

Pegon as an Aesthetic of Fragmentation in Jaranan Pegon Performance of Tulungagung, East Java

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Jaranan Pegon,
Aesthetic of
Fragmentation,
Traditional
Performance,
Ethnokoreology,
Local Genius

Jaranan Pegon is a distinctive traditional performance from Tulungagung, East Java, characterized by the selective adoption of classical elements without preserving complete narrative, musical, or dramaturgical structures. This article proposes "pegon" as an aesthetic of fragmentation, arguing that incompleteness in Jaranan Pegon should not be understood as artistic deficiency, but as a coherent aesthetic system rooted in local cultural strategies. Using a qualitative ethnographic approach, this study analyzes characters, visual properties (eblek), musical structure, and dramaturgy in Jaranan Pegon performances. Data were collected through performance observation, documentation, and interpretive analysis. The findings reveal that fragmentation operates consistently across multiple performance elements: Wayang Orang characters such as Gatotkaca, Antareja, and Antasena appear without canonical narratives; eblek imagery combines fragmented mythological symbols; musical accompaniment is structurally minimal; and dramaturgy is symbolic rather than plot-driven. These patterns indicate that pegon functions as an intentional aesthetic logic that enables the transformation of classical symbols into accessible folk performance forms. The study demonstrates that fragmentation serves as a form of local genius, allowing cultural complexity to be simplified without erasing symbolic meaning. By conceptualizing pegon as an aesthetic system, this article contributes to performance studies and ethnokoreology by offering a new lens for understanding how traditional arts adapt and sustain meaning through selective reduction.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional performing arts in Java have long demonstrated a dynamic capacity to adapt, transform, and negotiate cultural influences across time and social contexts. Rather than remaining static, these arts evolve through processes of simplification, reinterpretation, and selective appropriation, enabling them to survive within changing cultural environments. Such transformations are particularly evident in folk performances that draw upon elements of classical traditions while reconfiguring them into new aesthetic systems (Sedyawati, 2014; Hannerz, 1992).

One such performance is Jaranan Pegon, a distinctive variant of Jaranan that developed in Tulungagung, East Java. Unlike other forms of Jaranan that emphasize spectacular trance and physical excess, Jaranan Pegon is characterized by restrained movement, symbolic representation, and a simplified structural composition. This form incorporates characters derived from Wayang Orang, such as Gatotkaca, Antareja, and Antasena, yet detaches them from narrative structures and canonical storylines. As a result, these figures function not as narrative agents but as symbolic fragments embedded within a folk performance framework.

The term "pegon" is commonly understood in local discourse as deriving from pego, meaning incomplete or unfinished. While previous interpretations often associate "pegon" with linguistic or religious contexts, this study argues that, within Jaranan Pegon, the concept of pegon operates as an aesthetic principle rather than a deficiency. Narrative continuity, character development, visual symbolism, and musical structure

are intentionally reduced, fragmented, and reassembled to meet the expressive needs of local communities. In this sense, incompleteness becomes a form of aesthetic strategy rather than a limitation.

This aesthetic of fragmentation is evident across multiple performance elements. Visually, the eblek (woven horse prop) used in Jaranan Pegon displays images of horses, the head of Jathasura, and Jatayu, figures originating from different narrative worlds yet presented without a unified storyline. Musically, the ensemble is markedly minimal, consisting of limited instruments such as kenong, kempul, gong, and slompret, without the full gamelan structure typically associated with classical Javanese performance. Dramaturgically, the performance lacks a linear plot, relying instead on symbolic presence, rhythmic repetition, and embodied energy.

Despite its rich aesthetic logic, Jaranan Pegon has often been discussed only descriptively, framed as a “simpler” or “incomplete” version of more established traditions. Existing studies on Jaranan tend to focus on trance, ritual function, or social identity, while the aesthetic system underlying structural reduction and symbolic fragmentation remains under-theorized. This gap limits our understanding of how folk performances actively reinterpret classical elements through local creative intelligence.

This article addresses that gap by proposing “Pegon as an Aesthetic of Fragmentation” as a conceptual framework for understanding Jaranan Pegon in Tulungagung. Drawing on ethnographic observation and performance analysis, the study examines how fragmentation operates consistently across character selection, visual properties, musical structure, and dramaturgy. Rather than viewing incompleteness as cultural loss, this study positions fragmentation as a form of local genius that enables classical symbols to be transformed into accessible, meaningful folk expressions.

By articulating pegon as an aesthetic system, this study contributes to broader discussions in performance studies, ethnokoreology, and cultural anthropology concerning how traditional arts simplify complexity without erasing meaning. The findings offer a new lens for interpreting adaptive strategies in folk performance and underscore the creative agency of local communities in shaping enduring cultural forms.

RESEARCH METHOD

The analytical table indicates that pegon in Jaranan Pegon Tulungagung operates not as an incidental condition of incompleteness, but as a systematic aesthetic of fragmentation that consistently shapes multiple elements of performance. As shown in Table 1, fragmentation occurs across character selection, visual properties (eblek), musical structure, and dramaturgy. Characters derived from Wayang Orang, such as Gatotkaca, Antareja, and Antasena, are retained as symbolic figures while being detached from their original narrative functions. This selective appropriation reflects a process of cultural adaptation in which complex classical repertoires are reconfigured into accessible folk expressions, a pattern commonly observed in processes of cultural transformation (Hannerz, 1992; Sedyawati, 2014).

