



Modern Indonesian theater in the 1980s: A criticism of the aesthetic hegemony of the new order



Wahyu Novianto ^{a,1,*}, Guntur ^{b,2}, Faruk ^{c,3} G.R. Lono L. Simatupang ^{c,3}

^a Department of Theater, Indonesian Institute of the Arts Surakarta, Surakarta 57126, Indonesia

^b Postgraduate Program, Indonesian Institute of the Arts Surakarta, Surakarta 57126, Indonesia

^c Faculty of Letters, Gadjah Mada University, Special Region of Yogyakarta 55281, Indonesia

^d Department of Anthropology, Gadjah Mada University, Special Region of Yogyakarta 55281, Indonesia

¹ wahyunovianto@ska-isi.ac.id *; ² guntur@isi-ska.ac.id; ³ farukkhan@ugm.ac.id; ³ roomsargo@ugm.ac.id

* Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the practices and discourse of modern Indonesian theater in the 1980s as a form of resistance to the aesthetic hegemony of the New Order. For 32 years, under the government of Soeharto, freedom of expression was increasingly suppressed, including in the art of theater. Various forms of resistance emerged from theater groups, through practices and discourse that wished to seize the dominance of the New Order's aesthetic ideology. This research aims to reveal how modern Indonesian theater functioned as a tool of counter-hegemony through the practices and discourse it developed. The research approach uses a critical paradigm with a qualitative method. The primary data are documentation of theater performances from the 1980s and the secondary data are taken from literature about the New Order and mass media articles. A dialogical analysis was carried out to discuss the various data and to explore the relationship between art and efforts to build a counter-hegemony. The research results show that modern Indonesian theater used artistic strategies such as symbolism, humor, and exploration of local traditions to convey criticism, and developed an alternative discourse that challenged the domination of noble (*adiluhung*) aesthetics. The study concludes that the practices and discourse of modern Indonesian theater in the 1980s reflected a process of negotiation between tradition and modernity, aesthetics and politics, and became a space for symbolic resistance to the New Order system. Through fluid, innovative art forms, theater functioned as a medium of social awareness and a tool of change amidst the constraints of the authoritarian regime.

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1. Introduction

Entering into the 1980s, the relationship between theater and the New Order became antagonistic [1]. From the beginning of the 1980s, the relationship between theater and the New Order was colored by tension, which continued to rise until the 1990s, when the relationship turned into one of conflict [2]. This relationship status occurred due to the increasing restlessness of large numbers of the middle class, professionals, farmers, and the industrial working class, and was made worse by the ongoing division between supporters of the regime [3]. With the implementation of policies for national stability and development, the freedom of expression that had been allowed in the early years of the New Order was gradually closed off, reaching a peak just before Soeharto stepped down in 1998. This research aims to reveal the relationship between theater and the state in the 1980s through a hegemonic perspective. Research into the field of theater in the 1980s shows that theater performances were filled with

criticism of New Order power. Various symbolic narratives of resistance appeared on national stages, in both traditional-based and contemporary theater [4]. The life of theater in the 1980s was marked by the growth of modern theater groups formed by the educated class, in which Javanese tradition colored by a note of satire presented criticisms of the New Order [5]. Social criticism was conveyed through *pleseden* (play on words), *pasemon* (allusions), and *guyonan* (jokes) [6]. Existing research tends to look at forms of resistance presented symbolically [7], through satire [8], and *pasemon*, without looking at the aspect of hegemony [9]. The hegemonic perspective used in this research provides the opportunity to discover a previously untouched dimension, which includes the way theater functioned as a space for negotiation.

Hegemony is not a relationship of domination with the use of power but a relationship of consent with the use of political leadership and ideology [10]. Therefore, hegemony is a consensus in which submission is obtained through consent [11]. The study of hegemonic practices in art can be conducted by looking at works of art as political practices or activities [12]. As political activities, works of art have the power to build discourse to instill new ideology, by capturing the common sense in the ideology of the ruling class. Works of art can be viewed as counter hegemony, to “oppose” the ideology of dominant powers [13]. From a hegemonic perspective, art is a weapon that is used to institutionalize conformity and force the interests of the elite into the consciousness of the masses [14]. Art is considered to have the ability to infiltrate every nook and cranny of life experience [15]. Critical art has a revolutionary power that inspires, liberates, and motivates individuals to strive for social change [16]. Inside this theoretical framework, this research is founded on the assumption that modern theater was an expression of resistance to the hegemony of the New Order. The questions posed are: How did modern theater contend with the hegemony of the New Order? Specifically, how did the symbolic (artistic) practices of modern theater deal with the hegemony of the New Order? What kind of discourse was developed by modern theater in the face of the hegemony of the New Order? The goal of the research is to show how the art of theater in the 1980s served as a tool of counter-hegemony against the dominant ideology of the New Order, and to analyze how art created an alternative consensus through its practices and aesthetics.

