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Drumblek: The Transformation of Percussion Music into Entertainment Arts and Cultural Identity of Salatiga

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ABSTRACT

The art of drumblek is a percussion music phenomenon typical of Salatiga, Central Java, which was born from local creativity by using musical instruments from used items such as *barrels*, *blek*, buckets, and *bamboo*. This research aims to explore the form, socio-cultural function, and development of drumblek as a performing art. The research method is qualitative with an ethnographic approach, involving field observation and in-depth interviews with the actors and drumblek preservationists. The results show that drumblek has undergone a transformation of the form of performance: from a simple appearance in the style of a traditional drumband to a dynamic carnival performance, complete with costume innovations and variations of instruments. This art continues to maintain the values of togetherness, creativity, and the spirit of mutual cooperation in its community. As a collective entertainment vehicle, drumblek also functions as a medium to strengthen Salatiga's local cultural identity. Drumblek has become a symbol of pride of the Salatiga community. Thus, drumblek makes an important contribution as an innovative performing art while strengthening the cultural identity of the Salatiga community.

Keywords: drumblek; performing arts; cultural identity; percussion music; local creativity; Salatiga

ABSTRAK

Drumblek: Transformasi Musik Perkusi menjadi Seni Hiburan dan Identitas Budaya Salatiga. Seni drumblek adalah fenomena musik perkusi khas Salatiga, Jawa Tengah, yang lahir dari kreativitas lokal dengan menggunakan alat musik dari barang bekas seperti tong, blek, ember, dan bambu. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bentuk, fungsi sosial budaya, dan perkembangan drumblek sebagai seni pertunjukan. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan pendekatan etnografi, yang melibatkan observasi lapangan dan wawancara mendalam dengan para pelaku dan pelestari drumblek. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa drumblek telah mengalami transformasi bentuk pertunjukan: dari penampilan sederhana dalam gaya band drum tradisional menjadi pertunjukan karnaval yang dinamis, lengkap dengan inovasi kostum dan variasi alat musik. Seni ini terus mempertahankan nilai-nilai kebersamaan, kreativitas, dan semangat kerja sama dalam komunitasnya. Sebagai wahana hiburan kolektif, drumblek juga berfungsi sebagai media untuk memperkuat identitas budaya lokal Salatiga. Drumblek telah menjadi simbol kebanggaan masyarakat Salatiga. Dengan demikian, drumblek memberikan kontribusi penting sebagai seni pertunjukan inovatif sekaligus memperkuat identitas budaya masyarakat Salatiga.

Kata kunci: drumblek; seni pertunjukan; identitas budaya; musik perkusi; kreativitas lokal; Salatiga



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1. Introduction

Art is a cultural expression that reflects the social, aesthetic, and identity values of a community. In the context of locality, art not only functions as entertainment, but also as a means of social communication and the construction of cultural identity (Koentjaraningrat., 2020). One of the forms of local art that develops in typical Salatiga City is drumblek, which is a percussion music performance that uses used items as musical instruments, such as plastic buckets, used barrels, *bamboo*, and metal cans.

Drumblek was born as a form of creativity for urban people in overcoming limited resources while still producing attractive artistic expressions. The uniqueness of drumblek lies not only in its musicality aspect, but also in the socio-cultural dimension that surrounds it. Drumblek is a collective space that brings together various levels of society in the process of creation, training, and performance, thereby strengthening the values of mutual cooperation, solidarity, and communal pride. In its development, drumblek underwent a transformation of form and function: from just street entertainment to a performance that was packaged with a structured visual aesthetic and choreography, and became part of the cultural identity of the Salatiga people.

The art of drumblek as a form of second-hand percussion music transformation has been previously researched by Nugroho (Nugroho P, 2015), who highlights its existence as a means of community entertainment. Furthermore, Rahmawati and Sabardila (Rahmawati, 2023) emphasized the function of drumblek as a medium of creative expression and brotherhood, especially in the youth community in Salatiga. Prastiyo (Prastiyo, 2017) sees the drumblek community's strategy in developing this performance as a symbol of the city's cultural identity.

