

Aesthetics of the Cowongan Dance at Sanggar Sekar Shanty Banjarnegara

Dian Wardani Putri^{1)*}, Muhammad Jazuli²⁾

^{1,2)} Dance Arts Education, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author

Email : dianwardaniputri17@students.unnes.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the aesthetics in the Cowongan Dance by Gading Nadaswara Kemilau Banyu Biru. Cowongan dance has its own uniqueness and specifically has never been studied regarding its aesthetics so researchers are interested in conducting research. This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach with data collection techniques, namely observation, in-depth interviews and document review. The analysis was carried out using aesthetic theory which includes form, weight or content, and appearance. The results of this research show that aesthetics seen from the form side, the Cowongan Dance has a unique form of presentation with ritual-themed choreography as a development of creative dance works. Judging from its weight, the Cowongan Dance contains a magical atmosphere and a message of preserving the traditions of the local community. In terms of appearance, this dance is presented with dynamic choreography supported by movements, unique props, make-up and clothing, as well as musical accompaniment that strengthens the meaning of the Cowongan Dance. This research reveals the aesthetic values created from local community traditions through the creativity of the younger generation to preserve them.

KEYWORDS

Cowongan Dance
Dance Aesthetics
Ritual Choreography
Traditional Dance
Cultural Preservation

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INTRODUCTION

The Cowongan Dance is a choreographic interpretation of the Cowongan tradition, a rain-invocation ritual practiced by communities in Banyumas and its surrounding regions during prolonged dry seasons. Originally created by Gading Nadaswara Kemilau Banyu Biru as a solo dance, the work was later developed into a group dance and performed at the Central Java Cultural Park (Taman Budaya Jawa Tengah/TBJT) in Solo. Subsequently, the dance became part of the teaching repertoire at Sekar Shanty Art Studio in Banjarnegara. As a creative reinterpretation of ritual tradition, the Cowongan Dance represents not merely a performative adaptation of an existing cultural practice, but also a complex artistic construction that integrates traditional values, contemporary choreography, and aesthetic innovation.

The Cowongan tradition itself functions as a communal ritual aimed at invoking rainfall during times of environmental crisis, particularly drought. Historically, the ritual involves symbolic actions, ritual objects, offerings, and the chanting of mantras believed to summon supernatural beings associated with rain. Within this cultural framework, Cowongan is not only a spiritual practice but also a social mechanism that reinforces collective identity, cosmological beliefs, and the relationship between humans and nature. When such a tradition is transformed into a stage performance, it undergoes a process of reinterpretation that raises important questions regarding meaning, representation, and aesthetic transformation. The

Cowongan Dance thus occupies an intersection between ritual and performance, tradition and creativity, continuity and innovation.

The Cowongan Dance was choreographed by Gading Nadaswara Kemilau Banyu Biru, who at the time of its creation was only fifteen years old. Her position as the youngest choreographer involved in developing a dance rooted in local ritual tradition highlights the creative agency of the younger generation in engaging with and preserving cultural heritage. This fact is particularly significant in contemporary cultural discourse, where traditional practices are increasingly threatened by modernization, globalization, and changing social values. The sustained presence of Cowongan Dance in art festivals, dance competitions, and educational settings at Sekar Shanty Art Studio demonstrates its relevance not only as a performance work but also as a medium of cultural transmission and pedagogical practice.

From an academic perspective, Cowongan Dance presents a compelling object of study, especially in relation to aesthetic inquiry. While Cowongan as a ritual tradition has attracted scholarly attention, existing studies have largely focused on its sociocultural existence, ritual functions, and transformation in the context of modernization. Previous studies on Cowongan have predominantly approached it as a ritual and sociocultural practice, emphasizing its function, continuity, and transformation in the context of modernization. While such research provides important insights into the persistence of Cowongan as a living tradition, it tends to overlook the artistic and aesthetic dimensions of its choreographic reinterpretation. In particular, Cowongan Dance as a staged performance has not yet been systematically examined as an aesthetic construction that integrates form, meaning, and presentation. This gap indicates the need for an aesthetic-oriented study that moves beyond ritual analysis and situates Cowongan Dance within the discourse of dance aesthetics and performance studies. However, such studies do not address Cowongan Dance as an artistic product in its own right, nor do they analyze the aesthetic dimensions of its choreographic realization. Consequently, there remains a significant research gap concerning how Cowongan tradition is aesthetically reconstructed and articulated through dance performance.

