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Gadamerian Hermeneutics in an Artistic Process of Retno Maruti and Bulantrisna Djelantik's Bedoyo-Legong Calonarang

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ABSTRACT

It is important to rethink Indonesian dance creation within postmodern aesthetics, from which dance maker tends to present the forms of fusion in pursuing the “newness”. Encouraged by dialectic of Hans-Georg Gadamer, I believed that such specific manner is required to choreograph sufficient fusion forms in terms of Indonesian plurality. This research is to investigate the hermeneutic dimension of “Bedoyo-Legong Calonarang” as a dance piece that brings Javanese and Balinese classical idioms into Indonesia contemporary. I use the core motion of his hermeneutics to apply interpretative, holistic observation, and heuristics as well as philosophical qualitative method. Through identifying dialectical aspects in the conceptual sphere of artistic process and presentation of the dance, the result showed its merit to accommodate inter-subjective understanding in revitalizing traditional values.

Keywords: Contemporaneity, Dance, Dialogic Concept of Choreography, Gadamer's Dialectics, Hermeneutics.
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1. Introduction

In creating dance, a choreographer often works within the knowledge that significantly underlies the manner towards choreographic materials. It also directs to some certain goals to have either traditional or contemporary forms that associate with creativity and innovations. For arts creators, such competence is often established parallel with aesthetic experiences, and has the capability to define the horizon limits. Hence, creativity and innovation grow within the entire boundary. Hans-Georg Gadamer saw human's thought and experience are very limited, and they so much depend on tradition and the effort of history to manifest the utopian dreams.² The new area in the thought is risky and dangerous, if we ignore the achievement of the past. Throwing the past and history away from our today's life is not difference from vanishing the source of today's perspective for its development and the sustainable process (Piliang, 2012).

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² Gadamer's term that is known as *wirkungsgeschichte* and also be used in Gadamer's term to be understood as an effective history.

Gadamer's aesthetics is only one part of his *magnum opus*. Some reviews claim both positively and negatively to his hermeneutics as a pacemaker commencing postmodernism perspective (Palmer, 2005; Grondin, 2005). Some postmodernists have misunderstood his thesis in truth and relativity.³ In the late 2000s, postmodern aesthetics presents the artworks that significantly differ from the former genres. Mike Featherstone stated several central tendency of postmodern art, that are there is no more boundary between arts and daily life, the collapse of level difference between high arts and popular (mass) culture, the freedom of eclecticism, hyper-semiotics and the chaos of signs. The manifestation of postmodernism are parodist, kitsch, pastiche, irony, the game of surface and the cult of outer skin to avoid depths and meaning, the ignorance towards genius-authenticity of arts producer, and finally the embracement of reproduction-mimesis model in arts creation (Featherstone, 1993).

Postmodern that creates daily social's style also contributes to trigger many artists to work in such contradictive states; the power of mass media with its model of consumerism in one side, and cultural pluralism in the other side. Some artworks ironically present "happening acts" of subjective perspective. Thus, there is no attention to serious and formal explorations but the eclectic forms to produce "the newness". The work is not truly "new" in whatsoever, except for merely difference to be easily replaced by next styles (Dunn, 1993). Postmodernism inevitably emerges the condition in which the creator's spirit and soul do not anymore exist in artworks. Postmodern aesthetics remains a discourse. Yet, Indonesia arts society has fluently absorbed these global values and taken them for granted. Creativity of dance is addressed to differential reproduction for consumption and pursuing the "pseudo newness" through composing fusion of spectacles.

It is urgent for Indonesian dance makers, as for myself, to rethink our choreographic concept that attempts to present meaning; the concept that also sufficiently accommodates curiosity of today's audience. I propose one of few dance performances that distinctively merit contemporary perspectives. Entitled "*Bedoyo-Legong Calonarang*",⁴ the dance is a collaboration work of Retno Maruti (1947) and Bulantrisna Djelantik (1948); both are Indonesian female dancers-choreographers whose artistic experiences have been internationally remarkable. The dance presents significant cultural idioms of Javanese and Balinese in one performance space, in a form of juxtaposition. The nature of contradiction between *legong* and *bedoyo* has established the success of juxtaposition, and vice versa.

