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## **Aesthetic Symbols of Travesty in Ludruk Karya Budaya**

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### **Abstrack**

The Ludruk Karya Budaya art group is one of the largest groups in East Java. It still maintains the travesty in its performance. *A travesty is a form of existence consisting of a set of female roles a man plays.* It can be studied in terms of the form, symbol, and role in Ludruk Karya Budaya. The purpose of this study is related to the issues raised, namely revealing the problem, symbols, and the role of travesty in Ludruk Karya Budaya. This study uses a qualitative method. Qualitative research with the research approach used in this study is phenomenology. Data collection techniques used observation techniques, interviews, and document studies. The data validation technique uses source triangulation. Analysis was conducted through data reduction, data presentation, and data verification stages. The results of the study show the following. First, travesty is interpreted as a presentational symbol and a discursive symbol. The researcher analyzed the meaning of presentational and discursive symbols using Suzanne Langer's symbol theory. The researcher interprets the presentational symbol of a travesty in the clothes, makeup, dancing, singing, and stylizing like a woman, and the meaning of the discursive symbol is an abstraction that makes the travesty artist express an expression that can attract the audience's interest by using the appeal of a strange visual form of a travesty artist.

**Keywords:** Travesty, symbol, presentational, discursive

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## INTRODUCTION

Ludruk is one of the traditional arts in drama (Surjadi, 1992:6). It reveals stories about daily life, struggling, and so on. The story's setting is current because the stories told are everyday stories close to people's lives. Besides entertainment, this performing art also serves as an expression of the lively atmosphere of the supporting community. In addition, this art is also often used as a channel for social criticism. Ludruk performing arts have four main elements to build quality performing arts. The four include comedians, *tandak* (an actor dresses as a woman), plays, and musical accompaniment or getting. The four elements become an inseparable unit, Supriyanto (2018). *Tandak* or travesty is an essential part of ludruk performance that cannot be separated from the version. His role is one that the audience has awaited.

However, the presence of cross-dresser on the ludruk stage is an element that has existed for a long time. The emergence of besut (name of a player) ludruk starts in the early 20th century. Peacock then mentions a slapstick player who dances, sings, and tells a slapstick named besut. The dancer is a cross-dresser (Peacock: 2005). Showing cross-dressers on the ludruk stage continues to the following forms of ludruk. From the development pattern of its shape, ludruk is getting closer to a theatrical form, as seen today. Then, the cross-dresser performer plays the role of a slapstick player. In Ludruk Besut, cross-dressers become dancers. In addition, they play a role as a character in the story. Ludruk performances make a travesty to attract the audience's interest to watch it because it gives a different shape to affect the audience's sense to watch it. The graceful movements of his body shape, which is physically male, can bewitch the audience to wait for his presence on the stage. Supriyanto (2018) said that the classification of travesty divides into three: the professional *tandak* ludruk, the dual role of *tandak* ludruk, and the "cross-dresser" *tandak* ludruk.

Initially, travesty only served as a professional reference because it was only a role-play without any romantic relationship with one another. However, by the time the travesty role shifted, there was love with one another, including between artist and travesty, audience and travesty. According to Supriyanto (2018), the current ludruk has tried to include the fundamental role of women. This trend was followed by many ludruk groups in 1970, which included women as players in ludruk performances. Still, a ludruk play is considered quality if it has a beautiful travesty, a melodious voice, and character in every play performed. The role of travesty has dramatically influenced the audience's interest in ludruk performances with his body movements, melodious voice, and funny behavior, making the audience interested in waiting for his performance. The feelings and expressions possessed by a travesty in his every performance bring the audience in an imagination that can be seen directly to attract people's interest to wait for his presence on the stage.

According to Putra (2019), all forms in the art are abstracted forms to make them more visible as a whole and released from everyday use to be placed as a new use as a graphic symbol for human feelings.

The role of this travesty is considered to have its symbolic meaning, so it is needed in every ludruk performance. It can give its nuance or taste to attract the audience to wait and watch each of its performances. It is in line with Susanne Langer's thought of symbol theory presenting art as a symbol which is an objective thing in art. Art is the creation of symbolic forms of human feelings. As a symbolic form, it is presentational, present in its entirety and singly, and understood directly without going through any logical explanation. As a symbol, art refers to the ability to abstract in humans. Art as a presentational symbol has the characteristics of virtuality and illusion. Both virtuality and illusion refer to the activity of perception; however, it is through the senses and the imagination. Artworks have shapes and forms that the human senses can capture.

