

When Myths Incarnate Performances: The 12th Krisnayana Performances as Cultural Discourse and Emotional Experience

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine the representation of the myth of Krishna in the performance of the 12th Kresnayana based on the play Suta Ruhara, focusing on the relationship between dramatic structure, the emotional experience of the audience and the performer, and the aesthetic transformation of performance in the contemporary social context. The research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method, including script analysis, direct observation of performances, audiovisual documentation, and in-depth interviews with actors and audiences. The analysis is carried out through an interpretive phenomenological perspective to understand affective experience as part of the production of performance meaning. The results of the study show that myths are not positioned as static epic narratives, but rather as ethical discourses that are alive and negotiated through the tragedies of Samba, Boma, Hagnyanawati, with Krishna appearing as a figure of moral wisdom and a balancer of conflicts. The novelty of this research lies in the finding that affection in performance does not function solely as a dramatic effect, but as a space for collective ethical reflection that connects myths, bodily experiences, and the social consciousness of the audience. Aesthetic transformation through the fusion of traditional idioms and contemporary performance technologies reinforces the symbolic articulation of myths without eliminating local roots. This study concludes that the 12th Kresnayana acts as a reflective cultural practice that bridges traditions, emotional experiences, and social realities, and offers a model of traditional performing arts development that is adaptive, pedagogical, and relevant to the dynamics of today's society.

KEYWORDS

Kresnayana
Suta Ruhara
Krishna Myths
Affective Experience

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INTRODUCTION

Myths in the performing arts tradition in Indonesia do not solely function as narrative stories, but as a medium of cultural discourse that contains social, symbolic, and ideological values that are constantly negotiated in the public space. In the perspective of cultural representation, Stuart Hall asserts that meaning is not fixed, but rather constructed through the practice of representation in a given social context. Thus, myths in performance can be understood as a system of representation that allows people to reread power relations, social ethics, and cultural identity through artistic practice. (Stuart Hall, 1997)

Furthermore, in the study of performance studies, the transformation of meaning in performance is explained through the concept of performativity which places performance as a dynamic event involving interaction between actors, space, and audience. Fischer-Lichte (2008) emphasizes that performance creates an "autopoietic feedback loop" that allows meaning to continue to be produced situationally, while Schechner and Brady (2013) see performance as a dialectical arena between tradition and social change. Therefore, myth-based performances in the archipelago can be understood as a space of negotiation between

local aesthetics and the demands of contextualization of the times, where traditional values are not only preserved, but also reinterpreted according to contemporary social dynamics. (Fischer-Lichte, 2008; Schechner & Brady, 2013)

This phenomenon was evident in the performance of the 12th Kresnayana, which was organized by the Blitar Regency Tourism and Culture Office on June 15, 2025. The show blends the mythological narrative of Mahabharata with a contemporary performative approach through artistic arrangements, visual multimedia, and musical compositions that combine gamelan with modern soundscapes. This strategy is in line with the findings of Fischer-Lichte (2008) who stated that aesthetic transformation in traditional performances not only changes the form, but also generates new aesthetic experiences that affect the way audiences interpret cultural symbols. Thus, *Kresnayana* functions not only as a spectacle, but as an active and contextual production practice of cultural meaning.

In the study of contemporary performing arts, symbolic transformations such as the reinterpretation of myths, the use of visual technology, and shifts in actor-audience relations are understood as a form of performative agency that expands the social function of art. Recent studies in Indonesia have also shown that myth still has vitality when mediated through adaptive and dialogical aesthetics, especially in the context of cultural festivals and regional performances. However, much of the research still places myths at the level of symbolic representation and the preservation of tradition, without examining in depth how the emotional experiences of audiences and performers are shaped in performance events. (Fischer-Lichte, 2008; Stuart Hall, 1997).

A recent literature review shows that the study of myth-based performing arts in Indonesia and the global context still tends to be fragmented between symbolic analysis and audience experience. A number of studies, for example by Nugroho (2021) who examined the ideological function of myth in traditional theater, Herlina (2022) who examined the revitalization of theater based on local spirituality, and Ramadani and Subekti (2022) who highlighted the role of myth in the formation of national narratives, generally focus on the dimensions of representation, dramatic structure, and social function of performance. Meanwhile, other studies such as Qadar Basri and Sabri (2025) in the context of festival artistic design, as well as Indar Sabri et al. (2024) in performance management, extend the analysis to the production and visual aspects, but have not explicitly linked them to the audience's affective experience as part of the construction of the meaning of the performance.

These limitations show that the integration between cultural discourse analysis and phenomenological approaches to audience experience is still not widely developed. In fact, from a phenomenological perspective, the body and emotions are the main mediums in the process of meaning. Merleau-Ponty (2002) emphasized that perception is embodied, which is formed through the involvement of the body in the space of experience, while Van Manen (2016) emphasized the importance of lived experience as the main source of understanding of phenomena. Thus, the absence of a phenomenological approach in previous studies causes the understanding of mythological performances to tend to be reduced to mere narrative and visual aspects, without revealing the dimension of inner experience that is precisely the core of performative events. (Merleau-Ponty, 2002; Van Manen, 2016)

This research departs from the development of the study of performing arts which places experience as an important dimension in the production and meaning of works. A study conducted by Yanuartuti et al. (2025) confirms that an *experiential-based learning* approach in art education is able to place the body, affection, and empathic relationships as the center of cultural learning. The contribution of this study lies in the strengthening of the paradigm

that the practice of art serves not only as a representation, but also as a life experience that shapes cultural consciousness. However, the research focuses more on the pedagogical context, so it has not specifically examined how affective experiences are formed in concrete performance events. (Yanuartuti et al., 2025)

