



## Aesthetic Receptivity in Cirebon Mask Music: Analyzing the Correlation Between Rhythm and Motion

✉ Irniati Wanda\*

Sunarmi\*\*

Sarwanto\*\*

\*Institut Seni Indonesia, Surakarta

Email: [irniewanda@std.isi-ska.ac.id](mailto:irniewanda@std.isi-ska.ac.id)

\*\* Institut Seni Indonesia, Surakarta

Email: [sunarmi@isi-ska.ac.id](mailto:sunarmi@isi-ska.ac.id)

\*\*\* Institut Seni Indonesia, Surakarta

Email: [sarwanto@isi-ska.ac.id](mailto:sarwanto@isi-ska.ac.id)

---

### Article Info

Received : November,  
2025

Approved:  
December, 2025

Published :  
December, 2025

---

*Keywords:*

Cirebon Mask  
Dance, Receptive  
Aesthetics,  
Interpretative  
Phenomenological  
Analysis, Audio-  
Kinesthetic  
Synchronization,  
Percussive  
Patterns.

---

### Abstract

This phenomenological study investigates the receptive aesthetics in the accompaniment music of Cirebon Mask Dance (Tari Topeng Cirebon), focusing on the perceptual dynamics of rhythmic beauty and percussive patterns and their intricate correlation with dance movements. Employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) within a qualitative framework, this research explores how mask dancers and musicians interpret and respond to specific percussive patterns fundamental pulse, accented strike, and melodic-rhythmic ornamentation as complex aesthetic stimuli that fundamentally shape movement quality and character embodiment. The findings reveal a sophisticated audio-kinesthetic aesthetic system where beauty emerges from precise intersubjective synchronization between sonic impulses and kinetic energy release, mediated by culturally encoded bodily awareness and affective resonance. This study addresses a critical gap in existing literature by privileging insider (emic) perspectives often marginalized in structural and symbolic analyses. The research contributes to performance theory by proposing an integrated "audio kinesthetic receptive framework" and offers practical implications for culturally responsive pedagogy in traditional arts education, emphasizing the necessity of integrative dance and karawitan curricula to preserve the receptive sensitivity that constitutes the performative essence of this intangible cultural heritage.

## INTRODUCTION

The existential predicament of Cirebon Mask Dance in contemporary performing arts represents not merely a challenge of preservation but a profound paradigmatic crisis concerning the erosion of *kualitas rasa* (quality of aesthetic feeling), a degradation precipitated by the accelerating commodification and mechanization of performance practice (Soedarsono, 2002). Empirical observations across traditional studios (*sanggar*) in core Cirebonese regions—Slangit, Gegesik, Palimanan, and Losari—consistently document a troubling psycho-physical schism between dancers (*dalang topeng*) and musicians (*niyaga*), particularly regarding the attenuation of musical sensitivity and inter-performer attunement. Contemporary pedagogical trends reveal that younger dancers increasingly approach movement as discrete kinesthetic sequences to be memorized, rather than as embodied responses to the nuanced energy matrices conveyed through gamelan's percussive architecture. This results in performances that, while technically proficient, often manifest as *kering* (dehydrated) visual spectacles lacking *taksu* (spiritual charisma) and affective depth a phenomenon that Suanda (2006) identifies as the "crisis of embodiment" in traditional Javanese arts. The urgency of this investigation extends beyond academic curiosity; it engages with the vital question of how intangible cultural heritage maintains its ontological integrity amidst rapidly transforming socio-cultural economies. In a broader regional context, efforts to interpret local wisdom within the art of Cirebon's Wayang Golek Cepak are essentially a process of uncovering the noble values embedded in the traditions of its religious-pluralist society

(Afryanto, 2014). Cirebon Mask Dance, philosophically conceptualized as *manunggaling swara lan raga* (the unification of sound and body), represents a microcosmic realization of cosmic harmony. If this aesthetic disjunction remains uninterrogated, we risk witnessing the irreversible transformation of living tradition into what Kusnadi (2010) ominously terms "heritage simulacra", aesthetic forms preserved as touristic commodities but stripped of their phenomenological essence and epistemic foundations.