Such presentation must embody the artistic experience in the process of creation, which is the hermeneutic experience. The whole performance of "*Bedoyo-Legong Calonarang*" is a manifestation of understanding that at once presents the experience of art for both creators and audiences. The process of understanding involves philosophical activity. It is not technical or methodological, but more refers to dialectic and dialogical process to organize crucial differences between genuine preconceptions from ones that are not. Gadamer gives a high credit to the importance of artistic experience as one of the elements to establish dialogical process. Through experience that moves in time and space, we acknowledge what is proper and what is not (Grondin, 2002).

1.1 The aims and goals

A descriptive dance structure is the basic material that is used to read the performance of the dance more clear and definite, to emphasize the details of elements and spectacles. Through analyzing dance structure, the research achieves its main goal to identify the aspects of dialectic in the creative process of "*Bedoyo-Legong Calonarang*", from which Gadamer's hermeneutics can be known to sufficiently provide directions for inter-subjective understanding.

The research aims to discover the contemporaneity of the dance, in accordance with Gadamer's hermeneutics codes. These outcomes are to open further investigations towards the choreographic concept itself whether it accommodates a comprehensive choreographic technique for whom using traditional idioms in challenging innovation and modern technology.

³ About misunderstood in Gadamer's truth and relativity, see J. Grondin, 2005, pp. 207-209 (in S. Zabala, 2007).

⁴ The dance was firstly performed at 2006 at Graha Bhakti Budaya, Taman Ismail Marzuki, Jakarta, at 2007 and 2009 at the event of International Bali Festival Singapore, then 2012 at the event of World Dance Day held by Indonesian Institute of the Arts Surakarta. It was performed by eighteen female dancers; nine dancers of *bedoyo* and nine dancers of *legong*.

1.2 The framework

This Paper is organized into four headings. First section is an introduction consists of three sub-headings: introduction itself, the aims and goals, and the framework of the paper. Second section is a methodology to accommodate the requirement of philosophical qualitative method of research, consists of literary research and methodic phase. A literary research is the inter-textual analyzing towards related cross-discipline textbooks of dance, artistic-based research, aesthetics, contemporary issues, and hermeneutics, while a methodic phase is to attempt the application of Gadamer's hermeneutics into a process of understanding in the research.

Third section is a theoretical core motion that foregrounds the analysis of Gadamer's theory in dialectic. Fourth section provides the dialectic codes in an artistic work of "Bedoyo-Legong Calonarang", that direct to the discussion of the dance's contemporary dimension. The paper is closed with a brief conclusion towards the outcomes and research conducted.

2. Methodology

I use philosophical qualitative research methodology that requires a holistic understanding towards the subject both material and formal. The material subject is "Bedoyo-Legong Calonarang". The formal subject is hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer as a theoretical means for analyzing, describing, and finding a reflection towards research problems. The research works with primary data from a video of the dance performance, participatory observation of studio activities, and structured interviews. I consider literatures, although be known as secondary data in our field, to be classified into two kinds according to their substantial merit: main secondary literature and secondary literatures.

2.1 Literary research

The analysis process of the research is interwoven with deep reading activities. The works get the prime data from main secondary literature *Truth and Method*.⁵ The book provides the ontology and epistemology of Gadamer's thought in establishing his hermeneutics. Associated literatures are *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, *The Relevance of The Beautiful*, and other systematic writing of books, chapters of books, and Journal's articles that discuss Gadamer's perspective towards hermeneutics, arts and the ontology of artworks.