Furthermore, the research of Qadar Basri and Sabri (2025) contributes to the understanding of visual semiotics in contemporary art festivals, by showing that artistic symbols have a strategic role in building power relations and cultural identities in performance spaces. This study reinforces the importance of symbolic analysis in reading performance as a cultural text. However, the focus of the research is still on the design and visual representation aspects, so it has not directly linked how the symbols are received and interpreted emotionally by the audience. (Qadar Basri & Sabri, 2025)

On the other hand, the study of Indar Sabri et al. (2024) highlights the managerial dimension in performing arts production, by asserting that production management strategies have significant implications for the quality of artistic expression and the level of audience engagement. This contribution is important in understanding performance as a complex system of cultural production. However, the study has not explored the relationship between the production aspect and the audience's inner experience or affective response during the performance. (Indar Sabri et al., 2024)

Based on the three studies, it can be seen that each of them makes an important contribution to the pedagogical aspects, semiotics, and performance management. However, there has been no study that integratively links the analysis of cultural discourse, artistic symbols, and the emotional experiences of audiences in a single complete analytical framework. Therefore, this research occupies a position as an effort to bridge the three dimensions through cultural studies and phenomenological approaches, in order to understand performance as a cultural event that is both representational and affective.

Based on this background, this research is directed to answer two main questions: (1) how the staging of the *12th Kresnayana* is constructed as a cultural discourse through contemporary aesthetic strategies; and (2) how the emotional experiences of the audience and performers are formed through the performative and symbolic practices of performance. This research integrates cultural studies approaches and interpretive phenomenology, so that the analysis focuses not only on narrative structures and visual symbols, but also on the affective experience of the audience as an integral part of the production of performance meaning.

Overall, this study offers a theoretical contribution by expanding the study of performance studies in the context of mythical representations and emotional experiences; methodological through the integration of cultural discourse analysis and experiential phenomenology; and practical by providing a reflective framework for the development of art curricula, curatorial strategies, and cultural promotion policies that are responsive to social dynamics and public affection.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method, because it focuses on an in-depth analysis of the performance of the *12th Kresnayana* as a cultural event that is specific, temporary, and contextual. A qualitative approach is chosen to understand symbolic meaning, cultural power relations, and affective experiences that arise in performance practice holistically, as emphasized in performing arts studies and cultural studies that place meaning as the result of social construction and . (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Denzin, 2011)

The case study method is seen as relevant in the study of performing arts because it allows researchers to examine unique and non-repeatable performative practices, as well as to uncover the dynamics of meaning that arise in a particular socio-cultural context. In the perspective of performance studies, case studies are effective for reading performance as a living event, in which bodies, spaces, symbols, and audiences interact with each other in the production of meaning. Therefore, This approach was chosen to capture the complexity of the way myths are mediated through performance aesthetics and experienced emotionally by the people of Blitar. (Yin & Campbell, 2018). (Fischer-Lichte, 2008).

The research was carried out in Blitar Regency, East Java, with the main location in the area of the *12th Kresnayana* staging on June 15, 2025, which is part of the annual agenda of the Blitar Regency Tourism and Culture Office. The selection of the location is based on the consideration that the event is a space for the production of cultural discourse that brings together mythological traditions, cultural policies, and public audiences in one performative event (Schechner & Brady, 2013).

The research subjects consisted of the main performers of the performance (directors, actors, and artistic designers), organizers of cultural activities, and selected audiences. The selection of informants was carried out through purposive sampling, with criteria of direct involvement in the creation process or intensive viewing experience, as well as reflective ability in articulating aesthetic and emotional experiences. This strategy is in line with the experiential approach to performing arts research, which places performers and audiences as the primary source of cultural meaning (Van Manen, 2016; Yanuartuti et al., 2025).

The data collection technique is carried out through the following methods: (1) Non-participatory direct observation, to observe the structure of the performance, the use of visual symbols, actor-audience interaction, and the audience's affective response during the performance. Non-participatory observation allows researchers to maintain reflective distance without being directly involved in the artistic process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). (2) In-depth interviews with ten key informants, which include artistic performers and audiences with local cultural backgrounds. The interviews are conducted in a semi-structured manner to explore subjective experiences, aesthetic perceptions, as well as emotional meanings experienced during the performance, in accordance with the principles of interpretive phenomenology (Van Manen, 2016). (3) Visual and audio documentation, in the form of video recordings, performance photos, and field notes, which serve as supporting data to read artistic details, body gestures, spatial layout, and performative expression (Pink, 2015). (4) Study of literature and cultural artifacts, including performance scripts, costume designs, property, and official documents from the organizers. Cultural artifacts are treated as symbolic texts that contain specific ideologies and systems of representation (Stuart Hall, 1997)

Data analysis in this study was carried out through systematic stages that integrate cultural discourse analysis and interpretive phenomenology, with a gradual and structured analysis procedure.

First, the data from observations, interviews, and documentation is transcribed and organized in the form of a data corpus. Next, an open coding process was carried out, which was to identify the initial units of meaning from the field data, such as visual symbols (costumes, lighting), scene structure, key dialogues, and the audience's affective response. These initial codes are then grouped through axial coding into broader thematic categories, such as: (1) representations of myths and cultural symbols, (2) power relations and ideologies in performances, and (3) emotional experiences and reflections of the audience.