This study seeks to address that gap by focusing on the aesthetic values embodied in Cowongan Dance as choreographed by Gading Nadaswara Kemilau Banyu Biru. Rather than examining Cowongan solely as a ritual or ethnographic phenomenon, this research positions Cowongan Dance as an artistic text that can be critically analyzed through aesthetic theory. By doing so, the study contributes to broader discussions in dance studies, performance studies, and cultural aesthetics regarding how traditional rituals are transformed into staged performances and how aesthetic meaning emerges from such transformations.

Aesthetics, as a branch of philosophy and art theory, concerns itself with questions of beauty, perception, and artistic experience. It examines both natural beauty and human-made artistic forms, emphasizing how aesthetic value is produced, perceived, and interpreted. In the context of dance, aesthetics plays a crucial role in understanding how movement, music, costume, and staging coalesce to create meaning and evoke sensory and emotional responses. According to Djelantik (1999), the aesthetic structure of an artwork comprises three fundamental aspects: form (appearance), content or substance, and presentation. These aspects provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing artistic works, particularly in performance-based arts such as dance.

Form (appearance) refers to the observable and perceptible elements of a dance, including movement vocabulary, spatial design, costume, makeup, and musical accompaniment. In dance, form is closely related to choreographic structure and visual composition, shaping how the work is perceived by the audience. Content or substance

relates to the ideas, emotions, atmosphere, and messages conveyed through the dance. Djelantik identifies three components of content: atmosphere (mood), which reinforces emotional impressions; ideas or concepts, which reflect the choreographer's creative vision; and messages, which communicate values or meanings to the audience. Presentation, on the other hand, concerns the realization of the dance in performance, encompassing the dancers' talent, technical skill, and the supporting media such as props, costumes, and stage settings.

The importance of aesthetics in dance performance becomes particularly pronounced when the dance originates from tradition. Traditional dances often embody symbolic meanings, ethical values, and social functions that extend beyond entertainment. As Jazuli (2015) argues, understanding the aesthetic dimension of traditional dance is essential because it enables audiences and scholars to grasp not only how the dance looks, but also what it represents within its cultural context. Aesthetic value in art is not solely determined by visual appeal; it is also experienced emotionally and sensorially, generating what Astini and Utina (2007) describe as an integrated appreciation of the artwork's wholeness. Similarly, Jazuli (2021) emphasizes that aesthetic experience in dance arises from the interaction between movement, rhythm, and the viewer's perceptual and emotional responses.

In the case of Cowongan Dance, aesthetic analysis becomes a means of understanding how ritual elements—such as mantras, symbolic movements, and ritual properties—are transformed into choreographic components that function within a performance setting. This transformation involves creative decisions that reshape ritual practices into artistic expressions without entirely detaching them from their original cultural meanings. Therefore, examining the aesthetics of Cowongan Dance is not merely an exercise in formal analysis; it is also an exploration of how cultural memory, tradition, and creativity intersect in contemporary dance practice.

This research focuses on analyzing the aesthetic values formed through the various aspects of Cowongan Dance as performed and taught at Sekar Shanty Art Studio, Banjarnegara. These aspects collectively construct the dance as a coherent artistic work. To achieve this objective, the study employs Djelantik's aesthetic theory, which encompasses form, content or substance, and presentation. Through this framework, the research seeks to provide a systematic and comprehensive analysis of Cowongan Dance, highlighting how its aesthetic qualities emerge from the interaction between choreography, ritual tradition, and performance practice. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to international scholarship on dance aesthetics by offering a nuanced examination of a locally rooted yet artistically innovative dance work.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design with a descriptive qualitative approach, combined with an aesthetic–choreographic perspective to examine Cowongan Dance as an artistic and performative phenomenon. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the data generated in this research are predominantly narrative, interpretative, and contextual in nature, requiring close engagement with the creators, practitioners, and performance context of the dance. Rather than measuring variables quantitatively, this study seeks to understand meanings, aesthetic structures, and artistic intentions embedded in the choreography.