I also use varied kinds of literatures in dance especially those are reviewing and analyzing *bedoyo* and *legong* based on the historicity, development, dance structure, and philosophical values. It is important to make minor study towards aesthetic experience of two choreographers of "Bedoyo-Legong Calonarang" to seek the horizons of their philosophical thought in the process of choreographing. Scientific data from this literary research is processed in the analysis work, along with material data from interviews and studio observation. This process is an embodiment of dialogical discourse amongst author's understanding towards artistic work of material subject, artistic data of material subject themselves, and literature braid in philosophy area especially in hermeneutics.

2.2 Methodic phase

This research uses the methodic phase that is not rigidly systematized and to follow hermeneutic principle Gadamer suggested. The analysis process refers to interconnectedness amongst *subtilitas intelligendi* (verstehen), *subtilitas explicandi* (explanation), and *subtilitas applicandi* (application); an understanding that is not cease at a mere one's subjectivity to overcome an object, but understanding as "one's mode of Being" itself (Gadamer, 2004).

I apply methodic elements interpretation, historic continuous, holistic, and heuristics that are all integral as hermeneutic process:

- In conveying interpretation, I intently involve in the "tension room" of choreographers, *bedoyo*, and *legong*, while I remain outside "the play".
- Historic continuous is for examining the development of both choreographers' perspective, as interpreters, in reconstructing past works to be presented in today's modern society.

⁵ Revised edition 2004). The book is an English translation of *Wahrheit und Methode* second edition published in 1975, translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Mashall.

- Holistic is to direct the examination towards conceptual dimension in creative process of “*Bedoyo-Legong Calonarang*” as a dialogic process involves the sphere of aesthetics, ethics, and hermeneutical experience holistically.
- Heuristics might determine the scientific nature of philosophy’s innovation in which the openness to facticity will emerge new understandings towards hermeneutics and choreographic concept.

3. Theoretical core motion

Since the juxtaposition mode is highlighted for this research investigation, and to identify such innovation of the “*Bedoyo-Legong Calonarang*”’s concept, I look up to the essential of Gadamer’s hermeneutics into my analysis phases. I am aware Gadamer did not produce one definite system of analysis. His perspective about arts is a never-ending discussion that he did not mean to reach the final to serve the questions about arts. Furthermore, Gadamer’s arguments in the essays he wrote years after *Wahrheit und Methode* lead their readers to find the way of thinking about arts and hermeneutics in their own ways. His book’s preview by Bernasconi mentioned that the core conception of his philosophy is indeed far from what so called a system builder. Gadamer applied difference angles to approach the same issue, for his attempt to always commence new ways to illuminate the problems (Gadamer, 1989).

In Gadamer’s perspective, the artists and also the spectators must understand the changes in the process of arts and artworks. The artists must primarily have such active gaze in searching and synthesizing the mainframe of all forms, sketches, plans, concepts, and spectacles to create. His philosophical hermeneutics tempts to seek the nature of the understanding itself, thus it does not propose the rigid rules that has to be verified by objectivity alone. Prejudice, authority, and tradition cannot be fractured from the entity of human experience, and has to be involved in every act of interpretation. He suggests the hermeneutic circle that is constructed as a cycle of continuum where hermeneutic experiences prepare us, as interpreters, to deal with every challenge to develop our culture.

Although he does not offer the methodology, Gadamer actually proposes the significant concepts through his propositions in *Truth and Method*. This phenomenal book does not only accumulate the main ideas of Gadamer’s hermeneutics but also elaborates the complex of his thought about aesthetics, sciences of social - humanity, and the review towards his predecessors’ hermeneutics, that at the same time asserts his stance and position about the nature of human understanding. *Truth and Method* contents three main chapters, respectively comprehends the details of Gadamer’s main idea about human’s understanding.

The first and second chapter of *Truth and Method* tell us about the matter of truth in art experience that leads us to the understanding towards nature of the art itself. Gadamer derives these initial thoughts based on his critique to Kant’s aesthetics. These two chapters has been interwoven in producing a solid braid of human understanding, and in association with the faculty of experiences and historicity that establish the experiences themselves. Gadamer put forward the “text” as a departure for the acts of understanding. He asserts that human being as a matter of fact always moves in such interpretation, and that both writer and the reader must have their respective sphere of understanding.