A critical examination of the extant scholarly corpus reveals persistent epistemological limitations. While *Tari Topeng Cirebon* has attracted considerable academic attention over recent decades, dominant research paradigms remain largely confined to either structural-formalist or symbolic-hermeneutic approaches, each presenting significant blind spots. The first category, exemplified by the meticulous organological and musicological analyses of Supanggah (2002) and Suryana (2015), excels in documenting instrumental specifications, modal structures (*patet*), and rhythmic patterns but typically treats musical "texts" as autonomous objects divorced from their performative enactment. Such studies, while invaluable for archival preservation, often employ analytical frameworks that privilege notation over experience, structure over process, and stasis over dynamism, consequently failing to capture the real-time, improvisatory dialogics between sound and movement that animate live performance. The second category, represented by cultural-anthropological investigations such as those by Suanda (2006) and Kusnadi (2010), delves deeply into cosmological symbolism, Sufistic

philosophical underpinnings, and ritual contexts but tends toward metaphysical abstraction that distances analysis from the technical-phenomenological realities of performance practice. These studies adeptly explain why the dance is culturally significant but frequently neglect how this significance is materially and perceptually constituted through the precise synchronization of drum strikes with bodily kinetics. A third, more recent trend, performative and sociological studies as seen in Nalan (2000) and Murgiyanto (2004), examines the dance as theatrical event, focusing on audience interaction, dramaturgy, and adaptation to tourism economies. While acknowledging the integration of arts, this perspective often adopts an external (etic) viewpoint, overlooking the intensive internal negotiation and creative tension experienced by performers as they navigate temporal and rhythmic complexities (Turner, 1982). Collectively, these approaches have produced a fragmented understanding: we possess extensive knowledge of the dance's external forms and symbolic meanings but remain remarkably ignorant of the "black box" of performer psychology, the mechanisms through which specific auditory stimuli are perceived, processed through culturally conditioned consciousness, and transmuted into expressive, intentional movement (Becker, 2004). This constitutes a fundamental lacuna in both ethnomusicology and ethnochoreology. By addressing this gap, the study responds to the broader disciplinary call for research that synthesizes diverse information sources to provide a more holistic understanding of global musical and performative traditions (Post, 2004).

This research confronts this theoretical impasse by initiating a paradigmatic shift toward an interdisciplinary framework synthesizing receptive aesthetics (Jauss, 1982; Iser, 1978), phenomenology of perception (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), and theories of

embodied cognition (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991). Our central thesis posits that the aesthetics of Cirebon Mask Dance is fundamentally audio kinesthetic, an emergent property arising not from visual spectacle alone but from the dancer's cultivated capacity for deep listening and precise receptive response to the micro-rhythmic and timbral subtleties of the accompaniment. We argue that beauty (keindahan) in this context is a relational phenomenon occurring in the in-between space where percussive impulse meets kinetic release, mediated by a shared, intersubjective awareness cultivated through years of disciplined practice. The primary research objective is to deconstruct and theorize this receptive process, specifically investigating how master dancers perceive, interpret, and corporeally respond to the dynamic interplay of kedung (grounding pulse), sentak (energetic accent), and wiledan (ornamental elaboration). This moves beyond mere cataloging of musical patterns toward a hermeneutic exploration of how these patterns function as affective scripts that guide emotional expression and character embodiment. Subsidiary objectives include: (1) examining the pedagogical transmission of receptive sensitivity across generations; (2) analyzing gender dimensions in aesthetic reception, given the historical masculinization of certain characters; and (3) exploring implications for cultural sustainability in digital modernity.

Our methodological intervention employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to privilege the lived experience (*lebenswelt*) of performers themselves. Preliminary findings suggest a hypothesized model where the "moment of aesthetic arrest" (Langer, 1953) coincides with perfect synchronization between sonic stress (accentuated musical moments) and kinetic release (culminating movement gestures), facilitated by a state of intersubjective flow between dancer and musician. This challenges

prevailing notions of music as mere "accompaniment," repositioning it instead as an agential partner in a dialogic creative process. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute a robust theoretical model of audio-kinesesthetic receptivity that not only enriches academic discourse on Southeast Asian performing arts but also provides actionable insights for pedagogues and cultural practitioners striving to sustain the profound embodied wisdom embedded within traditions like Tari Topeng Cirebon.