The aesthetic–choreographic approach adopted in this study is grounded in the view proposed by Murgiyanto (1983), who argues that choreographic analysis should focus on the internal structure of dance, including both primary and supporting elements. The primary

elements of dance comprise movement as it relates to space, time, and energy, while the supporting elements include musical accompaniment, makeup and costume, performance space and timing, lighting design, and properties (Putri et al., 2023). Through this approach, Cowongan Dance is examined not merely as a cultural artifact, but as a choreographic composition shaped by aesthetic decisions and performative strategies.

To analyze aesthetic values, this study employs Djelantik's aesthetic theory, which conceptualizes aesthetics through three interrelated aspects: form (appearance), content or substance, and presentation. The aspect of form focuses on visible and audible elements of the dance, such as movement patterns, costume design, musical structure, and stage arrangement. Content or substance refers to the atmosphere, ideas, and messages conveyed through the dance, while presentation emphasizes the realization of the dance in performance, including the dancers' technical skills, expressive qualities, and the use of supporting media. This theoretical framework provides a systematic lens for interpreting how aesthetic meaning is constructed and communicated in Cowongan Dance.

Data collection was conducted using three primary techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observational data were obtained through direct observation of Cowongan Dance performances, focusing on choreographic structure, movement vocabulary, use of space, interaction between dancers, and the integration of music, properties, and stage elements. Observations were carried out during rehearsals and performances to capture both the intended choreographic design and its realization in practice.

Interviews were conducted to enrich and validate observational findings. The primary informants in this study were the choreographer of Cowongan Dance and the founder of Sekar Shanty Art Studio, both of whom possess in-depth knowledge of the dance's creative process, conceptual background, and performance practice. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, allowing the researcher to explore predetermined themes—such as artistic motivation, choreographic decisions, and aesthetic considerations—while also providing flexibility for informants to elaborate on relevant experiences and perspectives. In line with Handini et al. (2019), interviews in this study functioned as a dialogical process aimed at obtaining detailed and reflective information through direct interaction between the researcher and the informants.

Documentation served as a complementary data source and included photographs, video recordings of performances, rehearsal footage, and archival materials related to Cowongan Dance. These documents enabled repeated examination of movement sequences, spatial patterns, costume details, and musical accompaniment, thereby supporting a more thorough and accurate analysis.

To ensure data credibility, this study employed triangulation of sources, techniques, and time. Information obtained from observations was cross-checked with interview data and documentation, while data collected at different times were compared to identify consistency and variation in performance practice. Data analysis was conducted using an interpretative analytical framework informed by Adshead's dance analysis model, which emphasizes systematic description, interpretation, and evaluation of dance works. Through this process, the collected data were organized, interpreted, and synthesized to reveal the aesthetic structure and artistic significance of Cowongan Dance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Cowongan Dance by Gading Nadaswara, the Mirilu of Banyu Biru

This Cowongan Dance is an interpretation of the Cowongan tradition in Banyumas. The Cowongan tradition is a ritual performed by the Plana people of Banyumas during the long dry season. This tradition is a ritual to ask for rain. The ritual procession is believed to summon the angels who bring rain. The Cowongan tradition is held every Friday night, beginning with Friday Kliwon. The ritual begins at a house with a door under the pompok on Wednesday Pon night. The stolen siwur is stuck in a banana tree for seven days and seven nights of meditation, until it is retrieved on Friday Kliwon. Then, the props are decorated with irus or siwur made from coconut shells decorated with tassels for hair, and smeared with charcoal to resemble a human. The ritual includes offerings of incense, telon flowers, and traditional snacks. The ritual begins with the right hand holding the decorated coconut shell prop and singing a song or mantra as a prayer. After the ritual, a slametan (prayer offering) is held and the property is thrown into the Serayu River. This information and description aligns with the studio founder's statement, stating, "The Cowongan tradition originated in the Plana area of Banyumas, where I lived before moving to Banjarnegara. The Cowongan tradition is a prayer for rain, usually performed during the dry season. It began with stealing siwur (a kind of rain offering) from the homes of three randa telon (a widow's house) or widows with pompok (a widow's house) on Wednesday Pon night. The siwur is then placed on a plantain tree for meditation and retrieved on Friday Kliwon (Kliwon Friday)" (Yusmanto, July 5, 2025).