This stage refers to the principle of interpretive qualitative analysis that emphasizes the construction of meaning based on empirical data. (Lincoln & Denzin, 2011)

Second, within the framework of cultural discourse analysis, the thematic categories are further analyzed to identify how the Krishna myth is represented, negotiated, and reproduced in contemporary social contexts. This analysis focuses on the relationship between performance texts (narratives, visuals, symbols) and the social practices that underlie them, with reference to the theory of representation and power relations. At this stage, the researcher interprets how artistic elements such as lighting, music, and actors' body gestures function as a medium of cultural discourse production. (Foucault & Gordon, 1984; Stuart Hall, 1997)

Third, the interpretive phenomenological approach is operationalized through several analysis steps. The researcher horizontalized the data, which is placing all informants' experiences as equivalent data without an initial hierarchy. Furthermore, phenomenological reduction was carried out by filtering essential experiences related to affective responses, such as emotion, empathy, and existential reflection when watching performances. The next stage is imaginative variation, which is interpreting the variation of experience based on social context, cultural background, and the position of the subject (actor/audience). Finally, the researchers compiled a synthesis of the essence of experience that describes how Kresnayana's performance is understood as a collective emotional experience. This procedure refers to the phenomenological approach of the body and perception as well as interpretive methods in the study of life experience. (Merleau-Ponty, 2002) (Van Manen, 2016)

To ensure the validity and validity of the data, this study applied triangulation methods (observation, interviews, documentation), triangulation of sources (actors, spectators, organizers), and member checking to key informants to confirm the results of interpretation. In addition, the researcher conducts critical reflection (reflexivity) on his subjective position in order to minimize bias in the interpretation process, as recommended in interpretive qualitative research (Lincoln & Denzin, 2011).

The entire research process is carried out by paying attention to the ethical principles of research, including providing informed consent to informants, maintaining anonymity and confidentiality of data, and respecting local cultural values inherent in the practice of performing Kresnayana. This ethical approach is important in performing arts research that interacts directly with living cultural practices. (Mark Israel & Iain Hay, 2006)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Myth as Cultural Discourse in the Performance of Kresnayana

The 12th Kresnayana performance organized by the Blitar Regency Tourism and Culture Office on June 15, 2025 presents the figure of Krishna not only as an epic Mahabharata figure, but as a representation of symbolic power, ethical reasoning, and spiritual wisdom articulated in the contemporary social context. Based on the tracing of *the Suta Ruhara manuscript* as well as direct observation and audiovisual documentation of the performance, the myth of Krishna is not positioned as an epic narrative that is reproduced textually, but as a cultural discourse actualized through contextual dramaturgical and artistic strategies, especially in its relationship to generational conflicts, leadership ethics, and human inner tensions.

This approach is in line with the view of Barthes (1993) who asserts that myths in modern culture function as an ideological representation system that is always open to the process of reinterpretation. In the 12th Krisnayan, myth is not treated as a frozen inheritance,

but as a sign field whose meaning is constantly negotiated according to the social and cultural conditions in which the performance takes place. (Barthes, 1993)

Analysis of cultural discourse shows that the staging of *the 12th Kresnayana* serves as an arena for the production of meaning that is negotiated collectively through the interaction between *the dramatic text of Suta Ruhara*, the actor's body, and the audience's response. This is evident in the conflict scenes between Boma, Samba, and Hagnyanawati, which not only present a moral narrative, but also show the complex dynamics of power relations, emotions, and ideologies. For example, in the dialogue of Samba's confession "*Kakang Prabu kula lepat, kula ndhadha sakehing dedosan...*" there is a construction of the position of the subject who is subject to the authority of power (the king), but at the same time opens up the space for tragedy due to the inequality of the relationship. The intensity of the conflict intensified when Boma, who initially showed empathy ("*masih menga lawange pangparku*"), turned repressive due to Wilmuna's provocations, leading to an act of violence that led to Samba's death. This data shows that myths are not presented as a static narrative structure, but rather as a discursive practice that contains a battle of meaning between affection, power, and manipulation.

Furthermore, the use of artistic elements such as melody songs, changes in the intensity of music (*sereng to sirep music*), and actors' body gestures in murder scenes strengthen the performative dimension as a medium for meaning production. In this context, meaning is formed not only through verbal texts, but also through body expressions and stage atmosphere. This is seen in the moment when Samba whimpers in pain and Boma experiences an emotional ambivalence between regret and anger that is displayed through the change in rhythm of dialogue and physical action. Thus, this performance presents myth as a living performative experience, where symbols, bodies, and emotions intertwine in shaping the audience's interpretation. This perspective is in line with the concept of cultural representation which emphasizes that meaning is constructed through concrete social and artistic practices, not simply through narrative structures, while being reinforced by a formative approach that places the body as the primary medium of meaning production. (Stuart Hall, 1997) (Fischer-Lichte, 2008; Schechner & Brady, 2013)

From the perspective of performance studies, this staging event confirms that myth works as a performative act that produces meaning through the presence of the actor's body, the management of the stage space, and the affective relationship between the actor and the audience. Fischer-Lichte (2008) emphasizes that performance has transformative power when it creates *a shared experience*, which is a shared experience that allows the audience to engage emotionally and reflectively. In the context of the 12th Krishna, this transformative power is seen in the response of the audience that not only follows a dramatic flow, but also responds to the ethical symbols represented by Krishna as the mediator of moral and social crises. (Fischer-Lichte, 2008)

The findings of this study strengthen the study of Nugroho (2021) who placed myths in traditional performances as a medium for articulating people's ideological values. However, the 12th Krishna shows the expansion of the function of myth through the integration of contemporary issues such as the ethical crisis of the younger generation, the conflict of desire and responsibility, and the imbalance of power relations reflected in the conflict between the characters as built in the *text of Suta Ruhara*. Thus, myth serves not only as a symbol of the past, but as a critical discourse that responds to the latest social realities, as affirmed by Eagleton (2000) in the reading of myth as an instrument of cultural ideology. (Eagleton, 2000)