Another study of local contemporary performing arts shows that the transformation of the tools, forms, and functions of art is greatly influenced by social changes and community needs (Sedyawati, 2006). Therefore, the understanding of drumblek not only includes the aesthetic aspect, but also the social and ideological meaning it contains as part of the collective identity of the Salatiga people. The concept of urban art transformation in a visual and aesthetic context is also discussed by Purnama Sari et al. (2025), who examine the digitization of puppetry as a form of performance that experiences a dichotomy between tradition and contemporary media—just as drumblek has evolved from street entertainment to structured performance (Purnama Sari et al., 2025).

In cultural studies, this kind of artistic performance can be understood as a practice of cultural representation that continues to undergo the negotiation of meaning. Hall (Hall, 1997) states that cultural identity is dynamic and is formed through symbolic practices articulated by communities in a given social space. Therefore, drumblek cannot be separated from the social and cultural context that



Figure 1: The drumblek group that combines archipelago ethnic clothing with modern majorettes such as marching bands

gave birth to it. It is not only an art product, but also a medium of expression of local identity that continues to be constructed and negotiated.

This research aims to explore in depth the form, function, and development of drumblek art in Salatiga. Using a qualitative approach and ethnographic methods, this study will explore how the transformation of the form of performance, social function, and cultural values contained in drumblek, as well as examine its contribution to strengthening the cultural identity of local communities.

2. Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with ethnographic design to explore in depth the phenomenon of drumblek art as a local cultural practice in Salatiga City. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the meaning and social practices inherent in the arts contextually, from the perspective of the cultural actors involved (Creswell, 2013; Spradley, 2006). This method is effective in uncovering symbolic, narrative, and ideological dimensions that cannot be explained through quantitative approaches.

The ethnographic design provides space for researchers to conduct participatory observations, in-depth interviews, and visual documentation, all of which are geared towards capturing the complexity of the form and function of drumblek in the cultural life of the Salatiga people. This technique allows for the reconstruction of the meaning woven into the performance as well as the social relations that shape the dynamics of the art community (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Studi Bangsa, Udasmor & Noviani (2025) provides a framework for how urban art practices can shift social and aesthetic functions within the ecosystem of modern ideologies, which is in line with this ethnographic approach to drumblek. Observations were made on routine practice activities, staging, and internal creative processes of drumblek groups.

The research location is centered on several points of the drumblek community in Salatiga City that actively organizes exercises and performances, such as in Sidorejo, Tingkir, and Argomulyo Districts. The selection of the location was carried out purposively, taking into account the sustainability of arts activities, accessibility, and local community involvement. This technique is in accordance with ethnographic principles that emphasize intensive involvement in the social life of the communities studied (Fetterman, 2010).

The research informants were selected by purposive and snowball sampling, including the founders of the drumblek community, coaches, active players, local art activists, and community leaders. A total of 15 informants were interviewed in depth. Interviews are conducted in a semi-structured manner, allowing flexibility in digging into the informant's narratives of experiences, perceptions, and reflections about drumblek. Interviews are conducted in Indonesian and/or Javanese according to the convenience of the informant.

The data collected included primary data in the form of interview results, field observations, and visual documentation (photos and videos), as well as secondary data in the form of local media archives, community records, related literature, and institutional documentation from local cultural or tourism offices. All data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach to identify patterns of meaning that emerged in the process of transformation of drumblek as a performing art and cultural identity (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

During the participatory observation process, the researcher participated in various community activities such as routine exercises, festival preparation, and creative processes in composing choreography and musical arrangements. These observations are recorded in the form of daily field notes which are then analyzed reflectively to understand social relations, collective narratives, and symbolism contained in drumblek performances. This approach supports data triangulation with interview data and documentation.

