

Awakening of self-existence in the Covid-19 pandemic through "Sesaji Nusantara" as Rajut Kejut Craftivism

Sari Wulandari^{1*}, Guntur², M. Dwi Marianto^{3*}

 ¹Visual Communication Design, School of Design, Bina Nusantara University, Jl. KH. Syahdan No. 9 Jakarta, 11480, Indonesia
²Faculty of Fine Arts and Design, Indonesia Institute of the Arts Surakarta, Jl. Ki Hajar Dewantoro No. 19 Surakarta, 57126, Indonesia
³Faculty of Visual Arts, Indonesia Institute of the Arts Yogyakarta, Jl. Parangtritis KM 6 Yogyakarta, 55188, Indonesia

swulandari@binus.edu¹, guntur@isi-ska.ac.id², mdwimarianto@gmail.com³

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced people to minimize their activities and choose essential things to do. Apart from maintaining personal and environmental hygiene, mental health is the priority. The RajutKejut Community is a group of female crocheters who yarn bombs with crochet works. RajutKejut received an invitation from the Jakarta Biennale 2021 to exhibit their work in a public space. Their work "Sesaji Nusantara", presented a crochet installation in the form of flowers and crops arrangements, as an offering to God. Through crocheting in a quarantine atmosphere, a space for reflection and contemplation is formed. This is essential to consider that besides preserving quality intake, the body's immunity can also be increased by maintaining mental health and happiness. As a research question, how RajutKejut community through activity body by making communal crafts can create an understanding of themselves and their environment, which is an understanding that leads to the formation of mental health amid the Covid-19 pandemic. This study uses the phenomenological perception by Maurice Merleau-Ponty as an analysis method which is bodily experiences could help people to comprehend their world, particularly in the current pandemic situation. At the end of the discussion, this research shows that the pandemic conditions encourage people to look back at the past, realize their existence in present, and project themselves to plan their next steps. This can be realized by carrying out bodily activities consciously, which brings humans back to retrace their existence in the world as humans who have bodies that can 'make' to fulfill their needs, using their bodies, therefore that awareness of self and self-existence is awakened.

Keywords: RajutKejut, Craftivism, Covid-19, Self-existence

Kraftivisme Rajut Kejut: Membangkitkan eksistensi diri di tengah pandemi Covid-19 melalui ''Sesaji Nusantara''

Indonesia saat ini sedang mengalami pandemi Covid 19, dan masyarakat perlu lebih selektif dalam beraktivitas dan mengutamakan kebutuhan daripada keinginan. Kesehatan mental juga menjadi prioritas, dan perhatian lebih lanjut perlu diberikan pada masalah kebersihan pribadi dan lingkungan. Komunitas RajutKejut adalah sekelompok perempuan perajut crochet yang membuat bom benang dengan karya crochet. RajutKejut mendapat undangan dari Jakarta Biennale 2021 untuk memamerkan karyanya di ruang publik. Karya mereka "Sesaji Nusantara", menampilkan instalasi crochet berupa rangkaian bunga dan tanaman, sebagai persembahan kepada Tuhan. Melalui merajut dalam suasana karantina, ruang untuk refleksi dan kontemplasi terbentuk. Hal ini penting untuk diperhatikan bahwa selain menjaga kualitas asupan, imunitas tubuh juga dapat ditingkatkan dengan menjaga kesehatan mental dan kebahagiaan. Sebagai pertanyaan penelitian, bagaimana komunitas RajutKejut melalui aktivitas kebertubuhan, dengan membuat kerajinan secara komunal dapat menciptakan pemahaman tentang diri dan lingkungannya, yang membentuk kesehatan mental di tengah pandemi Covid-19. Penelitian ini menggunakan persepsi fenomenologis oleh Maurice Merleau-Ponty sebagai metode analisis dimana pengalaman kebertubuhan dapat membantu orang untuk memahami dunia mereka, terutama dalam situasi pandemi saat ini. Di akhir pembahasan, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa kondisi pandemi mendorong orang untuk melihat kembali masa lalu, menyadari keberadaan mereka di masa sekarang, dan memproyeksikan diri untuk merencanakan langkah selanjutnya. Hal ini dapat diwujudkan dengan melakukan aktivitas jasmani secara sadar, yang membawa manusia kembali untuk menelusuri kembali keberadaannya di dunia sebagai manusia yang memiliki tubuh yang dapat

'membuat' untuk memenuhi kebutuhannya, dengan menggunakan tubuhnya, oleh karena itu terbangun kesadaran akan diri dan eksistensi dirinya.