In the local context of Blitar, the myth of Krishna also functions as a medium for

legitimacy of local wisdom and Javanese spirituality. The presence of Javanese songs, gamelan musical structures, and actors' body gestures based on traditional Javanese movement idioms build a symbolic relationship between Javanese cosmology and the narrative of the Mahabharata. This approach enriches the layers of performance meaning while emphasizing its pedagogical dimension. These findings are in line with the research of Yanuartuti et al. (2025) which states that tradition-based performing arts have cultural and educational potential when interpreted as an experiential space, not just an object of spectacle. (Yanuartuti et al., 2025)

Thus, the performance of the 12th Kresnayana affirms the position of myth as an active and living cultural discourse, which is reinterpreted through performance practices, actors' bodies, and the audience's emotional experiences in contemporary social and cultural contexts.

Emotional Experience of Audience and Performer

Based on the exploration of *the Suta Ruhara script*, especially the conflict relations between the characters, Krishna's position as an ethical balancing figure, as well as the dramatic structure that leads to the climactic event and observations of the audiovisual documentation of the 12th Kresnayana performance (June 15, 2025), this performance is proven to trigger an intense and layered emotional experience for both the audience and the actor. Through an interpretive phenomenological approach, in-depth interviews show that affective experiences emerge strongly in dramatic moments that are symbolically designed, especially in the scene "Krishna descends on the battlefield", which becomes the meeting point between narrative conflict, ethical symbols, and the emotional resonance of the audience.

The scene is arranged through slowed gestures, focused light on the figure of Krishna, and the accompaniment of Javanese songs with subtle and contemplative nuances, as is evident in the video documentation of the performance. This performative strategy suggests that aesthetic experiences not only work on the visual and narrative levels, but also activate emotional and reflective responses simultaneously. In the framework of phenomenology, this condition confirms van Manen's (2016) view that the meaning of art is produced through *lived experience*, which is an experience experienced directly by the subject through the involvement of the body, emotions, and consciousness. (Van Manen, 2016)

Interview data showed that the audience's emotional experience of the 12th Kresnayana performance was diverse but had a consistent affective pattern, especially in reflective scenes involving moral and spiritual conflicts. One of the audience informants (P3, female, 36 years old) stated, "*The scene was not only heroic, but touching because it reminded me of my personal struggles in life.*" This statement was corroborated by another informant (P1, male, 42 years old) who mentioned that "*when Krishna speaks, it feels like he is being counseled directly, not just watching a story.*" Meanwhile, a young viewer (P5, college student, 21 years old) revealed that the scene "*made me shut up and think about my own life choices.*" These findings suggest that emotional experiences are not singular, but rather appear as reflective responses triggered by the interaction between the narrative, the actor's body, and the atmosphere of the stage. In the phenomenological perspective of the body, this experience confirms that the meaning of performance is produced through the perceptual and affective involvement of the audience, where the body plays the role of the main medium in living the symbolic experience. (Merleau-Ponty, 2002)

This affective involvement can also be understood through the concept of *kinesthetic empathy*, which is an emotional resonance that arises from the relationship between the

actor's gestures and the audience's perception. Observations during the performance show that the use of slow movements, dramatic pauses, and controlled vocal intensity create a state of silence that strengthens the audience's focus. In this context, temporal qualities such as rhythmic slowing and gesture repetition become performative strategies that facilitate contemplative experiences. This is in line with the view that the temporal dimension in performance plays an important role in building the audience's emotional experience and personal reflection. Thus, the emotions that arise are not simply spontaneous reactions, but the result of a measurable artistic construction in the structure of the performance. (Reason & Reynolds, 2010; Thompson, 2012)

In addition to individual experiences, the data also showed a tendency to form collective emotional experiences among viewers. During reflective scenes, the audience exhibits a relatively uniform response of silence, intense attention, and minimal distraction, indicating the creation of a shared affective space. This phenomenon can be read as a form of *performative communitas*, in which the boundaries between actors and spectators become fluid and produce a collective experience that is transpersonal. These interactions are amplified by what is referred to as a (Turner, 1982) *feedback loop* between the actor and the audience, where performative energy is exchanged through body expressions, voices, and audience responses. In this context, the meaning of the performance is not only produced by the actors, but also constructed together through the audience's affective participation. (Fischer-Lichte, 2008)

The emotional experience is not only experienced by the audience, but also by the performers. Interviews with the actor Kresna (A2, male, 34 years old) show that the acting process is not understood as mere representation, but rather as a process of internalizing values: *"I don't just play Krishna, but try to understand and convey his moral message to the audience."* A similar thing was conveyed by the artistic designer (D1, female, 29 years old) who emphasized that *"every visual element is designed to build an inner atmosphere, not just visual beauty."* These findings show that the actor's body and artistic elements function as a medium for carrying cultural and spiritual values. In the perspective of performative dramaturgy, the actor's body is not neutral, but carries a cultural memory and an ethical dimension that is active in the production of meaning. (Bleeker, 2008; Schechner & Brady, 2013)

In a broader context, these findings are in line with studies in Indonesian performing arts that emphasize the importance of the affective dimension as part of the process of cultural learning and the formation of social awareness. Research by Yanuartuti et al. (2025) shows that emotional experiences in myth-based performances play a role in building empathy, value reflection, and cultural connectedness. Thus, the staging of *the 12th Kresnayana* can be understood as a communal space where individual and collective experiences interact with each other in the process of mythical meaning.