To maintain the validity of the data, this study uses the triangulation technique of sources and methods, namely comparing the results of interviews with observations and visual documentation, and confirming the data to informants in the member checking stage. The validity and reliability of data interpretation were also strengthened through peer debriefing with academics in the fields of ethnomusicology and cultural anthropology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The researcher also applies the ethical principles of qualitative research, such as obtaining informed consent, maintaining the confidentiality of the identity of the source, and being reflective of the position and influence of the researcher in the process of data interpretation (Orb et al., 2001). In addition, the entire process of data collection and reporting is carried out with respect for the local values and cultural practices of the drumblek community in Salatiga.

With this method, the research is expected to comprehensively explain the dynamics of drumblek transformation, starting from aspects of musicality, performance visuality, to its function as a cultural identity reinforcer. The ethnographic method provides a narrative depth that allows an understanding not only at the level of artistic practice, but also at the ideological and symbolic realms inherent in drumblek as part of local contemporary culture.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Transformation of Drumblek's Show Form

The results of this study were obtained through participatory observation methods, in-depth interviews, and visual documentation analysis which were carried out systematically within 6 months from March 2024 to September 2024. Participatory observation was carried out by attending a number of drumblek performances in various public cultural spaces in Salatiga City, both in the context of festivals, carnivals, and street performances. The researcher directly observed the interaction of players, coaches, and audiences in the creative process and performance of performances, in order to gain a complete contextual understanding of the transformation of the form and function of drumblek art.

In-depth interviews were conducted with twelve key informants consisting of the original creators of drumblek, coaches from several active groups, players directly involved in the performance, and audiences who followed the development of the art over a long period of time. The data obtained from this interview provides a comprehensive picture of the perceptions, experiences, and cultural values embedded in the transformation of drumblek as an entertainment art as well as a representation of the cultural identity of the Salatiga people.

In addition, the analysis of visual documentation, both in the form of photos and performance videos, is an important tool in uncovering the aesthetic dynamics that develop in drumblek art. Three main aspects are analyzed in depth, namely: (1) innovations in percussion instruments that are no longer limited to recycled materials, but rather begin to adopt modifications based on simple technology; (2) choreographic variations that show cross-cultural influences and adaptations to performance spaces; and (3) visual aesthetics that appear through costumes, color schemes, and player body expressions that are increasingly conceptualized.

The transformation of musical instruments in drumblek's art reflects an evolution responsive to the evolving social and cultural dynamics in Salatiga. The addition of modern musical instruments reflects the desire to attract a wider audience and make drumblek more relevant in today's entertainment context. The combination of local musical instruments with modern elements affirms the rich and diverse cultural identity of the Salatiga people. In this process, drumblek plays a role not only as an entertainment medium but also as a means of preserving local culture and identity, which is adapted to meet the needs and tastes of the new generation (Susanto, 2017). The use of technology in music shows innovations that are important to maintain the relevance of this art in the midst of the times, inviting the younger

generation to engage and appreciate their own cultural heritage (Ernawati et al., 2022). The following is a table describing the transformation of the musical instruments used in the art of drumblek in Salatiga from 2010 to 2025. This table provides information on the development of musical instrument types, changes in playing techniques, and their impact on the art of drumblek as a whole.

Table 1: Drumblek musical instrument transformation

Year	Musical Instruments Used	Transformation Description
2010	Kendang, Bonang, Taiko	Traditional musical instruments with an emphasis on local performance.
2012	Drum, Suling	Addition of modern instruments, blending traditional rhythms and pop
2015	Marimba, cajón	Innovation in the use of outdoor musical instruments to attract the interest of the audience.
2018	Digital musical instrument (keyboard, synthesizer)	The integration of technology in the show, creates a modern feel.
2021	Drum sets, gamelans, other ethnic percussion instruments	The combination of cultures, shows the diversification of the musical instruments used.
2025	Hybrid musical instruments (combination of traditional and modern)	Innovation in the use of outdoor musical instruments to attract the interest of the audience.

