



A Critical Reflection on the Nature of Sacred Dance: The Case of Mechanical Reproduction of the Yogyakarta Bedhaya



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ABSTRACT

The Yogyakarta *Bedhaya* holds a definitive position as being a sacred royal performing art. Casual discourses concerning the origins of its sacral qualities have been attributed to the mythical creation involving significant figures of the Islamic Mataram Sultanate, resulting in the assumption that it is inherently sacred. I theoretically challenge this perspective by bringing to light the fundamental ideas on sacrality from Mircea Eliade and Roger Caillois to understand how the *Bedhaya* came to be regarded as being sacred. In short, the sacrality of art is constructed through sacred space and time, and is often accompanied by appropriate treatments. A problem arises when the art form is detached from the designated space and time. Therefore the reflexive rigor of this paper investigates a case on how the *Bedhaya* is mechanically reproduced and distributed through online platforms, incorporating Walter Benjamin's framework concerning the reproducibility of art. In spite of the growing accessibility of mechanical reproduction, it does not allow for the transmission of the 'life' of a performance and thus leaving sacrality behind, rendering it obsolete. Ultimately, this paper deconstructs the traditional view that sacrality is innately embedded in the *Bedhaya*, and reconstructs it through a different framework to help raise a new perspective and understanding on the discourse of sacred dance.

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