The scholarly discourse surrounding music dance relationships in Indonesian performing arts, particularly within Javanese and Sundanese cultural spheres, reveals a rich yet often fragmented intellectual terrain. Kartomi (1990) and Sutton (1991) provide foundational classifications and historical overviews, consistently acknowledging the intrinsic connection between *karawitan* (gamelan music) and *beksan* (dance).

However, the depth of analysis concerning the precise mechanisms of this connection varies considerably. A systematic review identifies three dominants, yet insufficient, clusters of prior research: structural formalist studies, cultural symbolic investigations, and performative-sociological analyses. Each cluster, while contributing valuable insights, fails to adequately address the phenomenological core of the performer's experience—the realm of receptive aesthetics.

**Structural Formalist Paradigm:** Rooted in comparative musicology and traditional ethnomusicology, this approach is exemplified by the rigorous analytical work of Supanggah (2002) on Central Javanese gamelan structures and Suryana's (2015) codification of Sundanese drumming patterns. Such formalist inquiries into Cirebon performance are further supported by studies documenting the specific structural organization of drumming patterns, which illustrate how rhythmic motives function as essential blueprints for choreographic phrasing

(Sari & Utomo, 2019). The primary focus is the musical "object" itself, its internal logic, modal systems (*paket*), colotomic structure, and rhythmic taxonomy. Methodologies typically involve precise transcription into Western or cipher notation, acoustic analysis, and the formulation of theoretical rules governing musical composition. The great strength of this paradigm lies in its creation of precise, replicable documentation essential for preservation. Its critical weakness, however, is its inherent objectification and decontextualization; music is analyzed as a disembodied "score," abstracted from the lived reality of its enactment alongside dance. By prioritizing static structure over dynamic process, this approach cannot account for the fluid tempo adjustments (*imbang*), interactive cues, and spontaneous variations that characterize live accompaniment, where musicians constantly adapt to the dancer's energy and narrative flow. It renders invisible the very dialogic process that is the lifeblood of the tradition.

**Cultural Symbolic and Hermeneutic Paradigm:** This cluster, dominant in anthropological and cultural studies of Cirebon Mask Dance, seeks meaning beyond form. Scholars like Suanda (2006) and Kusnadi (2010) expertly decode the dance as a symbolic text, linking the five core masks (*Panji, Samba, Rumyang, Tumenggung, Klana*) to narratives of the human life cycle, Sufi concepts of the path to God (*suluk*), and indigenous Javanese cosmology. The gamelan instruments are interpreted as microcosms of the natural and social order, and performances are often framed within ritual contexts like *ngekeb* or *nadran*. This paradigm excels at elucidating the "why"—the philosophical and spiritual rationale for the art form. Sumardjo's (2000) application of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* (the unity of servant and Lord) as an analytical lens is particularly influential. Nevertheless, its limitation is a tendency toward over-

intellectualization and metaphysical abstraction that can disengage from the somatic, sensory reality of performance. While it explains that the dance embodies spiritual unity, it seldom details *how* a specific, gritty *sentak* on the *kendang* technically translates into the dancer's experience and expression of that unity. It risks reducing the embodied practice to allegory.

**Performative and Sociological Paradigm:** Emerging from performance studies and cultural sociology, this approach, seen in Nalan (2000) and Murgiyanto (2004), treats *Tari Topeng* as a social event and cultural commodity. Research focuses on dramaturgy, audience-performer interaction, adaptation strategies for festival and tourist markets, and the political economy of traditional arts. Soedarsono's (2002) work on globalization's impact is pivotal here. This perspective usefully contextualizes the art within broader social forces. However, its vantage point is typically that of the spectator or cultural manager, not the performer. Consequently, it often frames music and movement as complementary elements serving a larger narrative or commercial purpose, missing the profound, pre-reflective, and often non narrative dialogue occurring *between* the *dalang* and *niyaga*. It observes the performance from the outside, neglecting the internal, felt experience of intersubjective attunement.