Observations in the field in addition to innovations in the musical instruments are also found in terms of choreography used in drumblek performances. The player's movements are no longer spontaneous or improvisative, but rather arranged in specific formations that follow rhythmic, narrative, and spatial patterns. In some performances, it is seen that the choreography is divided into thematic segments, such as environmental, national, or local cultural themes, which are displayed through symbolic gestures and the use of supporting properties.

Interviews with coaches and performers indicate that the complexity of this choreography is driven by the demands of inter-group competition, as well as the desire to perform on more formal stages such as city or provincial arts festivals. The trainers also stated that the structured choreography helped build discipline, cooperation, and a strong visual narrative, thus improving the overall quality of the performance. The training process they underwent also underwent a transformation: from just rhythm training to integrated training involving aspects of dance, acting, and stage blocking.

The choreographic transformation in drumblek's art reflects an evolution responsive to social and cultural changes in Salatiga. Starting from traditional movements that are thick with local cultural values to modern movements that are more attractive to the younger generation. In 2015, the incorporation of narrative in the show became an important innovation that added depth and emotional meaning to the drumblek show. Since 2018, with an emphasis on visual and aesthetic elements, drumblek's performances have become not only an audio spectacle but also a visually appealing one, creating a more immersive experience for the audience. This is evident in collaborations with other art forms that enrich the performance experience. By 2025, a focus on hybrid dance styles demonstrates a desire to embrace creative freedom and allow for greater interaction between dancers and audiences, making each performance a unique and personalized experience for the audience.

Table 2 illustrates the transformation of the choreography used in the art of drumblek in Salatiga from 2010 to 2025. This table presents developments in the form of choreography, movement types, as well as innovations added over time.

Another thing that has undergone a transformation in drumblek performances is visual aesthetics. The observation results showed that the visual aspects, especially costumes, color schemes, makeup, and additional accessories such as masks, flags, and other props became the main attraction for the audience. Most drumblek groups now apply different visual themes to each performance, from traditional Javanese nuances, pop culture, to futuristic costumes.

Interviews with the audience and performers confirmed that these visual changes were a key element in establishing the group's identity and enhancing the show's appeal. For some audiences, visual aesthetics

Table 2: Drumblek choreography transformation

Year	Choreography Form	Transformation Description
2010	Traditional Movements	Using traditional basic movements, depicting local culture.
2012	Fusion of Modern Movements	Introducing modern movements in the show to attract more attention, such as hip hop.
2015	Story-Based Choreography	Implementing the narrative in the performance through movement, adds emotional depth.
2018	Visual and Aesthetic Innovation	The application of new visual elements, such as more varied costumes and more dynamic choreography.
2021	Collaborations with Other Arts	Integrating dance elements from other arts, such as traditional Javanese and contemporary dances, in one performance.
2025	Hybrid Dance Style	Combines techniques and styles from different genres with an emphasis on improvisation and audience participation.

are also the main reason to attend the show repeatedly. Meanwhile, for players, the process of designing costumes and props is considered a form of self-expression and collective pride. In this case, visual aesthetics not only serve as a sweetener for the performance, but rather as an integral part of the cultural communication strategy that the drumblek community carries out to the public.

The transformation of visual aesthetics in drumblek's art shows significant developments along with changing tastes and technological advancements. In the early 2010s, the costumes used were still very traditional, reflecting strong cultural roots. However, with growing interest in attracting a wider audience, the application of elements such as lighting and projection began to be introduced in 2012, enhancing the mood and visual experience of the show. From 2015, there was an interesting change in the use of colors and motifs in costumes, with more complex design explorations designed to appeal to younger audiences. The integration of multimedia elements began to occur in 2018, where the use of video and animation added another dimension to the show, making it more dynamic and interactive. The collaboration with visual designers carried out since 2021 produces works that are not only aesthetic but also provide an interactive experience for the audience, reinforcing emotional depth and social connection. By 2025, with the adoption of digital technologies such as augmented reality in performance, drumblek is ushering in a new era that creates more immersive and innovative visual experiences, opening the door to even broader artistic exploration.