Kata kunci: RajutKejut, Kraftivisme, Covid-19, Eksistensi diri

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INTRODUCTION

The Covid19 pandemic struck Indonesia in March since the first case was detected in Depok on February 28, 2020, followed by more cases and a big increase was shown in the number of confirmed cases of Covid-19 (Kompas.com, 2020). The Jakarta State Government has taken the initiative to close schools and workplaces and limit public events and activities of residents to prevent the spread of Covid 19 on a large scale (known as Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar or PSBB) (Covid19.go.id, 2020). According to Aryan Torrido with COVID 19's Pandemic, there is a change in economic and health status that continues to be promoted by changes in consumer behavior. This constrains people to shift their daily consumption pattern from was previously driven by the wants to satisfy self-actualization, into the need-based consumption pattern, and adjust their behavior to be more healthy. The ability to manage stress becomes an exigency during the pandemic amid a limited social environment filled with uncertainty for an extended time (Torrido, 2021). Rifa Fauziyyah, Rinka Citra Awinda, Besral from the Indonesian Mental Medicine Specialist Association (PDSKJI) said that from April to August 2020, mental health issues in Indonesia related to three psychological problems: fear, depression, trauma. Most respondents were women between 14 and to 71-year-old (76.1%) (Fauziyyah et al., 2021). Individual immunity is often improved with a healthy mind and a pleasing mood, which will remedy hormones to figure more effectively in maintaining immunity. Consist Fransiska Kaligis, Madhyra Tri Indraswari, Raden Irawati Ismail, said that World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines stress four details in fighting stress and mass anxiety due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Some are doing a variety of relaxing and enjoyable activities to relieve stress and build a community that is a valuable source of support for overcoming the challenges faced by individuals and families (Kaligis et al., 2020).

Jakarta has a crochet community called Rajut Kejut which advocates the spirit of craftivism in their yarn bombing. The term craftivism was coined by Betsy Greer in 2007 and defined by Tal Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick, 2018). The community was founded in 2014 by five women as initiators. They are middleclass mothers, who live in Jakarta and are aware of the social issues that are evolving in society. They loved to crochet and started the yarn bombing project in Jakarta. Initially, they sent a political statement during the 2014 Indonesia presidential election. Since then, the projects involved many crocheters across Indonesia and used universal and humanity themes (Wulandari et al., 2021). They use crochet techniques to create yarn bombing with knitting yarn and responding variety of objects in public spaces. Over time, this fluid and open membership community was joined by hundreds of crochet craftsmen, and (mostly) women, from all over Indonesia (Wulandari et al., 2020).

RajutKejut received an invitation from the 2020 Jakarta Biennale organizer to exhibit its work in a public space. The international art event should be held in 2020, but due to the pandemic, it had been moved back to 2021. Jakarta Biennale is the oldest art event in Jakarta, which takes place every two years. Since its birth in 1974, by the Jakarta Arts Council, the Jakarta Biennale has emerged with a vision that the city of Jakarta needs an arena for achieving visual arts that are presented to the public (AntaraNews.com, 2009). The Jakarta Biennale 2021 theme was "ESOK" which means tomorrow. "ESOK" was conceived to touch on the various life issues within the world today: human rights, the environment, diversity, gender equality, political polarization to digital disruption (Jakarta Biennale, 2021). At the event, RajutKejut exhibited their work named "Sesaji Nusantara", which response to public open spaces in Central Jakarta.

The work of Rajut Kejut is the product of the many crocheters creating relatively small crochet modules and stitching them together into a huge art form. Modules are usually assembled at the community initiator's residence (they called it kopi darat - an *informal gathering*), to create a huge work of art placed in an open public space. Meanwhile, during all the restricted pandemics, Rajut Kejut was unable to meet up and make a yarn bombing as usual, but they did not undermine their enthusiasm for continuing the yarn bombing. RajutKejut constantly used information and communication technology not only for exchanging news but also for organizing online crochet events. They use their social media Facebook Fanpage and Instagram to invite volunteer crocheters, make publications, and document their works. Rajut Kejut invited crochet friends to do crocheting together via Google Meet and also discussed many things, such as issues on Covid 19, health tips, nutritious intake, news from sick family and friends, among sharing crochet patterns and techniques. Social media has an important role as a reference, inspiration, inviting, coordinating, documenting, and expanding the network. Without social media, it is difficult to create work of art that is made collaboratively, especially during the pandemic. In line with Fitzpatrick, we should be thankful for the online digital spaces. Social media also enables craftivists to connect with potential