Humans must capture art either through visual, audio, or audiovisual. Art objects can be judged by their shapes. Artwork results from an artist's creation that has a message to convey and the artist's intended purpose (Sudaryanto, 2010:12). Based on the previous explanation, it is used to compare the similarities and differences, place the researchers in a different position, and show the novelty of this research. Later, this research would focus on how art in the Ludruk Karya Budaya group still maintains its performances travesty. Many ludruk groups exist today in various places in East Java. The Ludruk Karya Budaya group is one of the largest groups in East Java. It is what attracted researchers to make the Ludruk Karya Budaya art group the place where researchers would analyze the role of travesty in the performances he played. In the initial research data, the researcher will meet the chairman or owner who also initiated the travesty management within the group.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher is interested in making the travesty symbol the research object because they have their sign in the group. It also becomes the means to preserve culture. Therefore, they can play their roles in advancing and elevating the ludruk group and the degree of cross-dresser because they are often isolated in society in general.

## **METHODS**

This study used a qualitative approach. The qualitative research required data obtained through information and observation, and it is described verbally through words (Gottschalk, 1986: 35). The research approach used in this research was phenomenology. Phenomenological studies attempt to explain the general meaning of several individuals on their various life experiences related to concepts or phenomena (Cresswell, 2014). The following is a data collection technique according to (Cresswell, 2014) which focuses on observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials, transparently and

accurately; where the researcher is the primary key to qualitative research, which determines the design and research data collection instruments to interpret it. This research used those data collection techniques. Then, various data collected were selected based on their relevance to the research topic and taken after considering the level of feasibility and validity. The feasibility or validity test of the data used triangulation, a technique of checking the validity of the data that utilizes something other than the data to solve or compare the data. It follows the following source: Creswell Time Triangulation Method (2014: 254).

The study used a qualitative approach where the researcher used three aspects of the analysis proposed by Walcott (1994) in Creswell's book (2014: 275), namely: a. Description, b. Analysis, c. Interpretation of same cultural groups.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Aesthetic Symbol of Travesty**

A travesty is one part of the ludruk performance that has a crucial element, and the role of travesty cannot be replaced in the performances of Ludruk Karya Budaya. Travesty means parody, caricature, or ridicule in the dictionary of foreign absorption words in Indonesian (Badudu, 2009:351-352). The same dictionary also stated that travestism is an individual's tendency to dress like the opposite sex (Badudu, 2009: 351). For social reasons, female roles are played by men or vice versa in many forms of theatrical performances. The role of travesty continues to be used in some context even after the actress is accepted on stage. The famous British dramatic pantomime cast traditionally had roles for boys played by young women and men played by men for parody and ridicule. Likewise, in ludruk performances, many groups use travesty in their performances. As travesty has its charms in Ludruk Karya Budaya, they can attract the audience to watch them. When dancing, doing makeup, wearing clothes, and making voices, their body curves hypnotize the audience. This

attraction makes them have their aesthetic symbol to attract the audience to watch them, which would later be studied using the concept of Suzanne Langer in terms of presentational and discursive symbols. In his book entitled *Philosophy in A New Key* (1942), Langer said that "the function of symbols is important in the main human activity." Everyone wears emblems and symbols without much thought. It is spontaneously spread concerning other people, and its meaning and purpose are immediately captured. The basic need of humans that cannot be abandoned is the need for symbols such as food, sight, or moving places. For humans, making symbols is a primary activity. Symbols present art as a symbol which is an objective thing present in an artwork. Art is the creation of symbolic forms of human feelings. As a symbolic form, it is presentational. It means that it presents in entirety and singly and is understood directly without going through any logical explanation. As a symbol, art refers to the ability to abstract in humans. Art as a presentational symbol has the characteristics of virtuality and illusion. Both virtuality and illusion refer to the activity of perception. It is not only through the senses but also the imagination. Artworks have shapes and forms that the human senses can capture through either visual, audio, or audiovisual. The artwork shapes can judge the object of art.

A symbol is essentially the same as an "image" itself, referring to a sensory sign and a supra-sensory reality (Sunarman, 2010:15). It explains that everything that exists is a tangible symbol, visible and present in every aspect of life. Even behavior does not escape from the action of symbolism. Signs are divided into two types, namely presentational and discursive symbols (Langer, 1976:25).

Sunarman (2010:15) describes: presentational symbols are symbols whose capturing them does not require the intellect, and they spontaneously represent what they contain. Meanwhile, discursive symbols are captured using intelligence, not spontaneously but sequentially. In addition, symbols are also distinguished according to how they are used,

namely: language, ritual, myth, and music. Cassier (1992:81) mentioned that the symbolic forms are language (stories, parables, rhymes, poetry, and proverbs), gestures (dance), voices or sounds (songs, music), colors, and appearances (paintings, decorations, carving, and buildings).