The 1980s are regarded as the height of power of the New Order government. This decade was marked by an economic prosperity that originated from foreign debt and foreign investment, which transformed Indonesia’s physical environment into something glorious, magnificent, and sparkling [17]. The New Order’s success in the field of economy and national development was used as an instrument for silencing voices that opposed government policies. This political silencing was experienced by WS. Rendra several times since the 1970s. On numerous occasions, Rendra’s poetry readings and theater performances, including those such as *Kisah Perjuangan Suku Naga* (1975), *Oedipus* (1975), *Pamflet* (1978), and others, were dispersed by the security forces. The New Order displayed a repressive attitude towards any performances that were regarded as “disturbing” political stability. However, Indonesian artists would not be silenced so easily, and a number of new theater groups continued to appear around the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. In some cities, theater groups emerged with the same spirit as that of Rendra. In 1977, Nano Riantiarno founded *Teater Koma* in Jakarta, known for its popular scripts such as *Bom Waktu*, *Opera Kecoa*, *Sukses*, and so on. In 1977, *Teater Dinasti* was established in Yogyakarta, and went on to perform numerous works by Emha Ainun Nadjib, including *Geger Wong Ngoyak Macan*, *Patung Kekasih*, and *Perahu Retak*. In Surakarta, *Teater Gapit* appeared (1981), led by scriptwriter and director Bambang Widoyo Sp, who was known for his works such as *Segelas Teh Untuk Pembangunan*, *Rol*, *Leng*, *Tuk*, and so on. *Teater Gandrik* was also formed in the early 1980s in Yogyakarta (1983), along with other theater groups which grew out of campus environments, such as *Teater Gajah Mada* (Yogyakarta), *Teater Payung Hitam* (Bandung), and others.

During the 1980s, many of these theater groups were subjected to censoring, not given permission to perform, and in some cases disbanded. This enforced silencing had the opposite effect of increasing the need and the urgency for criticism. The constraints gave artists the courage to take a leap, and to become more cunning [5]. Through their creativity, artists became more adept at concealing their criticisms in a symbolic manner. This is also mentioned by Sumardjo (1992), who notes that drama scripts in the era of the 1970s and 1980s contained

political criticisms of the government that tended to be more implicit in nature, hidden in historical or mythological events of the past. In line with Jakob Sumardjo, Hatley writes that the subtle resistance towards state ideology that was presented on the stage frequently involved the satirical reinterpretation of traditional symbols [18]. The authoritarianism and repressive attitude of the New Order government created an urgent need for criticism in all forms of artistic expression. Criticism of the New Order was not only limited to intellectuals and urban society through forms of avant-garde theater, but was also carried out by Muslim youth, laborers, and farmers, who were driven by social activists [19]. The repressive nature of the New Order also made artists more adept at concealing their criticism through the use of traditional symbols, thereby creating a unique form of dramaturgy that was a fusion of Western theater and traditional theater [20]. The New Order had in this case placed artists in an ambiguous position, *gojag-gajeg*, modern yet traditional, performance but also guidance, following rules (*pakem*) but also innovating. Meanwhile, research by Feinstein shows the use of language as a form of resistance to the New Order [9]. The same thing is also noticed by Siegel, who explains that language was able to destroy the dichotomic power structure of the New Order [21]. In addition to the use of language, resistance was also carried out by presenting the tragedies of the common people [6].

The studies mentioned above have a number of shortcomings. Bodden tends to be descriptive without exploring in more depth the complex relationships between social classes and the forms of theater expression they use [22]. Gillitt limits his study to a reading of the symbols in traditional performances in Java [20]. Winet fails to explore the ideological aspect of hybridity between Western and traditional dramaturgy, to determine whether this fusion is merely an aesthetic strategy or if it has an ideological agenda [23]. Kayam (2001) describes artists as holding a dual position (*gojag-gajeg*), without offering an in-depth analysis about the effect of this ambiguity on the critical strategies used by the artists [24]. Feinstein focuses more on textual aspects, with insufficient exploration of how audiences receive or understand criticism [9]. Meanwhile, Weix (1995) does not explain in detail the kinds of tragedies people experience that are used as resistance [6]. From the numerous studies conducted, the majority only look at a single performance by a particular theater group in the New Order. No previous research examines the practices and discourse of modern theater during a particular period in the relationship between theater and the state. Based on the literature review carried out, the problems raised in this research appear not to have been studied by previous researchers. This is the gap that will be filled with this study. The hegemonic perspective used in this research provides a broad area for exploration, not only of textual (artistic) aspects but also of contextual (social, political, cultural) aspects, including how theater practices and discourse function as a space for negotiation between tradition and modernity, aesthetics and politics, and spectacle and guidance.