Overall, these findings suggest that emotional experiences in performance cannot be reduced to mere individual responses, but rather are the result of complex interactions between artistic structure, body performativity, and sociocultural contexts. Therefore, the affective dimension needs to be positioned as a central element in the analysis of performing arts, as it plays a direct role in the production of meaning, the sustainability of myths, and the transformation of values in contemporary society.

Local Aesthetic Transformation and Social Relevance

Based on the search for the manuscript of *Suta Ruhara*, especially the composition of the characters, the structure of the conflict, and the placement of Krishna as an ethical balancing figure as well as an in-depth observation of the audiovisual documentation of the 12th Kresnayana performance (June 15, 2025), the field findings show a significant aesthetic transformation through the encounter between traditional idioms and contemporary artistic devices. Traditional elements such as gamelan accompaniment, classical Javanese dance movement patterns, vocal songs, and Javanese symbol-based clothing combine with digital lighting, surround sound, and visual projection, creating a hybrid and dynamic performance landscape.

Field findings show that the aesthetic transformation in the staging of the 12th Kresnayana does not stop at the general statement of "the fusion of tradition and modernity", but is seen concretely in the visual and staged constructions of key scenes. For example, in the fragment "Revelation of Peace" (Resolution Round), Krishna's figure is placed at the center of the stage with a steady blue-purple dominant light spotlight, while the background displays a visual projection resembling a digitally modified relief of Penataran Temple. This composition is combined with the slowed down accompaniment of the pelog barrel gamelan and the vocals of the mocopat song with delicate nuances. Visually, the configuration creates a contemplative space that is different from previous conflict scenes that are more dynamic and full of sound intensity. These differences suggest that technology is not merely a complement, but serves as a dramaturgical device that marks a shift in meaning from conflict to ethical reflection.

Another example is seen in the climactic scene of the Samba murder (Act 3), where the lighting changes to high contrast with the predominance of dark reds and unstable light intensity (flickering), in harmony with the increased tempo of the music and the aggressive gestures of the actors. In the moment when Boma acts violently against Samba, the actor's body not only represents the action, but also builds an emotional atmosphere through repetitive gestures, vocal pressure, and dramatic pauses. The abrupt transition from high intensity to silence (*sirep*) after Samba's death creates an affective shock effect for the audience. Thus, aesthetic transformation is not abstract, but rather present as a concrete strategy in regulating the rhythm of emotions, visual perception, and viewer experience in each dramatic phase.

Based on these data, aesthetic transformation in the 12th Krishna can be understood as a practice of performative intertextuality that works through visual, auditory, and kinesthetic layers simultaneously. Tradition is not presented as a whole and fixed form, but as a source of reference that is reprocessed through contemporary technology and stage language. In this case, the use of visual projection, digital lighting, and sound design does not replace traditional elements, but rather changes the way those elements are experienced by the audience. This perspective is in line with the idea that the aesthetics of performance are relational and formed through the interaction between the body, space, technology, and audience perception, but in this context it is reinforced by concrete evidence of the constructed stage observed. (Fischer-Lichte, 2008)

In addition to the technical dimension, the aesthetic transformation also contains an ideological content that is manifested through the construction of Krishna's character. In the dialogue scene with Semar in Act 4, Krishna does not appear as a physically dominant heroic figure, but as the center of moral stability presented through minimal gestures, calm intonation, and symmetrical visual placement. The dialogue about justice that "the wrong should be punished indiscriminately" was presented in a relatively quiet stage setting, so that the audience's attention was focused on the ethical message being conveyed. This strategy

shows that a character's strength is not built through action, but through control of rhythm, sound, and visual space. Thus, the representation of Krishna as a spiritual-political figure emerges not only from the narrative, but from the overall performative design that places him as the center of balance in the structure of the performance.

These findings show that the aesthetic transformation in *the 12th Krishna* was not just a formal innovation, but a mechanism of meaning-production that connects myth with contemporary social reality. If previous research (e.g. Hidayatulloh, 2022) emphasized the moral function of myth-based performance, then these findings suggest that these functions are extended through affective and multimodal aesthetic experiences. The combination of digital visuals, voices, and actors' bodies creates an experience that is not only understood symbolically, but also emotionally felt by the audience. This supports the view that contemporary performance operates as a space where aesthetics, social experiences, and reflection of values are interconnected). (Bennett, 1997; Reason & Reynolds, 2010)

Thus, the aesthetic transformation in *the 12th Krishna* can be positioned as an adaptive cultural practice that works through concrete strategies at the stage level including visual composition, musical rhythms, and body gestures that simultaneously shape the viewer's experience and renew the relevance of myths in the contemporary social context. This approach affirms that the sustainability of tradition does not depend on the reproduction of form, but on the ability to rearticulate meaning through an aesthetic language that corresponds to the sensibilities of the times.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of *performance studies* by placing myth not as a static narrative text, but as a discursive practice that is alive and constantly reinterpreted through staging structures, affective experiences, and aesthetic transformations. An analysis of the 12th Kresnayana staging based on *the Suta Ruhara script* shows that myth works as an ethical-cosmological framework that forms the relationship between personal conflicts, moral crises, and the collective reflection of the audience. These findings expand Schechner's (2013) thinking about performance as *restored behavior*, in which cultural values are not simply represented, but reactualized through the actor's body and audience response. (Schechner & Brady, 2013)

The integrative approach between *cultural studies* and phenomenology used in this study also opens up new spaces for analysis of the relationship between local cultural symbols and affective perceptions of audiences. By referring to the concepts of *thick description* (Geertz, 1973) and *lived experience* (Van Manen, 2016), this study shows that the meaning of the performance does not stop at the dramatic structure, but arises from the experience of the audience's body that is emotionally and reflectively involved. Thus, the theoretical contribution of this research lies in strengthening the understanding that performance aesthetics, affect, and ethics are a processual unit in the production of cultural meaning (Fischer-Lichte, 2008).