Cultural traditions of ancient communities can be preserved through works of art for future generations to understand. In other words, dance can symbolize the preservation of tradition. Accordingly, artistic aesthetics can be created through the role of dance in ritual contexts. The role of dance in rituals is also interpreted as a form of communication, a contribution to the preservation of tradition, and a force for preserving tradition, which serves as a community's identity and identification (Savchyn, 2023). Likewise, the Cowongan Dance preserves the Cowongan tradition through creativity in creating dance works. The Dadi Rongeng dance, a traditional Cowongan dance, was created in 2009 by Ibu Santy, and performed online on national television. At that time, the movements used Banyumasan style, with three dancers accompanied by live Banyumasan calung music. The costumes and makeup were simple, and the setting was an open-air stage, which at the time was housed at the Sekar Santy Studio in Banyumas, before moving to Banjarnegara. The Sekar Shanty Art Studio, located at Jl. Krajan No. 5, Karangjati Village, RT 02 RW 03, Susukan District, Banjarnegara Regency, was established in 2005 by Mr. Yusmanto and Mrs. Susanty.

Gading Nadaswara Kemilau Banyu Biru, the daughter of the founders of the Sekar Shanty Studio, demonstrated her talent for dancing from a young age, leading her to follow in her parents' footsteps as artists. One of his works is the Cowongan Dance, which at that time Gading was 15 years old and still a 2nd grade student at SMA Negeri 1 Purworeja Klampok majoring in science. It was inspired by a unique tradition that he had previously seen since childhood, namely the Cowongan tradition which at that time was carried out by his grandmother. This information or description is in accordance with the results of an interview with the Cowongan Dance choreographer who stated that "When I was little I liked to see my grandmother doing the Cowongan ritual, so I was interested in creating a work from the Cowongan tradition" (Gading, interview July 5, 2025) which was added to the statement of the founder and administrator of Sanggar Sekar Shanty who said that "Coincidentally, Mbah Gading or Pak Yus's mother was the oldest Cowongan player, the

oldest when she was still alive" (Shanty, since July 5, 2025). Gading created the Cowongan Dance with the help of his parents as the musical accompaniment and costume designer.

The dance creator was interested in creating a development that resulted in this Cowongan Dance work because he saw the work that his parents created in the past, namely the Dadi Ronggeng Dance which also tells the Cowongan Tradition with a different arrangement. The creator was interested in developing the dance into a different arrangement with the same background. The creator's background, who had seen the Cowongan tradition from his grandmother since childhood, who happened to be the oldest cowongan player in ancient times, until the creator was 15 years old and saw the work of his mother entitled the Dadi Ronggeng Dance, then the creator developed it into a Cowongan Dance work which at that time was first used for the FLS2N competition representing his school in 2022. At that time the dance was still in the form of a solo dance due to the needs of the competition, in the end the creator began to develop it again into a group dance work which at that time was first used for the Central Javanese Art Charm event at the Central Java Cultural Park (TBJT) in 2022 with a more structured presentation pattern with a longer flow and duration. This information is based on an interview with the Cowongan choreographer, who stated, "I was actually attracted to Ibu's work, the Dadi Ronggeng Dance. The Dadi Ronggeng Dance also captures the background of the Cowongan tradition. I wanted to develop Ibu's work into my own. It also captures all the ritual processes of the Banyumas people, who were suffering from the long dry season." (Gading, interview, July 5, 2025).

Gading's Cowongan Dance tells the story of a community that initially lived peacefully and happily until suffering struck due to the drought that struck Banyumas and its surrounding areas. Ultimately, the community performed a traditional ritual believed to help them through this difficult time. The Cowongan Dance depicts the Cowongan procession, with movements and props used, and even mantras chanted by the dancers to summon angels who are believed to bring rain. Ultimately, after performing the ritual, the community experienced the rain again, filled with blessings and happiness. This description aligns with information from the choreographer, who stated, "I was interested in capturing stories from the Banyumas community, from children playing, to the aridity, and then teenagers. I finally came up with the idea to create the Cowongan Dance. It was actually developed as an individual FLS2N dance in 2022" (Gading, interview, July 5, 2025). The creator had previously created a shorter individual version of the Cowongan Dance for the competition.