2. Method

The critical paradigm used in this research emphasizes an ontology based on historical realism, a transactional epistemology, and a dialogical methodology [25]. Historical realism can be understood to mean that the social world is the result of historical construction which shapes power relations and ideology. Transactional means that knowledge is produced through the interaction between the researcher and the data, taking into consideration the historical and ideological contexts, and dialogical means that the analysis conducted discusses, or 'dialogues' various data and perspectives to reveal the hidden power relations. The data in this research are socio-historical qualitative data that were obtained through two data sources, namely primary and secondary sources. The primary data are the documentation of theater performances in the 1980s which reflect the practice of art as a political activity during the New Order era, while the secondary data are literature studies which discuss the New Order and its power practices, and mass media articles that are relevant to the social and cultural contexts of the 1980s. In this research, the data collection technique used to obtain the data from these two sources was a technique of detailed observation. The observation stage involved a careful inspection of documentation of theater performances from the 1980s, in the form of videos, photographs, and notes, and a review of various relevant literature and research results, both

academic and popular. The analysis was carried out with a dialogical approach through three stages, namely identification, evaluation, and judgment [26]. The identification stage involved collecting primary data that were related to theater performances and practices of political hegemony during the New Order era; the evaluation stage was carried out by connecting the data on theater performances with the context of New Order ideology, dialoguing the results of literature studies with the researcher's interpretation of the primary data, and exploring the relationship between works of art and efforts to establish counter-hegemony; the judgment stage involved making a critical interpretation to reveal the practices and discourse of critical theater in the 1980s. The validation of data was done using a triangulation technique, by comparing the different data types (primary and secondary) in order to obtain a deep and comprehensive understanding.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Aesthetic Hegemony of the New Order

The New Order protected its aesthetic structure using the cult of *adiluhung* that was sourced in feudal values such as formality, "refinement", and attachment [27]. Meanwhile, simple and spontaneous forms of folk art were altered to suit the tastes of the national political elite. Folk art was forced to comply with the national aesthetic structure so that its performers and its audiences could adhere to the behavior demanded by the state and remain centered on state chosen forms that were related to regional and national identity [28]. National culture was regulated in such a way that it would not conflict with ethnicity, religion, and race (*suku, agama, ras/SARA*), and would always uphold values of courtesy and honor rooted in traditional values. The political system of the New Order, with its authoritarian nature that was designed to establish a homogeneous society, was implemented through an authoritarian cultural policy. Authoritarian culture is a cultural policy which is formulated under the assumption that the majority of the subjects of a state do not have the ability to practice responsible citizenship, and require the guidance of the state in making their cultural choices [28]. Therefore, from the 1990s on, under the name of 'guidance and development', Soeharto directed and regulated the aesthetic choices of Indonesian citizens, by intervening, censoring, and even disbanding art and cultural practices that went against the aesthetic structure of the New Order. In its guidance and regulation of aesthetic structure, the New Order government gave itself the status of a patron in order to determine aesthetic choices such as "concise and formal", "accessible", "dignified and entertaining" for every performance that took place [29].

The aspect of formality, which gave freedom of expression to artists, held an important position. The aesthetic work practices used by artists promoted the expression of honesty which maintained a distance from anything that was external to themselves, and this included distancing themselves from politics. Formalist aesthetic discourse became the main narrative of hegemony by involving intellectuals and state institutions. By prioritizing basic elements of art, such as lines, colors, and composition [30], the aesthetics of formalism enabled artists of the New Order to remain occupied with themselves, occupied with their own contemplative reflections, because the individual expression of honesty was valued as true beauty. In order to achieve this true beauty, it was necessary to maintain a distance with politics. Artists who sided with political interests were dishonest artists, and their dishonest works of art contained low aesthetics. Thus, the aesthetics of the New Order were built from an expression of the artist's "self", as the result of a contemplative reflection of the pure "compositions" that existed in their own thoughts, becoming a complete and single entity in a regime of "development". As a form of pure expression, a work of art must be free from any interests outside the work itself, with the exception of sparking the aesthetic emotion of the audience based on its formal composition. Therefore, art in this view has universal and eternal characteristics. In this perspective, as explained by Clive Bell, "meaningful forms" can be accessed universally by every person in all space and time, as long as they abandon their own self-interested points of view [30]. The "meaningful forms" in the formalist aesthetics of New Order aesthetic hegemony, which originated from Javanese culture, found common ground with *adiluhung* art.

The word *adiluhung* became the main narrative in discourse on aesthetic hegemony. *Adiluhung* originates from Javanese culture, in which the royal court, or *kraton*, was at the center. The *kraton* is regarded as the place where “the true high culture of Java” is preserved and maintained”, a culture that is described as an almost pure remnant of indigenous (Hindu-Buddhist) authenticity [31]. The word *adiluhung* (from the words *adi*: handsome, eminent, beautiful; and *luhung*: grand, remarkable) is comparable to the English word ‘classic’, namely first or highest class. *Adiluhung* can be translated as ‘utmost beauty’, as the peak of super “refined” beauty and the deepest point of Javanese culture [31].