Practically, the findings of this study have direct implications for the practice of performing arts education and the development of cultural promotion strategies. The staging structure of *Suta Ruhara* translated into the 12th Kresnayana shows that the learning of performing arts can be designed not only as a technical exercise, but as a space for reflection on moral and cultural values. This is in line with the view that myth-based performing arts have strong pedagogical potential in building ethical awareness, social empathy, and cultural understanding through aesthetic experience.

In addition, the aesthetic transformation approach applied, namely the integration of

traditional idioms with contemporary performance technology, can be a model of creative adaptation for traditional art groups. This practice shows that the preservation of tradition does not have to be purist, but can be done through aesthetic negotiations that maintain the basic value structure of the myth, yet communicative to today's audience. Thus, the 12th Kresnayana can be understood as an effective cultural strategy in maintaining the sustainability of tradition through social relevance and meaningful affective experiences. (Reason & Reynolds, 2010; Stuart Hall, 1997)

1. Mythical Representation in Staging Structure

The 12th Kresnayana performance is built on the play *Suta Ruhara* which presents a linear dramatic structure based on the mythological tragedy of the Dwarawati family. The staging flow moves through four main stages: (1) the exposition of the romantic conflicts of Samba, Boma, and Hagnyanawati; (2) complications (the beginning of conflict) through the inner anxiety of Samba the forbidden romance of Samba Hagnyanawati, and the intrigue of Wilmuna; (3) the climax of the tragedy in the form of the murder of Samba and the martyrdom of Hagnyanawati; and (4) ethical resolution through the emergence of Krishna as a figure of wisdom that marked the birth of the *Suta Ruhara* war event as a result of the collapse of the dharma.



Figure 1. Exposition of the romantic conflict between Samba, Boma, and Hagnyanawati

The first act of the *12th Kresnayana staging serves* as an exposition stage that introduces the main conflict based on the romance myth between Samba, Boma, and Hagnyanawati. Based on the attached photo visual, the scene opens with Sambba's appearance in the center stage space through open and expansive body gestures, marking the character's position as a young figure who is dominated by personal desires and ambitions. The red costume with golden ornaments and warm lighting emphasizes the character of Samba as a representation of lust, courage, and impatience, in harmony with its mythological construction in the *Suta Ruhara text*.

The conflict began to be articulated when Hagnyanawati was presented in a more static visual composition and layered with symbols of purity, as seen from the bowed body posture, reflective gestures, and the dominance of softer costume colors. In the mythical structure, Hagnyanawati is not only positioned as an object of romance, but as a value field where the attraction between worldly desires and spiritual ethics takes place. The photograph showing the close interaction between Samba and Hagnyanawati shows an affective tension built not through verbal dialogue, but through gestural choreography and visual relationships.

Boma's presence then shifted the romantic conflict into an ideological and symbolic conflict. In group photos with widened stage compositions, Boma appears with dominant posture and aggressive gestures, marking figures of power and possession. Mythologically, Boma represents a destructive force born of jealousy and masculine ego. The visual confluence of these three figures forms a dramatic triangular configuration that becomes the foundation of the next tragedy.

Thus, the exposition of the romantic conflict in Act I not only serves as an introduction to the storyline, but also as a space for the articulation of myths that are transformed into the visual and affective experiences of the audience. Through the stage, body composition, costumes, and lights, the myth of Krishna is reinterpreted as an inner conflict and relational ethics, which from the beginning has planted the seeds of tragedy in the structure of the performance.



Figure 2. The forbidden romance of Samba-Hagnyanawati, and Wilmuna's intrigue

Act II marks a shift from exposition to more complex inner conflict. In the mythological structure of Suta Ruhara, this phase represents the beginning of a rift in harmony due to the conflict between dharma and kama. Samba's inner restlessness is visualized through solitary scenes with dim lighting and red smoke, marking an internal conflict between moral obligation and romantic impulses. The bowing gesture and pressure on the chest indicate a liminal phase before falling into tragedy.

The forbidden romance of Samba–Hagnyanawati is displayed through a duet with symmetrical compositions and purple-golden lighting. The close but restrained physical distance represents sacred love that has not yet been subject to the ethical order, becoming a source of latent conflict.

Wilmuna's intrigue is present as a trigger for external conflicts. Dark lighting, red-black costumes, and aggressive movements affirm his role as an adharmic figure who exploits Samba's restlessness. This chapter serves as a liminal space, where tragedy is born not solely from external evil, but from a failure to manage inner desires and wisdom.



Figure 3. Form of the murder of Samba and the martyrdom of Hagnyanawati

Act 3 in the staging of the *12th Kresnayana* serves as a dramaturgical climax that represents the collapse of personal dharma and the failure of the ethics of power, marked by the murder of Samba and the martyrdom of Hagnyanawati. Based on the visual documentation and script of *Suta Ruhara*, this scene does not just reproduce a mythological tragedy, but interprets violence as a consequence of the dominance of kama and adharma in power relations. The stage visuals are dominated by dark red, smoke, and the aggressive movements of the Boma character representing destructive power, while the position of Samba's fallen body marks the collapse of divine moral protection. Wilmuna's role as a provocateur emphasizes the presence of discourse manipulation in the power structure, while Hagnyanawati's martial arts is interpreted as a ritual of redemption and a symbol of the disconnection of generational ethical continuity. Thus, Act 3 places myth as an active cultural discourse that affirms that personal tragedy in Javanese-Hindu cosmology always has a collective and cosmic impact, and is a prerequisite for the birth of a larger historical conflict, namely the Suta Ruhara event.