collaborators, coordinate projects, invite social engagement, share patterns and projects and reach wider audiences, take part in critical conversations that help enrich the practice of craftivism (Fitzpatrick, 2018:20). This study highlights the research question: How *Sesaji Nusantara* as a collective artwork that was made during the pandemic, has an impact on the crocheters. This study uses the existence of body concepts and consciousness by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. It shows how crafting in the RajutKejut community brings joy and helps rising awareness of oneself and the environment, which is useful for boosting immunity.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method Maurice Merleau-Ponti's perceptual using phenomenological approach as the analytical method. In his thoughts, he reveals his true relationship with the world in which he or she lives. That is, through understanding the body, the perceived world, and being-for-itself and being-inthe-world. As Thomas Hidya Tjaya pointed out, Merleau-Ponty considers the body to be a human anchor in the world because human existence cannot be understood without it. Merleau-Ponty moves the body, driving human consciousness and self, always focusing on the object, including the world and others, accessing the past, recognizing their present existence, and future themselves. I believe it will be projected onto. The presence of body concepts and consciousness influences the way we understand ourselves and others, including the common world (In Tjaya, 2020:113,143). The subject of this study is the Rajut Kejut community, and the object of this study is Rajut Kejut's Craftivism. Data were obtained through interviews with female crocheters, observations of the work process, the work they created, and literature on this study. Therefore, in phenomenological studies, it is necessary to interview 5 to 25 people and obtain data from those who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

During the pandemic, craftivism helps people to maintain their sanity by creating crafts for personal joy and tranquility, individually and collectively. They make fun of each other, encourage each other, think positively, and have fun together. These enhance a positive mood. Doing craft helps physical experience to understand how are other people's worlds going on, especially during a difficult time. One can understand one's world when he or she has the knowledge and empathy for it. Through the qualities that craftivism has as an agent of change in families and relatives, it helps people lead their lives, understand themselves and their world, and maintain their sanity.

The pandemics have created very hard situations for society, and affect the mental health of the community. The body felt "trapped" at home, causing a sensation of fear and suffering due to its limited interaction with the outside world. Feelings of stress and depression arise when people cannot interact with the outside world and experience pleasant moments as they usually do. Everyone feels restless and needs personal space to contemplate, reflect on what they did, how they will be in tomorrow, and how they can recover and survive. This thought causes anxiety. For RajutKejut, ESOK as a theme of the 2021 Jakarta Biennale gave an idea for them, they need to live relinquished while preparing a better world for the next generation. It is about surviving and adapting to the conditions. It is very important to maintain the relationship with God and pray quietly as a form of emotion to reduce fear and maintain peace of mind; to thank, take care of existing gifts, be introspective, and conscious. According to Novita Siswayanti, it is called *eling lan* was podo in Javanese culture. People should always be aware and pay attention to every movement, step, word, action, action; aware of their situation, always surrender and be honest, entrust everything to God, and are ready to believe in God (Siswayanti, 2013).

Therefore, RajutKejut presented a work entitled "Sesaji Nusantara", a crochet installation in the form of flowers and leaves arrangement, as an offering to God as the owner of the universe. "Sesaji" is the means of communication of the community with the highest power and the supernatural forces that have given life and protected them, and the center of hope for the positive wishes of the community as well. Sesaji Nusantara is a crochet work made by Indonesian crocheters who are members of RajutKejut, in the form of a Grebek-style cone that symbolizes protection, unity, and hope for a better life of tomorrow.

Conceptually, the cone-shaped is the embodiment of a mountain (*gunungan*). "*Gunungan*" is composed of various crocheted flowers, fruits, and vegetables that can be found in Indonesia. Crops are generally displayed on the *grebeg* which is a symbol of gratitude for the gifts given by God through the universe. In Indonesia, flowers are often used as an accompaniment to prayers in traditional ceremonies. Fruits and vegetables are a source of food and agricultural produce, originating from the fertile soil of Indonesia and this is something to be grateful for.