3.2. Practices and Discourse of Modern Indonesian Theater in the 1980s

During the 1980s, increasing resistance to the New Order was shown by various theater groups that consisted of farmers, Muslim youth, and laborers. On the other hand, modern theater performers from the middle class created works of avant-garde theater which challenged the dominant narrative by representing the torture, suffering, anger, and isolation experienced by urban communities towards the end of the New Order. With the support of journalists, the Legal Aid Agency, members of the political opposition, and industrial workers, these theater workers were better able to voice the civil rights that had been taken away by the New Order. In connection with this, Bodden states that the alliances built by theater workers with other parties contributed greatly to the pro-democracy movement which ultimately played an important role in ousting Soeharto from power in May 1998 [22]. Bodden (2010) writes that the discord between modern theater and the New Order was ongoing for at least the last fifteen years of Soeharto’s rule [22]. This was influenced by the increasing unrest of the majority of the middle class, including professionals, farmers, and the industrial working class, and by the long-standing division between supporting members of the regime. The tighter licensing, increased restrictions, and even the disbandment of performances began after the Malari incident in 1974. These restrictions continued until the time leading up to Soeharto’s downfall in 1998. Table 1 shows a list of the prohibitions for theater performances from the time following the 1974 Malari incident until the time Soeharto stepped down.

Table 1. New Order Censorship of Theater Performances

Performance	Year/City	Action
<i>Mastodon dan Burung Kondor</i> (Rendra’s Bengkel Teater)	1974/Yogyakarta	Prohibition to perform at UGM Yogyakarta
Bengkel Teater performances (numerous repertoires throughout these years)	1974-1977/Yogyakarta-Central Java	Prohibition/license not granted to perform at all in Yogyakarta and Central Java, so performances were forced to move to Jakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya.
<i>Kisah Perjuangan Suku Naga</i> (Rendra’s Bengkel Teater)	1975/Yogyakarta	Prohibition to perform in Yogyakarta
<i>Oedipus Berpulang</i> (Rendra’s Bengkel Teater)	1975/Yogyakarta	Prohibition to perform in Yogyakarta
<i>Bui</i> by Akhudiat (Untung Basuki, Yoyok, and Merit Hendro)	1976/Yogyakarta	Prohibition/license not granted by police to perform on 20 August 1976 in Yogyakarta
<i>Sekda</i> (Rendra’s Bengkel Teater)	1977/Yogyakarta	Prohibition by police to perform. After meeting and discussing, the performance was allowed to take place.
-	1978/Jakarta	Arrest of theater figure WS. Rendra, after his poetry reading that was deemed to have been a provocation, at student meeting in Salemba (poem <i>Pertemuan Mahasiswa</i>), and poetry reading at Taman Ismail Marzuki.
-	1978-1985/Indonesia	Prohibition for Bengkel Teater to perform anything anywhere in Indonesia throughout this period
<i>Langen Gita Putra Sang Fajar</i> (Performance of theater, dance, and poetry by a group of artists)	1980/Jakarta and Yogyakarta	The performance was stopped in the middle (at Balai Sidang Senayan Jakarta), the script was censored, and the performance was banned in Yogyakarta.
<i>Gendrek Sapujagad</i> (Teater Dinasti)	1980/Yogyakarta	Censoring of performance in Yogyakarta
<i>Kancah Kraton</i> (Teater Apa)	1984/Yogyakarta	Prohibition to perform in Yogyakarta

Theater performance by Teater Gajah Mada (title not mentioned, the information states only that the performance was a comedy script by a Russian writer)	1984/Yogyakarta	Prohibition to perform in Yogyakarta
<i>Patung Kekasih</i> (Teater Dinasti)	1984/Yogyakarta	Prohibition to perform in Yogyakarta
<i>Sepatu Nomor Satu</i> (Teater Dinasti)	1985/Yogyakarta	Prohibition to perform in Yogyakarta
<i>Sampek Engtay</i> (Teater Koma)	Late 1980s/Medan	Prohibition to perform in Medan
<i>Sampek Engtay</i> (Teater Koma)	1990/Jakarta	Prohibition to perform in Jakarta
<i>Suksesi</i> (Teater Koma)	1990, 1991/Jakarta	Prohibition to perform at Taman Ismail Marzuki Jakarta
<i>Opera Kecoa</i> (Teater Koma)	1990/Japan	Prohibition to leave the country and perform in Japan
Poetry reading from the poetry collection <i>Orang-Orang Rangkasbitung</i> (WS. Rendra)	1993/Jakarta	Prohibition to hold a poetry reading
<i>Pak Kanjeng</i> (Teater Dinasti)	1994/Surabaya	Prohibition to perform in Surabaya
<i>Senandung Terpuruk dari Balik Tembok Pabrik</i> (Teater Buruh Indonesia)	1995/Jakarta	Prohibition to perform at Taman Ismail Marzuki Jakarta
<i>Surat Cinta Kepada Marsinah di Surga</i> (Sanggar Pabrik)	1995/Jakarta	Performance stopped at Gelanggang Remaja Bulungan Jakarta
<i>Senandung Terpuruk dari Balik Tembok Pabrik</i> (Teater Buruh Indonesia)	1995/Surakarta	Prohibition to perform at Taman Budaya Solo, Surakarta
<i>Marsinah Menggugat</i> (Satu Merah Panggung)	1997/Jakarta and other cities	Prohibition to perform in Jakarta and other cities