Gading Nadaswara's Cowongan Dance, "Kemilau Banyu Biru," represents the preservation of Banyumas's nearly extinct Cowongan tradition. This dance makes the Cowongan tradition easier to understand because the longer version has a clear storyline and several meaningful movements that are easily understood. This dance is performed by teenagers, adults, and children through competitions and other arts events, successfully preserving the Cowongan tradition, which is appreciated not only by the people of Banyumas and Banjarnegara. In line with the purpose and meaning of the Cowongan Dance, the creator stated that "The Cowongan tradition is nearly extinct, so it's even more interesting because it's almost extinct, and now few people are reviving it. This Cowongan Dance is a way to preserve the nearly extinct Cowongan tradition" (Gading, interview, July 5, 2025).

Gading's Cowongan Dance, originally created for the FLS2N competition, evolved into a solo dance version, and then into a longer, more dynamic group version. It is now widely used in dance competitions at various levels and is also taught at the Sekar Shanty Studio, using a solo version. Most dancers range from teenagers to adults. The Cowongan Dance is performed according to the needs of the event, and will continue to be developed and reimagined to suit the needs of the event. This aligns with an interview with the creator of

the Cowongan Dance, who stated that "The Cowongan Dance is performed depending on the event and will then be further reimagined to suit the needs" (Gading, interview, July 5, 2025).

The Aesthetics of the Cowongan Dance by Gading Nadaswara, "Kemilau Banyu Biru"

The aesthetics of the Cowongan Dance utilizes Djelantik's (1999) aesthetic theory combined with the thoughts of Jazuli (Media Perkulahan Estetika, 2024). Aesthetics is a science in which everything deemed beautiful is considered beautiful. Everything studied in aesthetics can be felt and can evoke a sense of beauty in the viewer (Djelantik, 1999). According to Djelantik's (1999) book, "A Preface to Aesthetics," the aesthetic elements contained in art or other objects contain fundamental aspects that can be explored more deeply to discover beauty. These three fundamental aspects are form or appearance, substance or content, and appearance or presentation. The aesthetics of the Cowongan Dance can be seen from the form, namely the structure encompassing the form of the Cowongan Dance performance and the structure that forms the Cowongan Dance. The substance or content encompasses the atmosphere, ideas, and messages contained in the Cowongan Dance, as well as the performance aspects of the Cowongan Dance, which are visible to the audience.

Form

Form, in the aesthetic aspect, focuses on everything that can be seen by the sense of sight, consisting of basic forms or elements and structure (Djelantik, 1999). The form of the Cowongan Dance is everything that can be seen and heard by the human senses and can be appreciated by the audience. Form includes the performance form, which consists of the elements that make up the Cowongan Dance. The structure of the Cowongan Dance includes Integrity, Prominence, and Balance.

The form of the Cowongan Dance by Gading Nadaswara Kemilau Banyu Biru encompasses theme, movement, makeup, costume, accompaniment, stage design, and lighting. The Cowongan Dance by Gading Nadaswara Kemilau Banyu Biru takes a traditional theme, creating a magical atmosphere created by the recitation of mantras during the Cowongan ritual. This Cowongan Dance contains ritual elements that contribute to its appeal and uniqueness. This dance work, inspired by local ritual traditions, is presented in a dance performance. Both form a unified work that can contribute to the preservation of a tradition. In this regard, dance plays a crucial role through its connection to the supernatural reality of the rituals within that meaningful tradition (Bisri, 2007). The background of tradition became the central idea behind the creation of the Cowongan Dance. The tradition, which the creator has always appreciated, sparked his creative desire. The creator of the Cowongan Dance has been deeply involved with the Cowongan tradition since childhood, leading to ideas based on both personal experience and previous Cowongan dance creations.

Movement in dance is a crucial element. The Cowongan Dance utilizes creative movements and movements based on the Banyumasan style, a product of the creator's imagination. The use of meaningful and pure movements in each part of the Cowongan Dance presentation pattern depicts a different atmosphere. Meaningful movements are those that convey meaning and align with the dance's content. Meaningful movements in the Cowongan Dance are found in the opening section, which describes the dancers playing the games Seliring Genting and Petak Umpet, and in the section that describes the implementation of the Cowongan tradition. Agile and flirtatious movements depict happiness, while slow, liling movements convey sadness. The complex combination of

creative movements and Banyumasan (traditional dance) gives the Cowongan Dance a unique and varied aesthetic.