Figure 1. Crochet modules for *Sesaji Nusantara* by *RajutKejut* (Source: *RajutKejut*)



Figure 2. Sesaji Nusantara, a cone-shaped crochet installation in the form of flowers and leaves arrangement (Source: Wulandari)

RajutKejut made the design of the "gunungan" with a modular system so that many crocheters could be involved in the work easily. Besides, it is a prayer for the hopes of all levels of society in the form of a mountain symbol to be given safety, prosperity, and blessing. The height of the work is 2.7 meters and the diameter is 2.1 meters. By applying the modular system to a huge work, it appeared that RajutKejut provides a variety of patterns and colors as modules, which made it possible for the crocheters to choose the modules to work on. Even all crocheters have the freedom to use the pattern to be applied to the modules as they wish. Therefore, the shapes of flowers, vegetables, and fruit in the artworks appeared with many different qualities. Modules were arranged by a color spectrum, giving the impression of "Bhineka Tunggal Ika" (diversity -

motto of Indonesia). The freedom which was given to crocheters gave their work new meaning. This is in line with Merleau-Ponty's statement that freedom shapes the sense of existence to be concrete and realize themselves as free human beings to choose, decide to act, and determine their history (Tjaya, 2020: 141).

The feeling of joy is always present in the practice of RajutKejut. This can be seen when they held *kopi darat. Kopi darat* has an important position in the practice of RajutKejut. It is the moment when the crocheters wait to meet, gather, talk, share, both stories and patterns, and even their local snacks. The existence of *kopi darat* supports the technical and personal capabilities of the crocheters. It also works as a 'me time' for the crocheters, a comfortable space to share stories without any given judgment. This is also to keep the spirit of work alive. Crochet has the free spirit of wanting to play without any judgment or prejudice, as in a peaceful childhood time.

Through RajutKejut's Instagram account, it is known that many people were taking pictures with the artwork. With multi-color crocheted modules in the form of flowers, fruits, and vegetables, they were able to share joy, and stimulated the imagination of play, both for the artist and the people who see saw the work. RajutKejut brings joy, and it was said by their members. As phenomenological research, the study was conducted by interview.

Asri, a volunteer crocheter of RajutKejut, said that she felt that crocheting, is a positive distraction, considering that during work from home, especially during the pandemic. She works through videos conference and makes reports, at home. When the workload is hectic and the deadline is pressed, she needs crocheting, as if to distract her from boredom. Ati as one of the RajutKejut initiators and facilitators accommodates the anxiety that arises over conditions in the society. Then it is materialized into a crochet artwork and creates joy together. In the situation and condition of the Covid-19 pandemic, Ati realized that her space for the movement was very limited, she could not make meetings freely. Meetings are needed so that the results of the work can be evaluated as a whole and the shortcomings of the work can be observed so that it can produce a sleek work and can be proud of.

RajutKejut is an artwork with emancipatory messages. This is said by Rini, either the initiator, that every time they want to make yarn bombings or activities, they put messages of what they think or feel into our work, especially when we look at the situation and conditions around them. It can be in the form of a quote or contained in the crochet work. The point is, that there must be a message rather than just works.

RajutKejut can be seen as a movement. This can be seen by observing the crochet works that emerged from the ideas of many individuals in the community. The ideas were translated into crochet works through a collaborative participatory creation process with the wider community, accompanied by emancipatory messages responding to social issues that were developing in the community, and completed with the installation of the work in the public space along with its coverage in the mass media. Thus, the researcher sees RajutKejut as a craftivism. The existence of messages that are present in craft further strengthens the position of RajutKejut as craftivism, Fitzpatrick said, that craftivism is present when the craft made contains a message (Fitzpatrick, 2018:3). This is manifested in the artifact (crochet work), and the artists (crocheters).

RajutKejut highly relies on working with volunteers. Not only to make the job done but to disseminate ideas. The project opened to anyone who can crochet. It is feasible to work with system modules. The module is easy to complete, even for beginners. For experienced people, it is a challenge to create works in a different way from everyday life. In the process of this work, RajutKejut also facilitates the provision of free yarn, complete with shipping costs which are handled by RajutKejut. Tata, another RajutKejut initiator, said that RajutKejut believes in the participants when the threads are sent to them. However, what has been going on so far, almost all the threads were sent back by the participants in the condition as expected. It seems to be pride in the RajutKejut participants when they are working together.