3.2.1. Theater Practices

The Malari incident (1974) marked the beginning of the deterioration in relations between the New Order and its supporters from artistic circles, relations that had been forged since the middle of the 1960s. The Malari incident did not make students and artists more fearful but instead it caused them to be more active in directing their criticisms at the New Order. WS. Rendra, who at the time had become an icon of resistance and was regarded as a pioneer of political theater, was frequently invited to university campuses to perform poetry readings and political orations. Rendra's epic drama about misguided, egotistical kings, which resounded with anger-filled disappointment directed towards the New Order regime, was performed in university campuses [18]. Ultimately, Rendra and his Bengkel Teater were not granted permission to perform for a period of four years (1974-1978). It was not until May 1978 that Rendra appeared again in public, at TIM, to read his poetry. However, his first appearance at TIM after the four-year ban led Rendra into more trouble with the security forces. The commotion that occurred at the event, in which an ammonia bomb was believed to have been thrown by the security forces, caused WS. Rendra to be named a suspect and subsequently imprisoned for five months (1 May – 7 October 1978). After leaving prison, Rendra was not allowed to perform his scripts or to read his poetry for eight years. The gap that was left on the modern theater stage for eight years, with the absence of Rendra and his Bengkel Teater, was filled by other theater groups from the middle class. The middle class recognized the importance of transparency and human rights, and this made them more critical of the New Order government. The critical attitude of theater workers from the middle class created a new artistic language. While theater workers in the 1960s and 1970s were known for their spirit of neo-traditionalism, through the translation and adaptation of Western literary drama scripts, theater workers in the 1980s rose up with a spirit of commercialization, and the criticisms aimed at the New Order were packaged in refined, comedic performances [22].

Table 2 shows that the tug-of-war between Western dramaturgy and traditional theater in Indonesia in the 1980s era was apparent in groups such as *Teater Koma*, *Teater Dinasti*, and *Teater Gandrik*, and in the forms of experimental theater that arose in urban communities, such as *Teater Kubur* and *Teater Sae* (Jakarta), and *Teater Payung Hitam* (Bandung). In addition, the rise of theater as a social movement was evident from the growing number of theater workers

who worked together with social community groups to create new theater forms for mobilizing farmers, laborers, and other marginalized groups to make a move in bringing about social change [22]. *Teater Koma* was a theater group from the middle class in Jakarta, known for its popularity with audiences. *Teater Koma* succeeded in presenting the diction of Jakarta urban society in the form of dialogue that was filled with humor and sometimes presented in the form of singing and dancing. Sharp criticisms of those in power were presented in a light mood. Themes about eviction (*Bom Waktu*, 1982), class conflict between the rich and the poor (*Opera Ikan Asin*, 1983), the life of the lower and marginalized classes (*Opera Kecoa*, 1985), women's movements (*Wanita-Wanita Parlemen*, 1986), change of power (*Suksesi*, 1990), and other similar topics were presented in the form of opera, in a mood of satire and parody.

Table 2. Theater Practices in the 1980s

Main Characteristics of Theater	Theater Practices	Theater Groups	Shows performed
Diversification of modern theater styles.	Theater from the middle class, such as <i>Teater Koma</i> , encased criticism in opera with humor. <i>Teater Gandrik</i> used Javanese humor to convey social criticism.	<i>Teater Koma</i> , <i>Teater Gandrik</i>	<i>Opera Kecoa</i> , <i>Bom Waktu</i> , <i>Pensiunan</i> , <i>Orde Tabung</i>
Experimental and community theater.	<i>Teater Sae</i> and <i>Teater Kubur</i> used the actors' bodies metaphorically in non-verbal performances. <i>Teater Arena</i> worked with communities of laborers/farmers to create theater based on local issues.	<i>Teater Sae</i> , <i>Teater Kubur</i> , <i>Teater Arena</i>	<i>Ekstase Kematian Orang-Orang</i> , community performance in Parangtritis and Tanen
"Awareness" theater movement.	Workshops were held with marginal communities such as in Parangtritis and Tanen, involving communities in the creative process to present criticisms of New Order development.	<i>Teater Arena</i>	Community-based workshop

The performance of *Suksesi* by *Teater Koma* was disbanded by the security forces on day eleven of the fourteen planned performances. This disbandment proved to be counterproductive for the New Order government, because two months prior, in the month of August, President Soeharto, in a state of the nation address, had called for a more open airing of opinions in Indonesia [19]. After the dispersal of this performance by the security forces and the subsequent debates in the mass media about the restrictions, Bodden tries to look at the way theater was able to oppose the social and cultural hegemony that was being implemented at the time. The theme of leadership change that was presented in the performance of *Suksesi* was highly sensitive for the ruling powers of the New Order. Various public questions arose about who would replace Soeharto as the next leader, and the family businesses that were closely associated with him. Therefore, the story of *Suksesi* was considered to have overstepped the boundaries of public political discourse allowed by the New Order [19]. Anything that crossed these limits was considered discourteous, such as the use of elements of traditional shadow puppet theater (*wayang*) in the story of *Suksesi*, presented in the form of parody and satire, which went against the cultural politics of the New Order and its emphasis on courteous structure. The value of politeness was a standard set by the New Order, and for this reason, the "openness" that Soeharto offered in his state of the nation address should have been understood as an openness that prioritized politeness according to the structure of the New Order.