Such a solid braid then makes a bound with third chapter afterwards, to where Gadamer emphasizes his statement to the application of understanding. For Gadamer, understanding always implies the agreement, and the agreement almost always present through the language, a dialogue and a conversation. “To understand” is also “to articulate” (of meaning, something, and fact) into words. He furthermore poses the discussion about the language urgency in the last part of the book, which becomes a significant point to sustain his idea of hermeneutical experience universality (Grondin 2002).

Gadamer hermeneutics significantly has a dialogic pattern that does not understand the “text” as a mere bunch of fixed statements and thus has a final meaning. A text, or a phenomenon in the broader specs for not limiting it as literal text, and for including artwork as one of them, always proposes the query to its interpreter. The dialectic significance of such hermeneutics tries to comprehend the text’s questions. The answers factually have had the margins, which are determined by the horizon of the text itself that more or less lead the direction to every interpretation. Beyond the

limit interpretation therefore could be reduced to be less possible, to allow the text finally make sense and meaningful (Muzir, 2008).

In adapting Platon's concept of dialogue, Gadamer provides the intensive identification to the priority of the questions, which truly want to reveal all things that are secret, ambiguous and unclear. The emergent discourses by all means are the efforts to disclose the ideas or intentions hidden in the questions. Platon's dialogue critically differed the authentic ones from those are not. A process of dialogue was not authentic when the interlocutor attempted to prove that he himself was correct and valid, but not to dig the deeper understanding. A dialogue met its authenticity as the interlocutors were aware that passing the questions is not easier than answering them. Someone had to genuinely want to know and hence he realized that he did not know, so that he could make a question. *Interlocutor* who thought that he knew better (about the subject or matter in a discourse) than others even had more difficulty to passing a proper question (Gadamer, 2004).

Gadamer establishes the concept of authentic dialogue as "the art of conversation" and "the art of thinking". This is the creative activity of questioning, not to win every argument, not to resist other opinion, and not to defend weak analysis, but to seek the truth. The dialogue needs difference perceptions of interlocutors, but have no contradictory purposes, that liable to establish the logic of main subject development through structured debate. A dialogue should not be oriented to overthrow other arguments, but more to explore the quality of other ideas. Gadamer's dialogue is the art of thinking that supposes to strength the opposing perspectives, and to always refer to the main subject of the discourse.

Bringing this concept of dialogue into the motion of my research's theoretical foreground should initiate a proper method to understand an artistic production. The existence of a work of art is very much related to the creative process, to where the horizons of difference elements have to be well collaborated. Any concept or abstract idea emerges during the creative process becomes a dialogical medium for the difference horizons to convey the most possible manifestation. A presentation of an artwork is therefore tangible, to evoke meaning that is also temporal, the unfinished truth. The interpretation of artwork is open; it could be understood distinctively but comprehensively by different interpreters and in divergent state (of place, time, and situation). In Gadamer's term, such artwork could meet its dynamic existence through its manifestations. Hence, it will always be contemporary.

4. Dialectic codes in an artistic work of "Bedoyo-Legong Calonarang"

By taking a theme *Calonarang* that is rooted in a folklore and myth of commoners, *bedayan*⁶ in "Bedoyo-Legong Calonarang" has reduced or even has obscured the embedded myth of "feudal art". The deconstructive aspects might have been attached in the process of understanding the narrative and put it into an artistic composition of collaborative dance. "Bedoyo-Legong Calonarang" does not tell about what canonically presented by former *bedayan*, that is the story around the marriage between King of Mataram and the Queen of South Sea, or the conquest of Kings of Mataram towards smaller kingdoms; essentially designating to legitimacy of the King's power.