**Theoretical Gap and Present Contribution:** The collective oversight of these three paradigms is their neglect of *aesthetic reception* from the performer's standpoint—a gap explicitly addressed by Rezeptionsästhetik (Reception Aesthetics) as developed by Jauss (1982) and Iser (1978). While their theories originally focused on literary texts, their core insight—that meaning is not inherent in the artifact but activated through the perceiver's conscious engagement—is profoundly applicable to performing arts. Furthermore, the phenomenological tradition, particularly

Merleau-Ponty's (1962) philosophy of the "lived body" (*le corps vécu*), provides the crucial link between perception and action, rejecting mind-body dualism. This aligns with recent efforts within the Indonesian musicological sphere to utilize phenomenological lenses to uncover the subjective aesthetic values inherent in traditional performing arts, moving beyond mere descriptive analysis (Prabowo & Sinaga, 2021). Becker's (2004) notion of "deep listening" and "trancing" in musical experience, alongside contemporary embodied cognition theory (Varela et al., 1991), which posits that cognition is not confined to the brain but extends into bodily action and environmental interaction, completes the theoretical scaffolding.

This study therefore carves its niche by integrating these theoretical streams to interrogate the *receptive consciousness* of the Cirebonese performer. We ask not just about the structure of the *pukulan* (stroke) or the symbol of the *topeng* (mask), but about how the sound of the *pukulan* is felt in the dancer's viscera and guides the expression of the *topeng*. We propose that *rasa* in this context is neither purely emotional nor purely intellectual, but a *perceptual-affective-kinaesthetic nexus*—a way of knowing through the body-in-sound. This novel framework allows us to analyze micro-interactions: how a *Gedig* (shoulder shrug) is cued by a *Bam* (bass drum stroke), how a *Tangkis* (glancing look) coincides with a *Kempul* (hanging gong) decay, and how the *Wiledan* of a *rebab* (spike fiddle) melody inspires the *Ngayun* (swaying) of a dancer's torso. By centering this insider, embodied perspective, this research aims to generate a more holistic, dynamic, and experientially grounded understanding of Cirebon Mask Dance aesthetics, offering a model that can potentially illuminate similar audio-kinesthetic systems in other world traditions.

## METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative research design centered on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the personal lived experiences of performers, acknowledging both the pre-reflective dimensions of aesthetic receptivity and the researcher's interpretative role (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2022). Conducted a four-month period of intensive fieldwork, the research involved seven key informants (four master dancers and three master drummers) with at least 20 years of professional experience, selected through purposive and snowball sampling to ensure deep, embodied expertise. Data collection employed a multi modal triangulation strategy, including semi-structured phenomenological interviews in Indonesian and Cirebon Javanese, participant observation and video ethnography of 40 rehearsals and 12 performances, stimulated recall sessions to access real-time decision-making, and document analysis of historical archives and buku primbon. Following the iterative and idiographic procedure of IPA, the analysis progressed from initial immersion and noting to the development of emergent and super ordinate themes, such as "Intersubjective Synchronicity as Aesthetic Ideal"—eventually culminating in a cross case interpretative synthesis. Throughout the process, ethical integrity was maintained through informed consent and the leveraging of my positionality as a "committed outsider" with training in ethnomusicology and Javanese dance, allowing for a nuanced probe into the tacit knowledge of these practitioners.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of phenomenological data yielded a complex, multi-layered model of receptive aesthetics in Cirebon Mask Dance, organized around three interconnected experiential domains: Somatic Grounding, Energetic Dialogue, and Affective-Characterological Interpretation. These

domains correspond broadly to the musical elements of *Kedung*, *Sentak*, and *Wiledan*, but the findings reveal them as deeply integrated perceptual-kinesthetic processes rather than mere responses to discrete auditory signals.

### Domain 1: Somatic Grounding and the Receptive Base, Experiencing *Kedung*

As presented in Figure 1, all participants emphasized that the foundational aesthetic experience was not the initiation of movement, but the establishment of a receptive state through the *Kedung*—the fundamental, cyclical pulse articulated by the *kendang agung* (large drum) and gong.