Another tale about the succession of leadership was presented by *Teater Dinasti* through the story *Geger Wong Ngoyak Macan* (1983). Performances of *Geger Wong Ngoyak Macan* were held at Purna Budaya Yogyakarta at the beginning of the 1980s. This work tells the story of a king by the name of Prabu Sunggingpraba who holds absolute power, with support from the army, politicians, and the supernatural, and wishes to build an empire based on the unity of philosophical values. When Prabu suddenly falls sick with a mysterious illness, local leaders fight amongst themselves to gain the power needed to carry out a coup d'etat. Although the writer of the script, Emha Ainun Nadjib, does not mention the name of a particular country in his story, from a brief look at the story it can easily be seen that Emha is talking about Indonesia.

The performance format of *Geger Wong Ngoyak Macan* is full of traditional wisdom and succeeds in combining entertainment with education, information, and religious preaching. In addition to their theater performances, Emha and *Teater Dinasti* also performed various forms of musical poetry, fused together with religion, such as *Nyanyian Gelandangan* (1982) and other performances of critical poetry readings. A different approach was used by *Teater Gandrik*, which was known for its *sampakan* style, referencing (elements of) traditional Javanese theater aesthetics to create a form of modern theater that presented criticism in a humorous performance. By playing around with words (*plesetan*), *Teater Gandrik* created a humorous, intimate, and relaxed mood that was framed in criticism. *Teater Gandrik* presented a populist display of communication which removed all hierarchy between the conveyer of the message and the audience, making theater a space for joint participation. Scripts by Heru Kesawa Murti, such as *Pensiunan* (1985), *Isyu* (1987), *Dhemit* (1987), *Orde Tabung* (1988), and others, presented fresh, entertaining performances that were filled with social criticism. The criticisms by *Teater Gandrik* were made in a typical Javanese manner, described as ‘a pinch that caused no pain.’

In 1988, *Orde Tabung* was performed 13 times between August and December, in Yogyakarta, Salatiga, Jakarta, and Semarang. It tells the story of a new generation born in 2095 – a generation of geniuses who were the main inhabitants of the earth, while those born in normal circumstances were chased down, placed in nursing homes, and turned into tourist objects that provided a source of national income, replacing the natural resources that no longer existed. *Orde Tabung*, which described the birth of a new generation or a new age, shared common ground with the New Order and its new government system, which presented a narrative of development and equality. As was the belief of the New Order that a new government system would create economic equality and development would lead to a modern society, *Orde Tabung* also shared a similar belief that the birth of a new generation would create an equal distribution of genius, becoming a modern nation in which ultimately all human beings would become geniuses. Another phenomenon that gained momentum during the 1980s was the revival of experimental theater in large cities, including *Teater Sae* and *Teater Kubur* (Jakarta) and *Teater Payung Hitam* (Bandung). *Teater Sae*, with director Boedi S. Otong, grew out of a Youth Theater Festival that was held by the Jakarta Arts Council, while *Teater Kubur*, led by Dindon WS, started out with the activities of a group of young people in a small street in Jatinegara, who were preparing to perform at Independence Day celebrations on 17 August. *Teater Payung Hitam* was established in 1982, by a group of academics led by Rahman Subur, a theater lecturer at STSI (Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia) Bandung. *Teater Sae* director, Boedi S. Otong, collaborated on numerous occasions with scriptwriter Afrizal Malna. They both viewed the actor not as the conveyor of the text but as the text itself, and believed that actors have their own power, at least to be in charge of their own role. Both *Teater Sae* and *Teater Kubur* were nonverbal theater groups, which relied on the totality of the actors’ sweat and toil, acrobatic movements, and other physical skills. The actors’ bodies were freed from their roles as the bodies of characters, so that the performance created a multi-layered metaphorical relationship between human beings and objects. The performances of *Ekstase Kematian Orang-Orang* (*Teater Sae*, 1984) and *Sirkus Anjing* (*Teater Kubur*, 1987) showed how the actors’ bodies became one with other objects (chairs, barrels, drums, buckets, umbrellas, televisions, brooms, bowls, pans, irons, and other day to day objects) that were used not in accordance with their true function but rather to create metaphorical signs. Meanwhile, *Teater Payung Hitam* only found its maturity of form as an experimental theater group at the beginning of the 1990s through the performance of *Kaspar* (1994), after previously performing a large number of realist scripts by other Indonesian writers.