The table further demonstrates that fragmentation extends beyond narrative elements into visual and musical systems. The eblek displaying fragmented images of horses,

Jathasura, and Jatayu functions as a condensed visual text, combining symbols from different mythological contexts without reconstructing a unified storyline. Such symbolic condensation aligns with semiotic perspectives on performance, which emphasize that meaning in traditional arts is often communicated through signs and visual markers rather than linear narratives (Geertz, 1973). Similarly, the reduced musical ensemble, consisting primarily of kenong, kempul, gong, and slomporet, illustrates how musical complexity is intentionally minimized. This form of structural reduction resonates with discussions of minimalism and functional sound in ritual and folk performances, where music serves to regulate energy and collective rhythm rather than melodic elaboration (Merriam, 1964).

Importantly, the consistency of fragmentation across these elements suggests that pegon represents a coherent aesthetic logic rather than a lack of artistic completeness. As summarized in Table 1, incompleteness becomes an intentional strategy that enables accessibility, adaptability, and cultural continuity within local communities. This finding supports the concept of local genius, in which communities creatively transform external or elite cultural forms to suit local needs without erasing their symbolic significance (Ayatrohaedi, 1986; Koentjaraningrat, 2009). From this perspective, Jaranan Pegon challenges hierarchical distinctions between “complete” classical arts and “incomplete” folk performances, proposing instead that fragmentation can function as a productive aesthetic system that sustains meaning through selective reduction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study proposes pegon as an aesthetic of fragmentation in understanding Jaranan Pegon performance of Tulungagung, East Java. Rather than signifying deficiency or artistic incompleteness, pegon operates as a coherent aesthetic system in which narrative, characters, visual symbols, and musical structures are selectively reduced and recontextualized. The findings demonstrate that fragmentation functions as an intentional strategy that enables classical elements derived from Wayang Orang to be transformed into accessible and meaningful folk performance forms.

By analyzing characters, eblek imagery, musical minimalism, and dramaturgical structure, this study shows that fragmentation is consistently embedded across multiple performance elements. Such consistency confirms that Jaranan Pegon embodies a form of local genius, where cultural complexity is simplified without erasing symbolic depth (Ayatrohaedi, 1986; Koentjaraningrat, 2009). In this context, fragmentation should be understood as a productive aesthetic logic that sustains cultural continuity rather than as a sign of cultural loss.

Theoretically, this study contributes to performance studies and ethnokoreology by extending discussions on cultural adaptation and transformation. While previous studies have emphasized acculturation and hybridity in traditional arts (Hannerz, 1992; Sedyawati, 2014), this article highlights fragmentation as an active aesthetic choice through which communities negotiate classical and folk traditions. By framing pegon as an aesthetic system, the study challenges hierarchical distinctions between “complete” classical arts and “simplified” folk performances, proposing instead that selective reduction can serve as a legitimate mode of artistic expression.

Practically, the findings underscore the importance of recognizing local aesthetic logics in the preservation and interpretation of traditional performing arts. Understanding Jaranan Pegon through the lens of aesthetic fragmentation provides a more nuanced appreciation of how local communities creatively adapt inherited cultural forms. This perspective has implications for cultural policy, arts education, and heritage preservation, particularly in contexts where traditional arts are often evaluated using standards derived from classical or institutionalized frameworks.

Future research may apply the concept of aesthetic fragmentation to other folk performances in Java and beyond, examining whether similar strategies of selective reduction operate in different cultural settings. By doing so, the concept of pegon introduced in this study may contribute more broadly to comparative studies of traditional performance and cultural adaptation.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze the influence of ideology dynamics in Kampus Merdeka's Magang dan Studi Independen Bersertifikat Program (MSIB) (Independent Campus's Internship and Certified Independent Study Program) on the competence of design students. With a qualitative approach supported by bibliometric analysis, this study has succeeded in identifying and understanding the relationship between the ideologies applied in MSIB and the development of student design skills. Based on the results of a literature review from sources obtained through Google Scholar and Scopus, it was found that although MSIB provides great opportunities for students to develop practical skills through internship experiences and independent study, the influence of educational ideologies in the program on design education has not been widely discussed in the existing literature.

The results of the bibliometric analysis showed that the literature associated with MSIB focused more attention on the development of students' professional skills in the context of internships and independent study, while the influence of ideology on student design competencies was less frequently raised. This suggests a gap in existing research, where ideological aspects in design education through MSIB have not been extensively explored in depth. This study successfully fills in the gap by illustrating the importance of understanding the dynamics of ideologies applied in MSIB, as well as how these ideologies can influence the development of students' design skills, both in technical aspects and in creative and critical aspects.

The study also reveals that although MSIB gives students the opportunity to access the industrial world and develop practical skills, the lack of a clear understanding of ideology in the context of design can hinder the development of thinking skills critical and creative are essential in professional design practice. Therefore, this study suggests the importance of clarifying the integration of ideologies in MSIB programs, in order to make a more significant contribution to the competencies of design students that are more holistic and relevant to the demands of the industry.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that higher education managers and policy makers within the education sector design curricula that are more based on the development of ideologies appropriate to the design discipline. This will enable students

to develop design skills that are not only technical, but also creative and reflective, which will better prepare them for the challenges of the working world. This research also made an important contribution to the development of design education theory and practice, as well as suggesting for further research that could explore the student experience of undergoing the MSIB program in more depth. Overall, the study shows that although MSIB brings a lot of potential to enhance the competencies of design students, a clearer and integrated approach regarding the educational ideology in the program is needed, in order to ensure that design students do not simply develop skills practical, but also critical and creative thinking skills necessary in a dynamic and competitive world of design.

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