Figure 1: Kendang Agung and Gong in a Cirebon Mask Dance performance (Source: documentation, 2025)

Nyi Mas (dancer) described this as entering a state of *menep*:

"Before the first *jejer* (opening stance), my listening is already active. I am waiting for the *dung... dung...* of the *kendang agung*. It must feel *anteb* (weighty, grounded), like a large tree trunk sinking into the earth. That sound doesn't just mark time; it enters through the soles of my feet and settles my *karep* (intention/desire). If the *kedung* is *keblabak* (flighty, unstable), my spirit is scattered. But when it is *manteb* (firm), it creates a *pacakan* (a vessel, a container) within my body. In that space of inner stillness (*tenang*), Panji can begin to appear. The beauty of the beginning is this quiet fullness, this shared readiness with the drummer. We are both finding the same *dasar* (foundation)."

This narrative illuminates *Kedung* as a *somatic grounding technique*. It is perceived not

as an external metronomic guide but as a vibrational field that reconstitutes the dancer's bodily schema, creating an internal "container" for the performance. This aligns with Merleau-Ponty's (1962) concept of the body as the medium for being-in-the-world; here, the sonic world of the *Kedung* becomes the dancer's primary spatial-temporal orientation. The aesthetic quality (*keindahan*) at this stage is described as *wibawa* (authoritative calm), a beauty of potential energy and poised attention. This challenges purely structural analyses of introductory gending, reframing them as rituals of intersubjective alignment and corporeal attunement.

In the Figure 2, it represented the energetic dialog & kinetic release, and affective-characterological interpretation which belonged to domain 2 and domain 3 respectively.

#### Domain 2: Energetic Dialogue and Kinetic Release, The *Sentak* as Catalytic Command

The most vividly described experiences concerned the dynamic interplay with *Sentak* sharp, accented drum strokes that function as kinetic triggers. Participants consistently used metaphors of energy transfer: *api* (fire), *setrum* (electricshock), *dorongan* (push).



Figure 2: The Dynamic Interplay between the Kendang Player and the Mask Dancer (Source: documentation, 2025)

Ki Ngendang (drummer) explained the intentionality behind a *Sentak*:

*"My plak (high-pitched, sharp stroke on the kendang anak) is not a decoration. It is a pamungkas (a decisive, finishing command). For example, when Panji turns his head sharply (tangkis), that turn is not complete in its meaning until my plak strikes exactly at the apex of the turn. The sound is the punctuation of the movement. If I am late, the movement feels kethul (chopped off, incomplete). If I am early, the dancer looks kagok (awkward), as if surprised. The beauty is in the pas (exactness). We are not two people, in that moment, the drumstick is an extension of his neck muscle. I feel the tension build in his body, and I release it with my hand."*

This description reveals a profound level of *intercorporeal anticipation*. The drummer does not follow the movement reactively but predicts its energetic culmination based on an intimate knowledge of the dance's kinetic grammar and the individual dancer's bodily habits. The *Sentak* is thus a *catalytic command* that legitimizes and completes the movement's expressive intent. From a phenomenological standpoint, this represents a fusion of intentionalities: the dancer's kinetic intention and the drummer's sonic intention converge into a single, unified aesthetic event. The beauty here is an *explosive precision*, a satisfying congruence that feels inevitable rather than contrived. This finding significantly extends Becker's (2004) concept of "deep listening" into the realm of "deep co action," where listening is intrinsically linked to anticipatory motor empathy.

#### Domain 3: Affective-Characterological Interpretation – *Wiledan* as Emotional Scaffolding

While *Kedung* grounds and *Sentak* propels, the *Wiledan* – the fluid, improvisatory melodic and rhythmic elaborations by the *rebab*, *suling*, and *gender* – was identified as the primary carrier of emotional and narrative nuance. Ibu Sekar, specializing in the *Rumyang* character (a coquettish yet melancholic maiden), articulated how *Wiledan* shapes character interiority:

"The basic steps for Rumiyang are not so complex. But what makes her sedih (sad) or girang (playfully happy) is in the wiledan. When the rebab plays ngrayung, that long, bending, weeping phrase it physically nyangkem (hooks, pulls) at my chest. My breathing changes; it becomes more sigh-like. My tandang (gait) becomes slower, heavier, even if the tempo hasn't changed. The kendang might answer with a kembang sungsang pattern, like a heart fluttering. That conversation above the basic rhythm (balungan) is the script for my inner monologue. Without truly ngrasakke (feeling into) that wiledan, I am just a girl walking and smiling. With it, I am Rumiyang remembering a lost love."