Theater practices based on “awareness” also colored the world of modern Indonesian theater in the 1980s. The “awareness” theater movement was led by Teater Arena, under the leadership of Fred Wibowo. The practices of Teater Arena differed from the majority of other theater groups, with theater productions that rejected the humanist aesthetics that dominated theater on a national scale [22]. Teater Arena was run by theater workers from the middle class, who worked together with marginalized social groups consisting of laborers and farmers who were invited to create theater performances inspired by their own problems, so that through

these theater activities they would be able to respond directly to the problems they faced. From the early 1980s on, Teater Arena held frequent workshops in marginalized areas, accompanying victims of the development carried out by the New Order. In 1981, Teater Arena held a workshop in the coastal village of Parangtritis, in Bantul, inviting members of the isolated community in this area to create a performance based on their own suffering and the local problems they experienced. A similar event was held in 1983, for the impoverished community in Tanen, Pakem, Yogyakarta, who were experiencing economic problems and could not afford to buy their basic needs, as well as other problems such as irrigation, unequal development, high school fees, and so on. Through the workshop held by Teater Arena, theater was used as a tool to understand, learn, and articulate the problems faced in the community's own area. Modern Indonesian theater in the 1980s, as *Teater Sae* believed, was the result of the politicization of the New Order, and for this reason, theater had the right to own its own "power". It is evident that the form of experimental theater using nonverbal communication that was the artistic choice of *Teater Sae* and *Teater Kubur*, as well as the more fluid, spontaneous, and intimate verbal forms used by *Teater Koma* and *Teater Gandrik*, and the practice of "awareness" theater, all displayed the "power" of their own artistic choices, to speak honestly and break through the formality of bureaucratic language that was becoming increasingly widespread, natural, and common in art practices.

3.2.2. Theater Discourse

The trend of exploring traditional values grew stronger in the 1980s, and was specifically adopted as the theme of the National Theater Gathering which took place at Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM) Jakarta on 5-9 March 1985, with the theme "Exploring Traditional Values in Modern Indonesian Theater". The exploration of traditional values led to a new form of modern Indonesian theater in the 1980s, but it is incorrect to refer to this new form as modern theater in the Western sense. As a new movement, it would be more accurate to use the term of *Ikranagara*, namely a postmodern movement that was also Indonesian theater. Table 3 shows that the discourse on new (avant-garde) theater, in terms of both form and theory, which gained momentum in the 1980s, was influenced by the postmodernism movement. Postmodernism, which provided room for small narratives that had been pushed aside and discarded by modern rationality, paved the way for the diversity of reality to emerge. In this case, the strategy of deconstruction in postmodernism discourse made an important contribution to the practices of modern Indonesian theater. Deconstruction strategies managed to subvert the establishment of Western theater dramaturgy, thereby dissolving once again the hegemony of Western theater in Indonesia. In the 1980s, modern Indonesian theater practices were expanded by new realities such as eviction, prostitution, homelessness, women's issues, and other previously marginalized themes.

Meanwhile, in nonverbal forms of modern Indonesian theater, such as *Teater Sae*, *Teater Kubur*, and *Teater Payung Hitam*, postmodern discourse became the framework for sublime aesthetic practices, which promoted institutions and spiritual sensitivity by rejecting rational and scientific work methods. In these practices, the aesthetic was built by an artist, through contemplative reflections and explorations of the artist's own body. This was reminiscent of the aesthetic practices of abstract artists in the early years of the New Order. *Teater Sae*, *Teater Kubur*, and *Teater Payung Hitam* exhibited contemporary aesthetic practices and discourse but with an internal mood that was built like artists from the beginning of the New Order. The socio-political dimension of their works was not so evident, and when it did appear, it was merely superficial and lacked depth. As something sublime, the objects of everyday reality (chairs, barrels, drums, buckets, umbrellas, televisions, brooms, bowls, pans, irons, and other daily utensils) could simply exist in an overlapping manner. Performances presented a chaotic crossover of signs without any connection between the signifier and the signified. In postmodern aesthetics, this phenomenon was labelled as schizophrenia, a break in the chain of signification. This phenomenon could be discerned in the performances of *Teater Sae*, *Teater Kubur*, and *Teater Payung Hitam*, where the aspect of playing with signs was more meaningful than the production of meaning, and the exploration of form was more important than the content.