Dyah, a volunteer for RajutKejut, said that she was proud to be part of this community that promotes her self-fulfillment, inner satisfaction, happiness, and pride. The mind is positive, more skillful, and agile. Sisca, another volunteer, wants to be creative in a simple yet meaningful way. Although she realized that she is not very good at crochet, she tries to make a meaningful work that many people can enjoy. Even though her work was small, they appreciated it. She felt the impact on her, more patient and willing to compromise because she faced various human characters in RajutKejut. It was an exciting thing for her. Asri said that crocheting activities will not fulfill one's basic needs such as money, but it gives the higher need which is self-actualization. People feel the impact of self-actualization, because of the existence of the self. By crocheting, being published, and getting recognition from others, most people will become delighted. That is an immaterial reward that makes people happy and will do it again, people will repeat the action over and over again. With RajutKejut, crocheters get the pleasure, a sense of belongingness, and that our work, our aspirations are recognized. This is very closely related to selfactualization. In line with what Tata said, this is activism in the form of creating a sense —of pride and joy— the passion, not just pushing to produce hand-made works together.

RajutKejut's works began because it was inspired by the intention of making collective crochet work. Therefore, this work is the result of the aesthetic expression when the crocheters react to social issues. The meaning depicted in the work, and the work itself is the external existence of the meaning. This condition can be explained by Merleau-Ponty's opinion that the crochet hook has a body to interact with the world, perceive the world, and express itself with various gestures. Merleau-Ponty argues that the body is not a tool attached to oneself so that one can use it for any purpose, so can be involved in the world. The body is a way of expressing thoughts, feelings, hopes, and desires (Tjava, 2020:137).



Figure 3. *Sesaji Nusantara* was located on the roof of the small police station (Source: Wulandari)

The work of *Sesaji Nusantara* occupied a police post building in a park at the Cikini Raya intersection in front of Menteng Huis. Ocula Magazine explains *Sesaji Nusantara* as *tumpeng* in this work: *Tumpeng* is a dish that many Indonesians make, consisting of various dishes around a cone-shaped mound of rice that imitates the shape of a mountain, a symbol of life, prosperity, and the harmony of nature. This *Tumpeng* by RajutKejut is located on the roof of the police post, a small police station commonly found at the intersection of major roads in Indonesia, namely on the main Cikini Raya road opposite the post office (<u>Ocula.com, 2021</u>). The Jakarta Biennale created a short profile of this work and appeared on their Instagram account: RajutKejut proves that crochet works can make a difference in public spaces. This work is entitled *Sesaji Nusantara*. It takes the form of a cone as a shared expression of gratitude and introspection (Jakarta Biennale 2021).

CONCLUSION

RajutKejut always opens invitations to the wider community, especially crocheters in Indonesia, both in groups and individually. With this invitation, RajutKejut expanded its network and opened a new set of social relationships. RajutKejut consists of many crocheter profiles with different backgrounds, characters, talents, and tastes. With the spirit of collaboration to create a huge artwork completely, every submitted work is accommodated by the initiator. All of these compliments, enrich, and make the work unique. Defects contained in the artworks are displayed as human works. The gratitude given fosters the crocheter's enthusiasm for the ability to build and increase self-confidence. They have a spirit of "unity".

Each project has moments that represent an intense and enjoyable experience for the participants, which creates new social realities and collective memories. They continue to build an inner bond and a sense of unity among the crochet people. The disappointment when work is lost in public is not so deeply felt. This was understood by participants who knew the characteristics of the work as street art and was based on the crochet craftsman's attitude of prioritizing work processes that were done playfully and made the work enjoyable. Others have shown their position as offerings to the community. With the support of social media, you can still enjoy the work, especially the name of the knitting that imprints your identity. Rajut Kejut has a character called "enjoy".

Experiencing a pandemic with crocheting activities in a quarantine atmosphere is a source of thought. Contemplation guides people to look back, recognize the present, and project themselves to move toward the future. It creates a space, Through conscious work in physical activity, people will realize that they can "create" their needs and desires, awaken their self-awareness and self-existence, and deserve it. Discover it. It shows confidence that they can live in their world. Doing in the community stimulates confidence that ones are not alone. Many people value their existence and value themselves. Being in the world allows you to continue working with peace of mind. Consistent with what Merleau Ponty says, emotions can create self-existence.

Craftivism in pandemics helps maintain mental health by individually gathering creative work for personal joy and peace. Therefore, through emotional sharing, there is a connection between crocheters, mutual encouragement, and actively reflecting on strengthening the positive spirit of joy. The sense of unity of the RajutKejut community comes through a collaborative process with a spirit of mutual support and encouragement. Crocheters become comfortable more with themselves because they understand more of the world in which they live. One can understand his world when he has the knowledge and experiences it. Through the quality of craft, it can help people live their days, understand themselves and their world, and feel emotionally stable.

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