The makeup used by the dancers to create the characters in the Cowongan Dance is beautiful. The makeup elements used include foundation, loose and pressed powder, black eyebrows that match the natural shape of the eyebrows, eyeshadow with black accents at the corners of the eyes for a sharper look, shading, blush, red lipstick, eyeliner, and false eyelashes. This information is based on an interview with the dance creator, who stated, "The makeup is usually done by a team, and some do it themselves. The makeup is like regular beautiful makeup, except the black eyeshadow is used to make it more sharp" (Gading, July 5, 2025).

Costumes are used as supporting elements to reflect the characters portrayed by the dancers. The costume aspect of the Cowongan Dance, from head to toe, is worn throughout the performance to convey the characters portrayed by the dancers and ensure their understanding by the audience. The adult dancers wear a black and gold top with only one 3/4 sleeve on the right, a white camisole decorated with beads on the front, black knee-length pants, a black and gold belt, a brown and white patterned sarong, gold sash and embellishments on the right and left sides of the waist, black and gold bracelets on the hands and feet, and flower-shaped buns and earrings. The young dancers' attire includes a brown top and sarong, brown trousers, a belt, a red gold-colored rapek, bracelets on the hands and feet, and hair tied in two buns, complete with earrings. The attire can be customized to suit the performance. This description aligns with an interview with the dance creator, who stated, "The attire has no specific meaning. The style and color of the costume are usually further customized to suit the needs of the event" (Gading, July 5, 2025). The attire and makeup in dance are not merely a complement to the beautiful presentation, but must also support the dance's aesthetic value (Halima & Rahayu, 2021). The combination of colors and the styles in the costumes creates a beautiful, complementary performance of the Cowongan Dance by Gading Nadasawara, Kemilau Banyu Biru.



Figure 1. Cowongan Dance costume or clothing (Doc. Gading, 2022)

The accompaniment used in the Cowongan Dance serves as an accompaniment to the dance and provides the atmosphere of the dance. The musical instruments used are the calung, kendang, and suling as external music, while the singing of the female singer

(sinden) and the chanting of the dancers as internal music. The calung is a traditional Banyumas musical instrument made from bamboo. In several parts, the dancers recite mantras as part of the internal musical accompaniment. The mantras sung by the dancers and female singers are a form of prayer to the Creator in the Cowongan tradition for immediate rain when a long drought occurs. The mantras are sung directly by the dancers at the beginning of the small dancers and in the middle garap pattern during the ritual. This differs from the usual prayers recited in performances at the end of the performance (Soedarsono in Bisri, 2007). The Cowongan Dance mantra, according to an interview with the founder of the Sekar Shanty studio (Yusmanto, July 5, 2025), who also composed the dance accompaniment, is as follows:

*Sulasih sulanjana kukus menyan ngundhang dewa
Ana dewa nlanging sukma widadari tumuruna
Runtung-runtung kesanga sing mburi karia lima
Leng-leng guleng, gulenge somakaton
Gelang-gelang nglayoni, nglayoni putria ngungkung
Cek inceh raga bali rogrog asem kamilega
Reg-regan rog-rogan reg-regan rog-rogan
Reg-regan rog-rogan reg-regan rog-rogan*

The Cowongan Dance stage uses a proscenium stage. This proscenium allows the audience to see only from the front. Cowongan Dance is a creative dance with a traditional theme. This dance can also be adapted to the needs of the performance in the stage design used. Traditional arts typically use a circular stage or open arena. This is because it can be easily performed anywhere with simple and uncomplicated decorations (Kusumastuti, 2009). However, it still adapts to the purpose of the performance so that the audience can enjoy the performance comfortably. The spacious stage design supports the dancers' movement space with a variety of floor patterns. Beauty is achieved when a large number of dancers can master the stage layout well, combined with the varied floor patterns and dynamic movement space.

