

Research Article

Discipline of the Body Art of Puppeteer (Study of Dalang Soleh Adi Pramono)

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ORCIDTri Wahyuningtyas: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2076-0109>**Abstract.**

This study examines the practice of body discipline in the masked puppeteer Dalang Soleh Adi Pramono, a modern figure who values discipline, where the body is the most crucial aspect of the process. A disciplined body produces individuals who demonstrate responsibility and dedication. Discipline entails fulfilling all responsibilities willingly, rather than being compelled by external forces. The research employs a qualitative approach with a post-structuralist approach. The analysis employs Michel Foucault's theory of body discipline, with data collection through observation, interviews, and document studies. The research findings indicate that body discipline involves not coercing the will of others, but rather it is the execution of one's own will through the power of knowledge possessed by Soleh. Foucault argues that the puppeteer's body discipline extends beyond mere physical skills, encompassing mechanisms that regulate the body independent of power dominance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Art is a part of human life that holds beauty and value according to each person's perspective and experiences. Experience is the place that provides humans with the most ability to immerse themselves, create, and conceive an art form, adopted from the world of human experiences. Through experiences, individuals acquire knowledge that constructs their thoughts in the process of acting, thinking, and reasoning. The knowledge of a Wayang Topeng Malang puppeteer is acquired through the internalized process of body discipline, which began when they first learned about Wayang Topeng Malang. The puppeteer's knowledge of Wayang Topeng is formed through self-habits and long internalized experiences. The process of knowledge formation for each puppeteer is influenced by various factors, including the environment they grew up in, their surroundings, and the broader community.

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Each Wayang Topeng puppeteer possesses different knowledge based on their unique experiences and reasoning. The Wayang Topeng puppeteer is an artistic individual with the ability to cultivate aesthetic feelings through the art of puppetry in Wayang Topeng performances. They play a crucial role in the growth and development of Wayang Topeng. In some communities in Malang, puppeteers are still perceived as individuals with spiritual knowledge (*kaweruh*) and as artists (performers of art). As a result, the puppeteer carries two roles within them: as the director of Wayang Topeng performances and as a shaman or a person with “special knowledge” (someone who possesses high spiritual power). With their knowledge, the puppeteer can construct the thoughts of individuals or society through the stories (*antawana*) conveyed in Wayang Topeng performances, and they are actively engaged in the spiritual aspects of their craft.

The knowledge of a Wayang Topeng Malang puppeteer is acquired through an internalized process of body discipline that begins when they first learn about Wayang Topeng Malang. The puppeteer’s knowledge of Wayang Topeng is formed through self-habits and long internalized experiences. The process of knowledge formation for each puppeteer is influenced by various factors, including the environment they grew up in, their surroundings, and the broader community. Each Wayang Topeng puppeteer possesses different knowledge based on their unique experiences and reasoning. The Wayang Topeng puppeteer is an artistic individual with the ability to cultivate aesthetic feelings through the art of puppetry in Wayang Topeng performances. They play a crucial role in the growth and development of Wayang Topeng.

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The knowledge and reasoning of puppeteers have been disciplined since they learned and socialized in their living environment and the broader community. This pattern of discipline has shaped puppeteers who have the ability to control themselves wherever they are. With discipline, puppeteers are trained until they become skillful in playing masks and music, continuously tested and corrected until their body skills become automatic. Discipline is a way of exercising power to control the puppeteers of Wayang Topeng, ultimately producing obedient and useful individuals. The body

becomes the primary target of discipline, and it is trained and honed to become useful [1].

This study discusses how a Wayang Topeng puppeteer, Soleh Adi Pramono, has developed a disciplined body. According to Foucault, disciplining the body is a crucial art in human life. The body is the most important element in this process of discipline. A disciplined body gives birth to responsible individuals. For Foucault, the body is not merely a place where adornments depend; it is also an effort by humans to understand power. According to Foucault, the art of disciplining the body is manifested as a “method.” He formulates four methods: the art of dissemination, active control of activities, strategies to increase the usefulness of time, and organized power.

This writing aims to describe the art of Soleh’s body discipline as a Wayang Topeng puppeteer from the perspective of Michel Foucault. It consciously recognizes that the body is a crucial part of being human. It is an art in itself to discipline the body in carrying out the mechanisms of power as a territory oppressed by authority.

2. Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach, with data collected through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and observation of the words and actions of a Wayang Topeng puppeteer. The oral data sources are obtained from informants, including Soleh Adi Pramono (the Wayang Topeng Tumpang puppeteer), Enis Kartika (the wife of Soleh), and Turijani (Soleh’s sibling). The analysis method utilizes Michel Foucault’s theory of body discipline with the research objective of describing the art of body discipline among Wayang Topeng puppeteers in Malang.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. The Art of Training Soleh's Body as a Wayang Topeng Puppeteer

Soleh Adi Pramono is a Wayang Topeng puppeteer in the Tumpang region. He was born into an artistic family, the son of a dalang maca (macapat performer), and the nephew of a renowned Wayang Topeng puppeteer known as kek Tirtowinoto. It is from both of them that he acquired knowledge about puppetry and Wayang Topeng. Soleh’s experiences and reasoning have been shaped since childhood by various art performances, such as when he was asked to sit beside kek Tirtowinoto during Wayang

Topeng shows. His senses of hearing, sight, and feelings are deeply intertwined with Wayang Topeng performances. Additionally, Soleh's grandfather (Mbah Rusman) is also a Wayang Topeng maestro in the Malang and Tengger regions.

The spiritual values instilled through rituals by Kek Tir to Soleh sharpen his reasoning and enrich his experiences, ultimately shaping his knowledge until he becomes a renowned Wayang Topeng puppeteer. The profession of being a puppeteer is based on a centuries-old tradition, passed down orally, typically from fathers to their sons. Besides the knowledge and skills that Soleh must master, such as the stories, the played gending (music), dance movements, suluk (vocal performances), and the staging techniques, there is also mystical knowledge involved. This knowledge includes specific prayers and mantras, as well as certain protocols regarding behavior that empower the puppeteer to face significant events in the community's life, such as droughts and crop pests that threaten harvests, one's fate, and Soleh's own success as a puppeteer. The learning process of a child when delving into Wayang Topeng was experienced by Soleh Adi Pramono. He acknowledged that learning to become a puppeteer or to dance with the mask was not an easy journey. He stated that becoming a Wayang Topeng puppeteer could be pursued or achieved through several ways, including: Firstly, being a "dalang sejati" or a true puppeteer, which means being born into a lineage of puppeteers. Starting from his father, grandfather, and even great-grandfather, all of them were puppeteers, so the knowledge was directly or indirectly inherited by their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Secondly, being a "dalang cantrik," which means a puppeteer obtained through the method of "pencantrikan." In this process, a prospective puppeteer becomes a student or disciple to a senior puppeteer. This learning process is quite lengthy and involves several stages, starting with learning about music, dance, and how to play the "keprak" (percussion instrument),

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about music, dance, and how to play the “keprak” (percussion instrument). The cantrik process includes learning the production aspects, sometimes as a performer or dancer, and sometimes as a person responsible for arranging the Wayang (dancers/characters). The cantrik system involves extensive training to mature the candidate puppeteer’s behavior, mentality, and artistic skills. It becomes a long journey to becoming a puppeteer, and the entire life is devoted to following the guidance of a senior puppeteer. During the cantrik period, a puppeteer not only delves into the technical aspects of performing arts but also undergoes socialization as a member of the community. A dalang senior positions the cantrik puppeteer as an adopted child or a family member, thus the process of socialization continues.

When Soleh was a cantrik under the senior Wayang Topeng puppeteer Ki Tirtowinoto, who happened to be his grandfather, he received teachings on how a puppeteer should act and behave in society. In seeking knowledge (*ngelmu*), Soleh had to undergo tapa (a form of spiritual practice) or fasting for a month to develop his inner strength to become a puppeteer. When a disciple receives certain mantras, he must adhere to certain restrictions (*sesirik*), such as not eating anything except plain dry rice (*mutih*). He also refrains from going anywhere and stays focused on prayers (*panyuwun*) and meditation (*cipta hening*). At the right time, the puppeteer teacher, Ki Tirtowinoto, decided to share some of his mystical knowledge with his student. This knowledge could be in the form of mantras that, when recited before a performance begins, would captivate the audience’s attention or serve as a means to ward off evil influences. The authority of the teacher in imparting mystical knowledge to his student is like a play that has been inherited from his father or grandfather and is believed to bring positive influences. The control or isolation of the body (the junior puppeteer) is produced by knowledge to subjugate it. The knowledge and political control over the body (the junior puppeteer) intersect with power relations, knowledge localized in the body to shape a compliant and useful body that can be subdued, utilized, transformed, improved, and enhanced in its usefulness. In this observation, it can be seen that knowledge becomes a source of power, treating individuals as subjects and dominating them through knowledge. [2].