Figure 4. Ethical resolution through the emergence of Krishna as a figure of wisdom

Act 4 features a dramatic shift from chaos to ethical resolution through the emergence of Krishna as a figure of wisdom who reconstructs the dharma, not through violence, but through moral affirmation and cosmic balance. The change in the aesthetics of the stage is evident through the predominance of yellow-gold and blue colors, the more measured

movement of the actors, and the symmetrical and contemplative composition of the space, marking the transition from adharma to ethical consciousness. Krishna is presented not as a fighter, but as a weigher of values that places dharma above the bonds of blood and personal emotions, as affirmed in his dialogue that rejects partiality and upholds universal justice. In this context, the Suta Ruhara incident is not positioned as a mere explosion of war, but as a structural consequence of the collapse of the previous moral order. Chapter 4 thus affirms that the myth in *the performance of Kresnayana* serves as a space for ethical reflection and cultural pedagogy, in which war is interpreted as the result of man's failure to maintain the dharma, rather than as an ahistorical divine will.

This structure affirms the function of myth as an ethical and cosmological framework, not just a dramatic plot. Campbell (2008) stated that the myth of tragedy serves to display human failure to maintain moral balance, so that personal conflicts develop into cosmic crises. In the context of (Campbell, 2008) *Suta Ruhara*, the Samba tragedy is not only interpreted as a love story, but also a symbol of the collapse of the dharma order due to lust, incitement, and failure of moral leadership.

Each fragment of the performance contains local cultural symbols that are interpreted through artistic and musical arrangements, such as the use of tembang macapat (pangkur, monggang, bedhayan) as a marker of changes in the inner atmosphere of the characters, as well as costumes based on East Java traditions. This practice is in line with Geertz's (1973) concept of thick description, where cultural symbols are not only presented visually, but are presented as a practice of meaning that lives in social and ritual contexts. (Geertz, 1973)

In particular, the contemplative scenes involving Krishna and Semar are arranged with a composition of dim light in blue-purple shades and a relatively quiet stage space. This visual arrangement establishes a reflective atmosphere that places Krishna not as a war hero, but as a figure of moral wisdom. This strategy is in accordance with the aesthetic concept of *the performative*, where visual and spatial elements function to form the direct affective experience of the audience, rather than simply reinforcing the narrative (Fischer-Lichte, 2008).

2. Affection and Reflection: The Voice of the Audience and the Actor

The audience's affective experience in the 12th Kresnayana mainly appears in a series of scenes of Samba tragedy, ranging from romantic anxiety, reflective dialogue with Semar, to the tragic death due to Wilmuna's provocation. The interview shows that the emotions that arise do not stop at empathy for the character, but develop into a personal reflection on the themes of jealousy, power, and communication failure in family relationships. This experience is in accordance with the concept of *van Manen's (2014) lived experience, which is a meaningful experience that is experienced directly through the body and consciousness, not just understood cognitively.*

The confession of the actor who plays Krishna who stated that he "does not just play Krishna, but conveys a living message" affirms the position of the actor's body as a medium of values and ethics. In the context of mythological performances, Schechner (2013) explains that actors are in a liminal state between symbolic representation and the actualization of social meaning so that the actor's body becomes a meeting space between the mythical text and the reality of the audience.

This affective dimension can also be read through Massumi's (2015) theory of affect, which views emotions as relational energy that arises in encounters between the body, space, and events. The Samba tragedy in the 12th Krishna not only moves individual emotions, but builds a collective emotional experience that binds the audience in one shared moral

consciousness. (Massumi, 2015)

3. The Transformation of Local Aesthetics in a Contemporary Frame

The aesthetic transformation in the 12th Krishna is seen in the encounter between traditional idioms and contemporary performance technologies. Surround sound systems are used to reinforce the inner atmosphere of the characters, while visual projections including relief imagery of Penataran Temple and symbolic landscapes serve as digital backdrops that expand the imaginative space of the performance. This multimedia intervention does not replace tradition, but rather reinforces the symbolic articulation of the Krishna myth in the context of today's audience.

This practice is in line with Fairclough's (1995) view that cultural texts, including performance, are the arena of negotiation between history, power, and innovation. The 12th Krishna shows how the Javanese myth is not conservatively reproduced, but is renegotiated through the language of contemporary aesthetics without losing its basic value structure. (Fairclough, 1995)

In the context of digital culture, this approach is relevant to the thinking of Reason and Reynolds (2010) who affirm that contemporary performance functions as a multimodal space of experience, where visual, auditory, and affective perception work simultaneously. Thus, the 12th Krishna can be understood as an adaptive and reflective strategy of mythical sustainability, as well as a subtle form of cultural resistance through aesthetics.

The findings of this study enrich and expand the discourse that has been built in previous studies on traditional performing arts and their revitalization in the modern context. Some research on performance, for example, places traditional theater as a space of spiritual expression that undergoes a renewal of form without losing its ritual roots. The findings are in line with the staging of the 12th Kresnayana based on the *Suta Ruhara manuscript*, where the myth of Krishna is not reduced to a heroic narrative, but is presented as a medium of ethical and spiritual reflection through the structure of tragedy and the audience's affective experience.

This research also expands which confirms the functioning of myths in performance as an instrument of value education. If some studies emphasize the symbolic and pedagogical aspects of value transmission, then this study adds an important dimension in the form of direct emotional experience (embodied affective experience) as the main mechanism of internalizing value. In the context of the 12th Krishnaya, moral values such as self-control, ethical responsibility, and leadership failures are not conveyed didactically, but are experienced affectively through the tragedy of Samba and Krishna's presence as a figure of wisdom.