The reference above is the basis for researchers to analyze the aesthetic symbols of travesty in artistic works of Ludruk Karya Budaya performances. Their roles can attract the audience to watch and enjoy the presentation of artistic works of Ludruk Karya Budaya performances both in visual and audiovisual forms. In addition, travesty has deep social values and meanings in social life that have been excluded, ostracized, and alienated from the community, making the figure of travesty in a ludruk performance have meaning for travesty's life himself. Society can accept *tandak* through Ludruk Karya Budaya performance in Mojokerto.

#### **Travesty as a Presentational Symbol**

A presentational symbol is a symbol whose capture does not require intellect spontaneously. It brings what it contains. Art as a presentational symbol has the characteristics of virtuality and illusion. Both virtuality and illusion refer to the perception activity through the senses and the imagination. Creativity is an artist's imagination of not imaginary things (material). Therefore, the artwork is different from reality because it involves the artist's imagination (Jatnika, 2014). There are pure images, even in works that do not contain imitation elements. Artworks have shapes and forms that the human senses can capture. Humans must capture art through either visual, audio, or audiovisual. Art objects can be judged by their shapes. The form of travesty is a male who wears clothes, makes up, dances sings, and acts like a woman.

#### **Travesty as a Discursive Symbol**

A discursive symbol is a symbol captured using the intellect, not spontaneously but sequentially. Langer in (Jazuli 2014) stated that

discursive symbols are symbols where modern logic analyzes statements. The principle of a discursive symbol is a particular system or rule that cannot be ignored, namely a structure built in a certain way so that the meaning of the rules can be understood. Creativity is an artist's imagination of things that are not imaginary. Artwork is different from reality because it involves the artist's imagination. Artworks, which do not contain elements of imitation, have pure images. Symbolizing the artist's vision is a process of abstraction (there is a separation process from its actual existence and has a different context). The artwork refers to as a symbol (Langer in Ritter Willy et al., 2013). All forms in the art are abstracted forms to make them more visible as a whole and are released from everyday use to be put into new uses as symbols that are expressive of human feelings. In works that contain symbolic meanings, the emotions expressed in the art are not genuine but ideas about those genuine feelings. Therefore, it is symbolic (Langer in Ritter Willy et al., 2013).

Artwork is a virtual object because it exists for sight. A work of art is an illusion because even though sight perceives its form, it does not touch its form. The virtual form of an artwork is a living form. It is called a living form because it expresses life, growth, and motion. Art as a living form can be found in all kinds of art, for example, the travesty in the Ludruk Karya Budaya performances. The discursive symbols of travesty in Ludruk Karya Budaya performances include visuals, music, motion, and verses because each of these elements has a pattern, structure, and meaning as a medium of expression for travesty artists in creating the creativity and imagination of an artist.

The travesty is one of the elements in the ludruk performance, which features a man who resembles a woman. He performs dance and singing movements to attract the audience to come closer and watch the ludruk performance. The signs and chants are carried out to attract the audience to go and approach because the strangeness, cuteness, and strange makeup become an interesting phenomenon. There is a

strong attraction when seeing a habit different from reality which makes a travesty artist attractive to the audience. Therefore, he brings a powerful appeal to the audience. This attraction makes a travesty artist look forward to his presence during Ludruk Karya Budaya performance. The difference that a travesty artist brings is the expression of his presence on stage. According to Langer, all forms in the art are forms of abstraction to make them more invisible as a whole and are released from everyday use, to be placed as new uses of symbols that are expressive of human feelings. In artworks that contain symbolic meanings, the feelings expressed in the art are not genuine feelings but ideas about those feelings. Travesty in the ludruk performance as a visual form that displays movement, singing, and conversation in dialogue is increasingly demanded by the public. The message presented can be factual because the story of ludruk performance usually uses everyday life as the theme carried by the director in presenting the show. Therefore, it is informative for the social life of the low-middle class community and can also criticize government policies that burden the people.

The implication of this art research was how Ludruk Karya Budaya group still maintains the role of travesty in its performances to preserve the culture since the first Ludruk performance was founded.

The experience that occurs in the artistic process, how a travesty practices and applies in the training process as separate aesthetic learning for travesty actors to preserve the culture that has been valid since the beginning and still maintain their position in the Ludruk performance.

## CONCLUSION

A travesty is interpreted as a presentational and discursive symbol. The meanings of presentational symbols and discursive symbols were analyzed using Suzanne Langer's symbol theory. The researcher interpreted the presentational symbol in the clothes, makeup, dancing,

singing, and stylizing like a woman. In addition, the meaning of the discursive symbol is an abstraction that makes the travesty artist expresses an expression that can attract the audience's interest by using the appeal of a strange visual form from the travesty artist.

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