Here, *Wiledan* operates as emotional scaffolding. It provides an auditory stream of affective cues that the dancer embodies, translating melodic contour and timbral quality into kinesthetic and expressive qualities (slowness, heaviness, a sighing breath). This process is interpretative; the dancer actively construes the musical emotion and incarnates it. This aligns with Iser's (1978) reader-response theory, where the "text" (the *Wiledan*) contains "gaps" or indeterminacies that the "reader" (the dancer) must concretize through their performance. The beauty generated is one of *psychological depth* and narrative plausibility, elevating the dance from formalized movement to embodied storytelling.

### Synthesis: The Audio-Kinesthetic Aesthetic System

Figure 3 depicts the integrated framework of the audio-kinesthetic aesthetic system, highlighting the convergence of the three primary domains. The domains are not sequential stages but continuously interwoven threads throughout a performance. A dancer is simultaneously grounded in the *Kedung*, responding to *Sentak* accents, and interpreting *Wiledan* phrases. The superordinate theme emerging from cross-case analysis is Intersubjective Synchronicity as the Primary Aesthetic Ideal. Beauty is equated with the seamless, fluid, and seemingly telepathic

connection between sound and movement, perceivable as a unified phenomenon rather than two separate arts. This synchronicity is achieved through a shared, culturally cultivated *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977)—a set of embodied dispositions that align perception and action among community members.

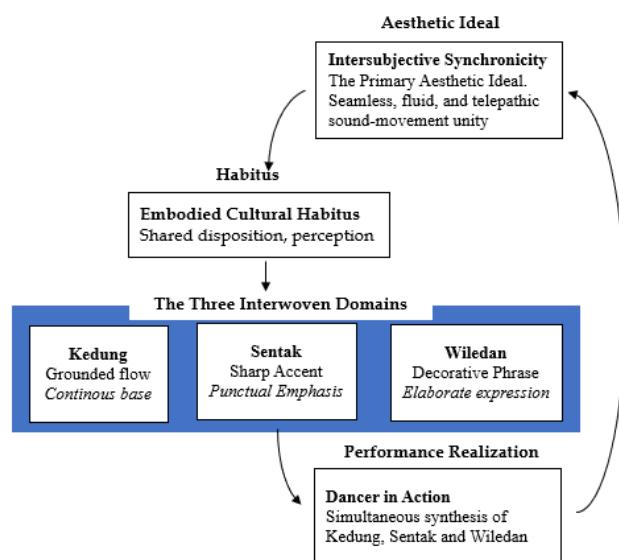


Figure 3: Synthesis of the Audio-Kinesthetic Aesthetic System

The synthesis of the audio-kinesthetic aesthetic system is rooted in the Embodied Cultural Habitus, a foundational social substrate that provides the shared grammar of perception and action necessary for the community to find the performance meaningful. Within this framework, the three core threads, the grounding *Kedung*, the punctuating *Sentak*, and the elaborate *Wiledan* exist in a state of constant, non-sequential interaction, serving as the materials that the Dancer in Action simultaneously instantiates and interweaves in real time. This

synthesis point, where theoretical domains are corporeally transformed into a unified event, manifests as Intersubjective Synchronicity; this super-ordinate aesthetic ideal is not a separate phase, but rather the emergent perceived quality of a telepathic connection between sound and movement. Ultimately, this process creates a cultural feedback loop where the habitus enables the performance, the performance culminates in synchronicity, and the collective valuation of that synchronicity further reinforces and defines the underlying habitus.

The visual structure captures the key elements: the non-sequential, interwoven nature of the three domains, the central overarching theme of synchronicity, and the foundational role of the cultural habitus.