Figure 2: The drumblek group preparing to participate in a carnival in Salatiga

Table 3 depicting the transformation of the visual aesthetic used in the art of drumblek in Salatiga from 2010 to 2025. This table shows the various visual elements involved, design changes, and innovations in aesthetic aspects during the period.

Table 3: Drumblek visual aesthetic transformation

Year	Visual Aesthetic Elements	Transformation Description
2010	Traditional Costume Design	Using costumes that reflect local culture and traditional elements.
2012	Lighting and Projection	Application of lighting techniques to create a more dramatic atmosphere.
2015	Color Variations and Motifs	Bolder color exploration and more complex motifs to add visual appeal.
2018	Multimedia Integration	The use of multimedia elements such as video and animation in performances.
2021	Collaboration with Visual Designers	Collaborate with visual artists to create interactive and innovative works.
2025	Digital-Based Aesthetics	Using digital technology to create immersive and interactive artworks, such as augmented reality (AR).

The findings of these three approaches suggest that drumblek has undergone significant changes in its performance format, not only as a musical-communal expression, but also as a modern performance medium that is flexible to the cultural, economic, and social contexts that surround it. The transformation reflects the process of cultural negotiation between local traditions and contemporary demands, making drumblek an urban art phenomenon that continues to develop in Salatiga.

3.2. Socio-Cultural Functions of Drumblek

Based on data triangulation conducted through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation analysis, this study shows that drumblek plays two main socio-cultural functions in the context of the Salatiga community, namely as a collective entertainment media and a community-based cultural education media. These two functions operate simultaneously and complement each other in strengthening social cohesion and the preservation of local values.

As a collective entertainment medium, drumblek routinely performs in various social and cultural activities such as city anniversary commemorations, cultural carnivals, village celebrations, and folk festivals. In this context, drumblek serves as a medium of collective expression that bridges interactions between citizens of different ages and social backgrounds. Drumblek's dynamic and attractive performances



Figure 3: The drumblek group "Gadalisa" performing with great joy in the Pacasila Salatiga field

not only serve as a means of visual and auditory entertainment, but also facilitate the active participation of the community in local cultural life.

Interviews with key informants, including community leaders and cultural event organizers, confirmed that drumblek's presence increased the enthusiasm and engagement of citizens. Many state that drumblek is a symbol of communal joy that is able to create a space for intergenerational interaction. This is in line with Rahmawati and Sabardila (2023), who note that drumblek plays a significant role as an inclusive and participatory cultural representation.

In addition to the entertainment function, drumblek also has an important role in the community-based cultural education process. Observation of training activities that are carried out regularly every week show that this activity is an informal learning space for the younger generation. The exercises are carried out in a gotong-royong, involving a collaborative process in making musical instruments, arranging compositions, and preparing choreography. This activity reflects participatory educational practices that are full of the values of solidarity, collective responsibility, and technical creativity.

Interviews with coaches and members of the teenage age group revealed that involvement in drumblek provided a meaningful social learning experience. They learn discipline, teamwork, and artistic skills in a fun and non-hierarchical context. This reinforces Spradley's (2006) view that culture can be an arena of education through contextual processes of participation and social interaction.

Quantitative data from the interview results showed that 90% of the informants stated that drumblek promoted the spirit of mutual cooperation and strengthened the bonds of brotherhood between citizens. These findings show that the education instilled through drumblek is not only technical, but also ethical and social, contributing to character building and collective solidarity.

The two functions do not run separately, but support each other. The educational process of rehearsals is the foundation for the quality of the performance that is highly appealing. Instead, the show's popularity strengthens members' motivation to keep learning and innovating. Thus, drumblek creates a cultural ecosystem that allows for value transfer, local cultural reproduction, and social capital strengthening in the midst of a multicultural urban society such as Salatiga.