The new contribution of this research lies in the emphasis on the affective dimension of performance which has been relatively under-worked in depth in the study of traditional performance. Using an interpretive phenomenological approach, this study shows that the inner experience of the audience as reflected in empathy, personal reflection, and emotional engagement is an integral part of the production of performance meaning. This approach enriches *performance studies* based on *embodied experience*, as developed by Merleau-Ponty (1962), van Manen (2014), and Fischer-Lichte (2008), with the empirical context of traditional Javanese performing arts that are adaptive to contemporary sensibilities.

4. Research Implications and Contributions

Theoretically, this study expands the scope of performance studies by integrating the reading of myth as a cultural discourse with the analysis of the emotional experiences of the audience and the performer. These findings confirm that myths in performance serve not only as narrative structures or ideological symbols, but also as triggers for collective affection that forms a shared ethical consciousness. Thus, this study reinforces the view that performance aesthetics are procedural and relational, where meaning is born from the interaction between the actor's body, dramatic structure, stage space, and the audience's affective response. (Fischer-Lichte, 2008; Schechner & Brady, 2013)

Practically, this research makes a real contribution in several domains. First, these findings can be used as the basis for designing a value- and affectation-based performance arts learning design, where students not only learn techniques and texts, but also experience and reflect cultural values through performative practices. Second, this research offers a strategic model for regional performance production to remain contextual without losing local roots, through creative negotiations between traditional idioms and contemporary technologies (. Third, in the context of cultural preservation, the approach offered is dialogical and adaptive, not conservative-reproductive, so that tradition is understood as a living practice that is able to respond to social realities and changing generations of viewers. (Reason & Reynolds, 2010; Stuart Hall, 1997)

5. Limitations and Reflections of Researchers

This study has a number of methodological limitations that directly affect the depth and scope of the findings. First, the duration of observation which is limited to one performance cycle (June 15, 2025) causes the data obtained to not fully capture the dynamics of changes in meaning that may occur in repetitive or evolving performances. Consequently, the interpretation of the construction of cultural discourse and affective experience is still situational and cannot be compared longitudinally. Second, the researchers' involvement in post-performance interactions with audiences was relatively limited, so that wider variations in affective responses, especially from audience groups with different social backgrounds, have not been adequately accommodated.

In addition, the interpretive phenomenological approach used has the potential to produce a subjectivity bias in the process of interpreting emotional experiences. Although reflexivity has been carried out, the researcher's position as part of the performing arts ecosystem also influences the way data is read, especially in interpreting symbols and aesthetic experiences. In this context, as emphasized by Van Manen (2016), the depth of meaning in phenomenological research does depend on the researcher's interpretive sensitivity, but at the same time it opens up space for the possibility of over-interpretation that needs to be critically realized. (Van Manen, 2016)

On the other hand, this study has not integrated quantitative approaches or psychological measurement methods to map the intensity and distribution of audience affective experiences in a more systematic manner. As a result, the findings regarding the emotional dimension are still descriptive-interpretive and have not been able to show generalization patterns or comparisons between audience groups. These limitations suggest that the understanding of affection in performance is still partial and requires a more diverse methodological approach.

Thus, the limitations in this study are not just technical aspects, but show the epistemological limits of the approach used. This opens up opportunities for further research to develop mixed-method designs, extend the duration of observations, and examine performance in a more comparative and longitudinal context. This kind of approach is

expected to enrich the study of performance studies, especially in understanding the relationship between myths, performance aesthetics, and the emotional experience of the audience more comprehensively.

CONCLUSIONS

The 12th performance of Kresnayana shows that myths in contemporary performing arts practice no longer function as stable narrative representations, but rather as cultural mechanisms that actively produce meaning through the interaction between dramatic structures, aesthetic strategies, and bodily experiences in performance events. In this context, the Samba–Boma–Hagnyanawati tragedy not only represents a mythological conflict, but works as a dramatic device to articulate ethical tensions that resonate with contemporary social conditions. Krishna's presence as a balancing figure does not simply resolve narrative conflicts, but affirms the function of performance as a space for value mediation, where discourses about leadership, morality, and social balance are negotiated symbolically.

Furthermore, the findings of this study place the affective dimension as a key element in the production of performance meaning. The emotional experience that arises cannot be understood as a purely individual response, but rather as a relational construct formed through the actor's body interactions, the rhythm of the performance, and the audience's reception. Thus, performance serves as a collective affective space that allows the embodied internalization of values, transcending the boundaries of visual and narrative representation. This perspective shifts the focus of performance studies from structural analysis to an understanding of how cultural meanings are experienced, perceived, and negotiated in performative practice.

The main contribution of this research lies in the shift in the analytical framework in the study of the performing arts, namely from a representational approach to a relational-affective approach that integrates cultural and phenomenological studies. This approach opens up new possibilities in reading traditional performance as a dynamic practice that not only reflects culture, but also actively shapes social consciousness and collective ethics. In the practical realm, these findings indicate that aesthetic innovation through the integration of technology and local idioms is not just an artistic strategy, but a cultural device that determines the sustainability and relevance of performance in the midst of social change.

However, this study also shows important boundaries in understanding the complexity of performance experiences, especially related to temporal limitations of observation and the unmapped variety of audience affectation more broadly. Therefore, the development of future studies needs to be directed towards a more comparative and longitudinal approach, as well as the integration of cross-disciplinary methods to examine the relationship between aesthetics, affects, and social dynamics more systematically. In this direction, the study of myths in the performing arts has the potential to develop not only as a textual or visual analysis, but as a research field capable of explaining how culture works through lived experiences and collective practices in society.

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