### **Discussion: Theoretical Implications and Critical Reflections**

This model of audio-kinesthetic receptivity offers several theoretical advances. *First*, it challenges the hierarchical view of "music accompanying dance" or vice-versa, proposing instead a *dialogic co-creation* model. Both arts are mutually constitutive; the dance gives purpose and visual form to the music's narrative potential, while the music provides the energetic and affective infrastructure for the dance. *Second*, it provides a concrete framework for understanding the often-mystified concept of *rasa*. In this context, *rasa* is the perceptible quality of the intersubjective synchronicity, the feeling of "rightness" when sound and movement fuse.

Comparing this to other traditions highlights its uniqueness. In classical ballet, synchronization is often mathematically pre-composed and counted. In contrast, Cirebon Topeng relies on a flexible, responsive synchronicity negotiated in real-time, rooted in aural-oral transmission rather than fixed scores. This underscores its nature as an *improvisatory tradition within strict boundaries* (Brinner, 1995). The findings also illuminate the crisis of

transmission noted in the introduction. Younger dancers trained with less emphasis on immersive, long-term aural acculturation may develop the *form* (*wiraga*) but struggle with the *feeling* (*wirasa*) because they haven't fully internalized this receptive, dialogic mode of being with the music.

Furthermore, a gender dimension emerged subtly. Ibu Sekar and other female dancers noted a need to sometimes assert their interpretative agency more strongly with older, traditionally male drummers, suggesting that the intersubjective "meeting" is also mediated by social hierarchies. Finally, the research underscores the vulnerability of this aesthetic system to technological mediation. Using recorded music eliminates the dialogic possibility, freezing the music's responsiveness and reducing the dancer to a follower of a fixed track, fundamentally altering the aesthetic from interactive to reactive.

In essence, the receptive aesthetics of Cirebon Mask Dance reveal a sophisticated epistemology of the body-in-sound. Beauty is an emergent property of a skilled community engaged in a continuous, mindful, and corporeal dialogue across the modalities of sound and movement. Preserving this art, therefore, requires preserving not just choreographies and musical compositions, but the cultivated perceptual sensitivities and the social-spatial contexts that allow this profound dialogue to flourish.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study has elucidated the intricate architecture of receptive aesthetics in Cirebon Mask Dance, demonstrating that its core aesthetic principle is not visual spectacle but a profound, cultivated audio-kinesthetic synchronicity. Through a phenomenological exploration of master performers' lived experiences, we have delineated a tripartite model of reception: (1) Somatic Grounding via the *Kedung*, which establishes a shared

corporeal foundation and state of calm readiness (*menep*); (2) Energetic Dialogue catalyzed by the *Sentak*, where sharp percussive accents function as intercorporeal commands that trigger and complete kinetic impulses with millisecond precision; and (3) Affective-Characterological

Interpretation guided by the *Wiledan*, where melodic-rhythmic elaborations provide the emotional scaffolding for deep character embodiment. Synthesized, these processes constitute an Intersubjective Synchronicity that performers identify as the very source of beauty (*keindahan*) and *taksu* (charismatic essence) in the performance. The dance, therefore, exists in the dialogic *in-between* space where the drummer's intentionality and the dancer's kinesthetics merge into a unified, co-created event.

The primary theoretical contribution of this research is the formulation of an "Audio-Kinesthetic Receptive Framework" for analyzing traditional performative arts. This framework bridges significant gaps in existing literature by integrating insights from receptive aesthetics, phenomenology of the body, and embodied cognition to prioritize the insider's (*emic*) perceptual and experiential reality.

It moves analysis beyond the dichotomies of structure/symbol and text/context, offering a dynamic process-oriented model that explains *how* meaning and affect are generated in the real-time, embodied interaction between sound and movement.

This study thus enriches the fields of ethnomusicology, ethnochoreology, and performance studies with a nuanced vocabulary and methodological approach for examining the tacit, corporeal knowledge systems that underpin many of the world's intangible cultural heritage.