The basic concept of lighting in dance performances is often understood as stage technique, which is the arrangement of the dance space through the beauty of lighting and illumination, aimed at enabling the audience to see the choreography clearly, appearing lively, and supporting the purpose and meaning of the dance presentation (Y. S. Hadi, 2017). The lighting in the Cowongan Dance utilizes blue, yellow, and white lights throughout. This lighting enhances the atmosphere of the performance, allowing the audience to better grasp the meaning of the dancers' movements. The audience can appreciate the beauty of the dance through the lighting, which enhances the atmosphere of the Cowongan Dance.

Structure

According to Djelantik (1999), in his book "Aestetika Sebuah Pengantar" (Aesthetics: An Introduction), aesthetic elements in the structure of a dance work have three aspects: unity, dominance, and balance. Unity also encompasses togetherness; this integrity represents the wholeness of a work. This beautiful work possesses elements that are complete without any flaws, and works of art typically possess symmetry, rhythm, and harmony, reinforcing this integrity (Astini & Utina, 2007). The Cowongan Dance's movement is evident in the movements, costumes, and musical accompaniment. The Cowongan Dance utilizes a variety of dynamic, fast, slow, and medium tempos, each conveying different

meanings. The Cowongan Dance has unique costumes and is designed to suit the performance. Furthermore, the accompaniment adapts to the work's pattern, with the tempo adjusting to the movements. The emphasis, intended to direct the audience's attention to the artwork, is achieved through asymmetry, arhythm, and contrast. Symmetrical balance, which typically promotes serenity, is created to enhance the dance composition, making it more engaging (Djelantik, 1999). The emphasis of the Cowongan Dance can be seen in the movements that reflect rituals, with props and mantras characteristic of this dance. The use of movements depicts a ritual in which the dancer is possessed by an angel spirit, believed to bring rain, as a symbol of the Cowongan tradition. This is a unique attraction for the audience. In the balance aspect of the Cowongan Dance, all aspects of the dance are balanced in a continuous, interconnected way, creating aesthetic value.

Atmosphere

The atmosphere of the Cowongan Dance differs in each scene performed. Atmosphere is the main element in the weight which is the result of the involvement of time, place and events that produce conditions or situations in the work (Mhike, 2018). The Cowongan Dance tells the condition of society which was initially happy turned into sadness due to a prolonged drought until the Cowongan tradition that ends happily. The atmosphere of the Cowongan Dance is complex and flowed. In the beginning part tells the children playing creating a cheerful and happy atmosphere. In the middle part, the core part of the dance tells the prolonged drought that creates an atmosphere of sadness with the screams of the dancers. Finally, the Cowongan ritual occurs with meaningful movements creating a mystical and sacred atmosphere. In the final or closing part, it tells the situation that returns to normal after the rain, telling about happiness with agile and dynamic movements.

The idea for the Cowongan Dance stems from the creator's childhood, witnessing his grandmother perform the Cowongan ritual. He was inspired by a dance his mother had previously created, the Dadi Ronggeng Dance, which depicts the Cowongan tradition, where a dancer is possessed by an angel spirit, prompting him to create his own. This sparked the idea to develop a more complex work with a sequence of performances. This resulted in the Cowongan Dance, which lasts 20 minutes. The creator's observations are the creative ideas that drive innovation in creating a work of art. Through the appreciation of other works of art or previously observed sources, new ideas often emerge, or these ideas can manifest themselves, purely from one's own thoughts (S. Hadi & Suparli, 2019).

The creation of the Cowongan Dance conveys a message about how the Cowongan tradition, which has existed for centuries, is on the verge of extinction over time. This beautiful work conveys a message of appreciating, respecting, and preserving traditions within the community. The message of the dance is intended to be understood by the audience or art connoisseur, which aligns with the concept of "ibarat" or "advice." A metaphor or suggestion is a message from the dance creator that can be understood by the audience or art lover by observing a work of art. This metaphor helps the audience more easily grasp the message the creator is trying to convey through the dance (Hendra, 2017).

Performance

After the aspects of form and content or substance, performance is also one of the main elements in an art form. Performance or presentation relates to the tangible form of an artwork, whether tangible or intangible. In this case, what can be displayed or presented is something that can be seen or realized (Djelantik, 1999). The performance aspect in this study is the aspect seen in the Cowongan Dance choreography, related to the pattern of the

work presented, the type of work, the theme, and the number of dancers.

