public spaces, including at T-junctions or crossroads. This phase of separation or division occurs in line with the increasing tension in the presence of the audience that forms the crowd. Borrowing the thoughts of Mulyana (2013), this situation occurs because people mix or mingle with each other and ultimately create unification.

The next process, when the separation stage occurs, is followed by the liminal stage. In this liminal stage, the audience experiences a phase where they are immersed in humorous events and experience a distortion of their awareness of the daily order. In this liminal stage, release occurs or in scientific language, it is called a cathartic event. The outburst of catharsis through the audience's laughter implies the existence of a connection between each person's inner emotional experiences, which could involve various cultural issues such as family problems, love, debts, sex, and so on. When life problems commonly experienced by village people are brought to life and put into practice through packaging messages and the impression of humorous performances by the Congwayndut shadow puppet group, then this can become a vehicle for reflection to soften their inner condition so that people are more introspective. At the reintegration or reunification stage, namely after going through the experience of watching, expressing humorous expressions by laughing, then after the Congwayndut performance is finished, a person has felt a new experience, as if the state of mind has been recharged, so that the inner state becomes more enthusiastic to undergo a phase as a new individual in his social environment.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this research can conclude that the key aspect of the cuteness and novelty of the Congwayndut performance lies in the strategic role of the *entul* and trickster to enliven the atmosphere of the performance, instil the message of the performance, and foster a rejuvenated image of puppet performances that are of interest to all levels of society. Humour in Congwayndut performances is done to arouse laughter in the audience and is scripted as an important part of Congwayndut's characteristics. The appearance of humour is important because the mission of cultural messages can be conveyed in a way that is easily digested by the audience. The content of the message can be a message that carries values regarding political, economic, and social criticism, freedom to express opinions, and even inner freedom. This humour or humour becomes a representation and reflection of popular socio-cultural events because it carries empirical experiences involving various cultural issues and the burdens of people's daily lives, family problems, romance, debts, sex, and so on which are deliberately merged and negotiated. When life problems that are commonly experienced by village people are presented as Congwayndut's humorous discourse, then this can become a vehicle for reflection to soften the inner condition so that people are more introspective.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank the supervisor, as well as the editorial team of the SOSHUM journal and all the sources involved in making our article which is entitled on the page above.

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