Soleh’s disciplined body has shaped him to have greater abilities compared to most people who lack knowledge and skills in activities and socializing with their surrounding community. In his daily activities within the community, whether it’s at work, interacting with other artists, or the general public, Soleh is regarded as someone with high spirituality and is trusted as a spiritual practitioner. His expertise and skills have been honed over several years, especially in the last 25 years. The knowledge that has been internalized in Soleh’s body has formed his capacity to understand various aspects of life.

The knowledge he learned through the process of studying Wayang Topeng has gained him the trust of the community. His learning process goes beyond merely learning about movements, music, and stories in Wayang Topeng performances. It involves maturing his thinking and actions in interpreting Wayang Topeng, not only visually but also at a deeper level, through interactions with the traditional figures of Wayang Topeng. This has formed his understanding of the meaning of life.

Soleh stated, “Learning Topeng is fascinating because it’s not just about learning movements, music, costumes, and storytelling as a puppeteer, but it’s about learning the Javanese knowledge, *sinau* as it’s symbolized in the *dalang* literature like the *suluk dalang gandrung* “*mangmrat-mangmong, mangmrat mangmong mang singo barong*”. In there, it’s said to have the *aji*, *gandrung mang mong mang, called gusti ang ong ang, mangmrat mangmong singo barong, ajinya singo barong*, and so on. Everything taught in Wayang Topeng is a lesson about life as a human being who is aware of their existence within the community and with the Almighty” (interview on November 19, 2022).

Soleh realizes that in learning and immersing himself in Wayang Topeng, spiritual elements naturally form within the bodies of the Wayang Topeng performers. This has also shaped Soleh’s identity in interpreting his role as someone entrusted with the responsibility of Wayang Topeng’s existence. The *habitus* of Wayang Topeng performers in Tumpang, when learning about topeng, cannot be separated from these spiritual aspects. For example, during the making of topeng, they must perform a ritual called “*suguh topeng*” at the burial grounds so that when they cut down the wood and shape it into topeng masks, they can avoid negative influences. Before every performance, Soleh and the Wayang Topeng performers gather and go to the river to bathe and cleanse themselves, then proceed to the village burial grounds to perform rituals, pray, and seek blessings for a smooth performance, and for every character to come to life on stage. Enis also mentioned that in every aspect related to learning and performing arts, both in the studio and outside, during ritual activities or rehearsals and performances, their bodies have conditioned themselves according to the usual practices. Their long-standing habits and knowledge have been trained and disciplined in their bodies, forming what they believe to be obedient bodies. With this conviction, the performers can endure and be effective in their respective domains.

Soleh’s *habitus* as a *dalang* Wayang Topeng has been long disciplined, a product of his experiential process that has shaped the actions of each individual and collective in accordance with their artistic experiences. Certain habits of Soleh are acquired through his life experiences and serve specific functions within the social world where those

habits occur. Soleh's life experiences are a result of historical events, which are then internalized within him, allowing him to sense, understand, become aware of, and assess the social world. Through these patterns, artists produce their actions and also evaluate them (habitus controls the thoughts and choices of individual actions) [3].

Soleh's body discipline is not an execution of the will imposed by others; rather, it is the implementation of his own will. The development of individual control over "his own body," namely Soleh's body, historically emerged from the moment of artistic body training, which means there is a process of training, developing, and making it skillful [4]. The art of training Soleh's body as a dalang is not merely about body skills; it has expanded into a mechanism that disciplines the body, not under the dominion of power and domination. Discipline is a meticulous mechanism of control over the body; through body discipline, it is trained to become skillful, constantly tested, and corrected, resulting in the skills, dexterity, and readiness becoming an automated mechanism within the body itself. Through discipline, the body's skills, strength, and utility are enhanced, while also placing the body in a relationship of obedience and usefulness.

4. Conclusion

The target of discipline is the body, and the disciplined body of Soleh as a dalang Wayang Topeng produces individuals who can be treated as obedient bodies. These obedient bodies must also be productive. The artistic productivity within Soleh's body leads to parallel development in the utility and obedience of individuals and society, spreading further. Soleh's body discipline is not the execution of the will imposed by others; instead, it is the implementation of his own will under the power of his knowledge. According to Foucault, the art of body discipline for a dalang is no longer limited to body skills; it has expanded into a mechanism that disciplines the body, not under the dominion of power and domination.

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