Choreography is the knowledge of the process of composing a dance work that produces its structure. Regarding structure, the Cowongan Dance has a sequence of presentation with a structured pattern. The opening section uses meaningful movements, depicting the community's situation, where children joyfully play ancient games like seliring genting (tiles) and petak hidpet (hide and seek). Then, a prolonged drought sets in, leading to the emergence of the Cowongan tradition. The middle section uses meaningful and pure movements, with a touch of creative and Banyumasan movements, depicting the Cowongan procession, with mantras and dancers possessed by angel spirits. The final section uses lively and dynamic Banyumasan movements, depicting the community's happiness after the rain falls.

The Cowongan Dance embraces the ritualistic Cowongan tradition, creating beauty with its characteristic Cowongan props. The Cowongan Dance uses props used in the Cowongan tradition: coconut shells decorated to resemble human faces. The coconut shells are painted white and painted to depict faces with hair-like decorations. In the opening section, the props are used by young dancers who perform while reciting mantras. These props carry the dancers around, depicting the possession of angel spirits. In the middle section, the props are used for rituals, along with tings (lamps) and plates filled with rose petals.



Figure 2. Ritual with props in the Cowongan Dance (Gading, 2022)

The Cowongan Dance is presented as a group dance, but was originally presented as a solo dance, with adaptations tailored to the needs of the performance. The Cowongan Dance is presented with a traditional theme containing elements of magical ritual. As a ritual, the Cowongan Dance is used to invoke rain in the Cowongan tradition. In accordance with this theme, the Cowongan Dance is associated with magical functions in the Banyumas community and its surrounding areas, as well as the aesthetic values that are interconnected. In other contexts with different objects of study, the primary aspect is not its aesthetics, but rather, as a ritual dance, prioritizing its magical function and symbols (Jazuli & Alam, 2020).

The Cowongan Dance, performed as a group dance at the 2022 Central Java Arts Charm (PSJT) event, involved more than 20 young and child dancers, students of the Sekar Shanty Studio. The dancers included are students at the Sekar Shanty Studio, ranging in age from children to teenagers. The beauty of the Cowongan Dance performance can be seen in the dynamic, varied patterns, creating an engaging yet engaging atmosphere. Furthermore, the large number of dancers allows for effective stage presence.



Figure 3. Cowongan Dancers at the Pesona Seni Jawa Tengah (Central Java Arts Enchantment)
(Doc. Gading, 2022)

CONCLUSIONS

Cowongan Dance by Gading Nadaswara Kemilau Banyu Biru represents a significant example of how traditional ritual practices can be reinterpreted into contemporary choreographic works without losing their cultural essence. Through an aesthetic analysis grounded in Djelantik's theoretical framework, this study demonstrates that Cowongan Dance embodies a coherent integration of form, content, and presentation, resulting in a balanced and meaningful artistic composition. Each aesthetic aspect contributes to the overall integrity of the dance, allowing it to function both as a performative artwork and as a medium of cultural preservation.

From the perspective of form, Cowongan Dance exhibits a distinctive choreographic structure that combines creative movement with Banyumasan stylistic elements, supported by appropriate costume design, makeup, musical accompaniment, stage setting, and lighting. These components work synergistically to create visual and auditory harmony. In terms of content, the dance conveys a layered atmosphere that evolves from joy and hardship to sacred ritual and collective gratitude. The ideas and messages embedded in the choreography emphasize respect for ancestral traditions and highlight the importance of preserving local cultural practices that are increasingly marginalized in modern contexts.

Regarding presentation, Cowongan Dance demonstrates a high level of artistic realization through disciplined movement execution, expressive performance, and effective use of supporting media. The choreographic arrangement, whether performed as a solo or group dance, enhances its aesthetic impact and communicative clarity. Overall, the findings suggest that Cowongan Dance not only offers aesthetic pleasure but also serves as an educational and cultural instrument that bridges tradition and contemporary creativity. This study contributes to the discourse on dance aesthetics by illustrating how ritual-based traditions can be transformed into performative expressions that remain culturally relevant while achieving artistic sophistication.

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