Maruti consciously constructs her *bedayan* from a theme that is more humane, exploring the depth of human soul and mind in living the destiny. "Bedoyo-Legong Calonarang", as well as her former creations such as *Tjiptoning*, *Satyawati*, and *Sekar Pambayun*, has put forward the story of *Calonarang* to be understood not in a "black and white" perspective but more with the holistic approach towards the balance of universe (*rwa binedha*). In her intellectual dialogue with Djelantik, she presents her *bedayan* in a male role of the knights from *Padepokan Lemah Tulis* belongs to Airlangga the King of Kediri. She confidently creates some accentuation to evidence *Mpu Barada's* craftiness in deceiving *Calonarang* with false marriage of *Bahula* (*Barada's* son) and *Ratna Manggali* (*Calonarang's* daughter). On the other scene, however, she poses her characters into self-reflection within the state of turmoil while they have to make decision to confront *Calonarang* in a battlefield. Maruti and Djelantik close their performance with unfinished solution, placing *Barada – Calonarang* into never ending battle.

Djelantik establishes the representation of *Calonarang's* rage to show female power that is also vulnerably defeated. *Calonarang's* rage in its former classical representation is manifested to a figure of

⁶ Javanese terminology to name a type of new dances that refer to or adapt the basic concept of *bedoyo*; thus there are some reconstruction to the dance vocabularies and performance rules.

demonic creature named *Rangda* or the *leyak* queen that has a horrifying face, protrude tongue, fangs, extremely glared eyes, messy white long hair, and long claws. In “*Bedoyo-Legong Calonarang*” Djelantik choses to emphasize an elegant *Calonarang* instead, by using a simple wooden mask that can be played easily with one hand, so the female figure of *Calonarang* remain existed. She also constructed the agony of *Ratna Manggali* as a trigger of the revenge to hunt-down and fight against the enemy; a proof of mother’s love. In a manner during studio rehearsals, Djelantik have had a strong struggle in coping the intimidation of inner power of *bedayan* while she had to always maintain the dynamic, strong and extrovert movements. Yet, she took it as a challenge, not a handicap that could obstruct her creativity.

Another dialogical embodiment in “*Bedoyo-Legong Calonarang*” is also well presented through the alternation of musical accompaniment. Juxtaposition concept, as I have said, put together the two traditional styles of dance, so that the dance has two styles of *gending* to perform respectively. For several scene of episodic-symbolic composition, the Javanese *tembang* (song) is sung above *semar pagulingan*⁷, and Balinese *maucapan* (recitation) is alternately vocalized above *ladrang* or *ketawang*⁸, emerging the unique atmosphere that are beautifully distinct and awkward. This is a manifestation of fusion between Javanese *gending*’s horizon and Balinese *semar pagulingan*’s horizon, producing a new technique of performing one narrative dance composition.

Gending semar pagulingan becomes the only root for establishing the structure of *legong* in “*Bedoyo-Legong Calonarang*” that consists of *papeson* (the beginning), *pengawak* (the core of *pelegongan*), *pengecet* or *pasiat* (conflict or battle), and *pekaad* (the ending). The *bedayan* compositions are framed mostly by *gending ladrang* and *ketawang* pattern within the interplay amongst the sound of *rebab*, *kemanak*, and *kendhang* to create specific tones. The technique of rhythmical fusion produces some distinct atmosphere of the situation that was narratively presented “the intercultural marriage”. Javanese *gangsaran* run parallel to Balinese *batél maya* in the marriage sequence of *Ratna Manggali* and *Bahula*.

The fusion of two styles of the *gending* is rationally presented, as both have sufficient similar pattern in a rhythm structure. The differences lie on the way the *wiyaga* (*gamelan*’s musicians) beat or sound the instruments so that they produce respective unique sound color. The complex technique, for both fusion and alternation with a little attachment of juxtaposition, is intensified in the sequence of battle dance. With complete cast of eighteen dancers onstage, the *gending* of *sampak* (Javanese) is sounded alternately against the *batél pasiat* (Balinese), and repeated. Such technique adapts a concept of *mabarung*⁹ that is owned by performance tradition of Balinese *gamelan*.