3.3. Strengthening Local Cultural Identity

In the context of a multicultural urban culture such as Salatiga, drumblek has transcended its role as a performing art and has evolved into a symbol of local identity. Based on data triangulation analysis that included participatory observation at urban cultural events, interviews with art actors and local government officials, as well as visual documentation, it was identified that drumblek functions as a medium for articulating cultural identity that is dynamic and open to negotiation of meaning.

Drumblek became a symbol of communal pride. One of the indicators of strengthening local identity is the presence of drumblek in official celebrations that are institutional. Documentation of the activity on April 20, 2024, during the peak of the Salatiga Anniversary commemoration, shows that drumblek was displayed in a strategic position as the opening of the series of events. This position is not only ceremonial, but also symbolic, signifying that drumblek has gained *cultural legitimacy* from the government and society as an authentic representation of Salatiga culture.

Interviews with representatives of the Cultural Office stated that the selection of drumblek as an icon of the city's event was not just an artistic decision, but a form of affirmation of local arts that grew from grassroots communities. In this context, drumblek became a symbol of collective pride, as he was born, grew and developed organically in the local environment. This phenomenon shows the internalization of local values in the cultural identity of citizens, where drumblek is not only shown, but also lived as part of a shared narrative.

In addition to being a symbol of communal pride, drumblek also functions as a process of negotiating cultural meaning. The uniqueness of drumblek lies in its ability to creatively blend traditional and

modern elements. The folk percussion music that is at the root of drumblek represents the values of locality, affordability, and community participation. Meanwhile, its form of presentation that resembles a modern carnival with attractive choreography and costumes shows an openness to contemporary aesthetics. This synergy makes drumblek a space for negotiating cultural meaning, where local identity is dialogically reconstructed.

In the perspective of Hall's (1997) theory of cultural representation, identity is not a fixed entity, but rather the result of a cultural process that is constantly negotiated in social space. Drumblek reflects this process through the adaptation of form and value, without losing its local roots. Observation of drumblek's performance in the public space shows a spirit of innovation that still respects community values, such as mutual cooperation, egalitarianism, and solidarity.

Interviews with the coaches and members of the drumblek group also indicate a collective awareness to maintain a balance between preservation and renewal. The actors actively interpret drumblek not only as a performing art, but as a "cultural language" that articulates the identity of the people of Salatiga in the midst of globalization and homogenization of popular culture.

The presence of drumblek in the cultural landscape of Salatiga is proof that local identity is not static or essentialistic, but productive and performative. It is formed through social practices, institutional recognition, and the negotiation of values between tradition and modernity. Drumblek is not only a tool of cultural expression, but also an arena where the meaning of locality is constructed, negotiated, and disseminated.

Thus, drumblek serves as a cultural signifier that connects collective memory, aesthetic expression, and the socio-political dynamics of urban society. It represents Salatiga's open, creative, and rooted identity in community values, making it not only a cultural heritage, but also a cultural strategy in responding to the changing times.

4. Conclusions

Drumblek as a percussion music art based on used materials has undergone a significant transformation in the form of performance, socio-cultural function, and its symbolic role in the local identity of the Salatiga community. From the practice of street music, drumblek evolved into a carnival performing arts with complex instrumental innovations, choreography, and visual aesthetics, while serving as a community-based cultural education space that instills the values of mutual cooperation, creativity, and intergenerational solidarity.

The transformation was not fully accepted homogeneously, as some members of the community showed resistance and a tendency to maintain traditional forms that were considered more authentic. These dynamics reflect the ongoing negotiation process between the preservation of tradition and adaptation to modernity in the context of a multicultural city. Thus, drumblek is present not only as an artistic expression, but as an adaptive, participatory, and cultural strategy that plays an important role in strengthening social cohesion and affirming the collective identity of the Salatiga community.

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