The practical implications are substantial and urgent. The findings argue compellingly against the disintegration of dance and music pedagogy. Effective transmission must be

integrative, fostering from the earliest stages the receptive sensitivity that allows future dancers to "listen with the body" and future musicians to "see with the ears." Curricula in conservatories and sanggar should be redesigned to emphasize joint listening sessions, improvisatory dialogue exercises, and the verbalization of felt experience.

Furthermore, cultural preservation policies must recognize that the essence of this tradition lies in its live, interactive dialogics; over-reliance on recorded accompaniment for convenience or tourism risks eroding the very aesthetic core the policies aim to protect. The research also suggests the potential for developing "somatic documentation" methods that record not only the audio visual performance but also the kinesthetic and perceptual cues exchanged between artists.

This study acknowledges its limitations. The focus on master practitioners in the Slangit and Gegesik styles provides depth but may not capture the full variation across the Cirebon region e.g., Losari, Indramayu or among less experienced performers. The reliance on verbal articulation, while fruitful, encounters the inherent challenge of translating pre-reflective bodily knowledge into language. Future research should therefore expand geographically and demographically, incorporate biometric methods such as motion capture synchronized with audio analysis to empirically measure synchronicity, and employ longitudinal designs to track the development of receptive skills in apprentices. Ultimately, by illuminating the profound sensory and intersubjective intelligence embedded in Tari Topeng Cirebon, this research hopes to contribute not only to its scholarly understanding but also to the empowered and nuanced stewardship of this living tradition for generations to come.

## REFERENCES

Afryanto, S. (2014). *Memaknai kearifan lokal pada seni wayang golek cepak Cirebon* [Research paper]

Becker, J. (2004). *Deep listeners: Music, emotion, and trancing*. Indiana University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice* (R. Nice, Trans.). Cambridge University Press.

Brinner, B. (1995). *Knowing music, making music: Javanese gamelan and the theory of musical competence and interaction*. University of Chicago Press.

Iser, W. (1978). *The act of reading: A theory of aesthetic response*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Jauss, H. R. (1982). *Toward an aesthetic of reception* (T. Bahti, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.

Kartomi, M. (1990). *On concepts and classifications of musical instruments*. University of Chicago Press.

Kusnadi, A. (2010). *Topeng Cirebon: Makna dan simbol*. Disbudpar Kabupaten Cirebon.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of perception* (C. Smith, Trans.). Routledge. (Original work published 1945).

Murgiyanto, S. (2004). *Tradisi dan inovasi: Beberapa masalah tari di Indonesia*. Wedatama Widya Sastra.

Nalan, A. S. (2000). *Aspek dramaturgi dalam Topeng Cirebon*. STSI Press.

Post, J. C. (2004). *Ethnomusicology: A research and information guide*. Routledge

Prabowo, A. S., & Sinaga, S. S. (2021). Estetika Pertunjukan Wayang Orang Bharata: Sebuah Kajian Fenomenologi. *Jurnal Seni Musik*, 10(2), 118-126. <https://doi.org/10.15294/jsm.v10i2.5113>

Sari, N. P., & Utomo, U. (2019). Analisis Pola Kendhangan Tari Topeng Cirebon Gaya Slangit. *Jurnal Seni Musik*, 8(2), 75-82. <https://doi.org/10.15294/jsm.v8i2.35332>

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2022). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Soedarsono, R. M. (2002). *Seni pertunjukan Indonesia di era globalisasi*. Gadjah Mada University Press.

Suanda, E. (2006). *Topeng Cirebon: Ketubuhan dan keindonesiaan*. Yayasan Obor Indonesia.

Sumardjo, J. (2000). *Filsafat seni*. ITB Press.

Supanggah, R. (2002). *Bothekan karawitan I*. ISI Press Surakarta.

Suryana, J. (2015). *Pola tabuh kendang Sunda: Kajian musical*. Sunan Ambu Press.

Sutton, R. A. (1991). *Traditions of gamelan music in Java*. Cambridge University Press.

Turner, V. (1982). *From ritual to theatre: The human seriousness of play*. PAJ Publications.

Varela, F. J., Thompson, E., & Rosch, E. (1991). *The embodied mind: Cognitive science and human experience*. MIT Press.