Table 3. Theater Discourse in the 1980s

Main Characteristics of Theater	Theater Discourse	Theater Groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deeper exploration of traditional values. - Focus on social themes such as eviction, prostitution, the homeless, and marginalized women. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Postmodernism provided room for diversity of reality. - Deconstruction of Western dramaturgy. - Avant-Garde Theater: Challenged modern rationality and shook the hegemony of Western theater. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Teater Gandrik</i> (Yogyakarta) - <i>Teater Dinasti</i> (Yogyakarta) - Teater Gapit (Surakarta)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Non-verbal theater, emphasizing the exploration of form and intuition. - Use of everyday objects (chairs, umbrellas etc.) without any clear connection of meaning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prioritized contemplative and intuitive aesthetics. - Avoided scientific rationality and focused more on artists' inner intuition. - Schizophrenia in performance: a game of signs with no clear meaning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Teater Sae</i> - <i>Teater Kubur</i> - Teater Payung Hitam
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fusion of traditional values with modern elements. - Theater forms that did not refer to the social or subjective situation of the artist. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contextual Literature emerged as a form of resistance to Universal Literature. - Emphasized expression based on locality and social context. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teater Gapit (Surakarta)

In the works of these three nonverbal theater groups, what was created was a feeling that had no reference. Their works of art became the aestheticism, which meant that they did not refer to anything outside themselves, nor did they refer to an objective situation (a time and social condition) or a subjective situation (the internal state of the artist). The reading of works of aestheticism can only be done by using internal aspects within the work itself. Hence, even though these three nonverbal theater groups spoke about the social issues that people were facing, the “people” themselves were positioned merely as aesthetic tools. The works created had no social context because the “people” referred to the aesthetic of the existing work, not the social context in which it was occurring. The attempt to draw literary works closer to a social context reoccurred 20 years after the golden age of “universal literature” that was left behind by *Manikebu* (1963). In an Arts Seminar in Surakarta, in 1984, discourse on “contextual literature” was born as a challenge to the domination of “universal literature”. Since the manifesto of *Surat Kepercayaan Gelanggang* (1950) and *Manifes Kebudayaan* (1963), works of Indonesian literature were dominated by the “universal” principle which was contrary to the principles of the socialist oriented Lekra. The resistance of “contextual literature” to “universal literature” was not a repetition of a power struggle that was formerly the enemy of “universal literature” [35]. Arief Budiman, one of the signatories of Manikebu was in fact a pioneer of discourse on “contextual literature”. Discourse on “contextual literature” paved the way for the growth of expression based on locality. The emergence of *Teater Gandrik* and *Teater Dinasti* (Yogyakarta) and *Teater Gapit* (Surakarta) contributed further to the celebration of expression of locality in the 1980s. *Teater Gapit*, which grew in the place where discourse on “contextual literature” was born, chose to use the simple, unrefined, unreserved Javanese *ngoko* language, unlike its counterparts from Yogyakarta, who preferred to use Indonesian. *Teater Gapit's* choice to use Javanese *ngoko* brought it face to face with the polite, elitist, *adiluhung* dramaturgical structure of the New Order.

4. Conclusion

The hegemony in the practices and discourse of modern Indonesian theater involved a process of push and pull, bargaining, and negotiation between the practices and discourse that were dominated by the dramaturgy of Western theater and those of traditional theater based on folk performing arts. In the 1980s, the practices and discourse of modern Indonesian theater were colored by nuances of satire and the use of traditional symbols, as well as the fusion of Western dramaturgy and traditional Indonesian theater. The use of local elements in modern Indonesian theater groups such as Teater Koma, *Teater Dinasti*, and *Teater Gandrik*, found theoretical and practical justification from postmodern discourse that was an ongoing

discussion. The presence of these critical theater groups was a celebration of a local narrative which rejected aesthetic uniformity. New aesthetic practices and discourse arose through the creation of alternative arts that were “coarse”, critical, and vulgar, amidst the domination of the humanist, modernist, and *adiluhung* aesthetics of the New Order. Problems that had been pushed aside, discarded, ignored, silenced, and repressed suddenly rose to the surface. The exploration of traditional theater forms as media for criticism, as carried out by Teater Koma, *Teater Dinasti*, and *Teater Gandrik*, and the experimental forms used by *Teater Sae* and *Teater Kubur*, as well as the practice of “awareness” theater, can be viewed as artistic strategies for discovering the right expressive language for disclosing the social problems faced on a daily basis. Theater workers from the middle class made their performances a medium for increasing social and political awareness during the era of the authoritarian government of the New Order. Their artistic strategies contributed new knowledge to modern Indonesian theater, developing it from something that was initially being bound by verbal communication with the formalities of the Indonesian language to become a more fluid, spontaneous, and intimate form of communication (*Teater Koma* and *Teater Gandrik*), or nonverbal communication through an explosion of overlapping poetic words (*Teater Sae* and *Teater Kubur*), and an expression of pure honesty (*Teater Arena*). The various findings in this research show three important things: (1) the use of local elements in modern theater was not only a reflection of the revival of local aesthetics but also a form of resistance to the aesthetic homogenization of the New Order; (2) theater became a space where freedom of expression could be maintained, albeit in an authoritarian environment, or to borrow the words of Seno Gumira Ajidarma, “When politics are silenced, theater must speak out”; (3) the transformation of theater communication that was more fluid and spontaneous reflected the changes in the thought patterns of society, where art was no longer separate from reality but was directly connected with the dynamics of political and social life.

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