The movement compositions themselves are also performed to play the tension sphere between abstract against narrative, symbolic against representative, elegance against vigorous, and expressive against contemplative. The story exists in an episodic way, yet it still accommodates and accentuates an abstract concept of *bedayan* and *legong*. “*Bedoyo-Legong Calonarang*”’s juxtaposition has no form to be defeated for the sake of creating one fusion form. The two dance styles exist in their respective nature, in one harmonious space and time to share the philosophical meaning. The dialogical aspect is well established there, as well as the piece embodies its historical odyssey, its *Bildung*, its aesthetics voyage and experience, and conveying its path to revitalize traditional values into contemporary state.

5. Conclusion

The conceptual sphere leads the essential phases to pull out the core of the problems, and to develop principles of creative work for achieving artistic presentations. A choreographer do the art of making dance through the chain of experiments, composing one part to another, one phrase to another, within the courage to seriously “play” the whole materials continuously or simultaneously, until the form manifested (Blom & Chaplin, 1989). The idea is expressed through dancers’ body or choreographers’ themselves, to allow dance achieves its autonomy and independence existence. The

⁷ The name of Balinese *gending* as music accompaniment for *legong*.

⁸ The name Javanese *gending* as music accompaniment for *bedoyo*.

⁹ The performance concept of “stole each other’s time”, attempted to fill in the gap of empty rhythm and “enter the sound space”. The “unsuccessful” group has to admit its loss and invited the successful one to play, but immediately made a preparation to the next “battle”.

experiments and “play” themselves construct such technique or methods of creating that is unique and distinct, as they manifest through an artistic-based research.

A complex artistic investigation is even more needed to comprehend a dance piece that embeds roots of tradition and the past, for such piece has a unique cultural context such as its glory in its own time that could be far different from today’s condition, or it was performed as a partial role inside the community that was specific and particular. In the reconstruction process, choreographer deals with the “text” without the present of its former creator. This kind of reconstruction needs the analysis level that could more articulate the coherence of a whole. The meaning that is owned by the original work cannot be removed just as it is, although some reconstruction efforts try to provide “a new breath” towards the piece (Adshead, 1988). Yet, presenting the past and tradition into the actual context acquires a newborn artistic work that is not *cliché*, or even less destructive forms. Hence, dancers and choreographers must show their intensive interests to entangle with the past, while at the same time, to open mind for every today’s phenomena.

The aesthetic experience is essential for the arts and is the foundation to understand them. Aesthetic experience is conveyed historically, through the continuous self-investigation as *Being*. Human experiences cannot be separated from the life itself, holistic and wholly impacts, as the basis of all knowledge, and as a complex unit to form *Dasein*. Gadamer’s hermeneutics emphasises the importance of new meaning production that assertively proposes the understanding could never achieve the final or the absolute truth. Truth is a production of any kinds of relations in a history, voyaging in the space and time, and which is conveyed through the comprehensive praxis and meaning that are also moving in history (space and time).

Through Gadamer’s sight, I could draw that “*Bedoyo-Legong Calonarang*” has the ability for a transformation to get out from the cage of conventional sphere and embrace the new direction without loosing itself. The dance re-enters into its *Being* within the nature and fresh perspective. Such work of art is therefore has the competence to assimilate, as a “power of fusion”, which mean that this dance piece in its existence speaks about contemporary, by bringing along the past and the actual, in the temporal structure that is holistic and actual. For its creativity to bravely put difference cultural forms side by side, “*Bedoyo-Legong Calonarang*” successfully commences a new concept of intercultural choreographing. The term “new”, following Gadamer’s philosophy, does not depart from that did not previously exist. The “newness” is more voiced as a form of self-consciousness to openly accept the differences to embrace “the others”. The future will be owned only if we undertake a continuum understanding towards tradition and history.

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