

VULNERABLE BODY, RESILIENT TECHNOLOGY IN PERFORMING ARTS

Yola Yulfianti
Email: yolayulfianti@ikj.ac.id
Jakarta Institute of the Arts

Abstract

Nge-Glieth is an experimental collaboration involving IKJ's Art and Technology Laboratory and ISBI Bandung's Body Laboratory. It was performed on 22 October 2023 at the National Gallery in Central Jakarta, Indonesia. In this performance, we tried to explore the relationship between the body and technology through artistic experiments in performing arts. "Glitch" is a term that emerged from the computer world, referring to a problem or interruption in an Internet connection. We borrowed this term because the symptoms of "glitch" also often arise in the social life of today's society. This symptom is present in our observation of the behaviour of people around the cities of Jakarta and Bandung who depend on technology through electronic devices, which then become a space for the expression of all forms of emotions that are often beyond the limits of reason.

In this experiment, we used simple technology, such as kinect sensors, visual manipulation using Adobe in Design, and remote communication through Zoom. The space that was built was not like a normal performance space, but rather adapted to the environmental conditions of the venue. Our form of performance is participatory and interactive, to test whether the audience will actually follow whatever the virtual human characters we create tell them to do. The dramaturgy we built tells the story of a woman who falls in love with a virtual human, and she does whatever the virtual human asks. The virtual human becomes a human, and the human becomes a machine. In this performance, the audience also follows this love story by following whatever the virtual human asks.

Between the analogue and digital worlds in the context of performing arts, we explore the technical aspects in the search for answers to research questions. The battle between the digital body and the human body has become so real; it has become a daily life challenge that must be faced. In the ever-increasing influence of digital technology, is there still space for weakened human bodies? What is the reality of the body in virtual and real life and how does it relate to everyday life?

Keywords: body, technology, performing arts, interactivity

Introduction

My artistic encounter with actor Tony Supartono (aka Tony Broer) in this performance is not the first time. Our previous collaboration titled *Cuy - Gimana Cara Nolong Elu Pindah dari Zaman BB ke Zaman Z* (Cuy – How to help you to move from the BB era to Z era) was performed at the closing ceremony of the 2018 Festival Teater Jakarta (FTJ), at Teater Jakarta, Taman Ismail Marzuki, Jakarta. According to Afrizal Malna (2019), "In a collaboration between Tony Broer and Yola Yulfianti (choreographer), through the performance "Cuy" as the closing of the 2018 FTJ, Tony shows how his body responds to the digital dramaturgy performed by Yola in this performance, between the virtual world and the real world." Tony Broer, an important actor who developed in an era when the body became the primary identity, plays Cuy. The manual and analogue construction of body theatre faces new challenges when dealing with digital technology. The body as identity now faces the digital body, which makes existence no longer dependent on measurable physical space. As a result, a new, unique, funny and aesthetically pleasing chaos occurs when analogue existences meet digital existences in performance practice between theater.

In my view, Tony Broer is a unique artist, not your average artist. One reason is that until recently he decided not to use a sophisticated smartphone. He still uses an old Nokia cellular phone; he uses his mobile phone merely as a tool for long-distance communication through oral conversation. He never uses more than that, he even doesn't use chat tool.

Let's get to know him better by taking a closer look at his physical biography as a first step. Tony Broer is a middle-aged man with a well-proportioned body that looks younger than his age. His hair is long and thin, with a beard that is allowed to grow long. His style of dress is simple: T-shirts, shorts and flip-flops, both at formal and informal events. He is a devout Muslim, does not smoke or consume alcohol.

In addition to his formal theater education, he is also an experienced realist theater actor, having grown up with the theater group Payung Hitam founded by Rahman Sabur, a leading Indonesian theater artist. The theatre is famous for its style of body theater or physical theater, with extreme exercises to explore the potential of the body as a theater medium. Tony Broer has travelled to many countries. In 2002-2003, he received a Bunka Cho scholarship to study Japanese Traditional Theater (Noh) and Japanese Modern Theater (Butoh). He learnt Noh from Shimada Sensei of Noh Kongo, and Butoh from Yoshito Sensei (son of Kazuo Ohno), Waguri Sensei, Moto Fuji Sensei (wife of Tatsumi Hijikata), and Shimimaru Sensei of Sankai Juku.

According to Toshiharu Kassai (1999), "The definition of Butoh may differ among Butoh dancers, but it seems to cover the basic idea of Butoh. One of the interesting aspects of Butoh is 'body archaeology', unearthing something buried in the body, which seems unique compared to other dance styles. "Looking at this statement, the body has an archaeology as if it has a life of its own. It seems that Tony Broer's thinking about the body is heavily influenced by Japanese modern theater, Butoh. His daily practice is to constantly unearth something buried in the body.

Discussing intermediality in performance in the context of *Nge-Glitch* performance, this is already highlighted by Kattenbelt (2008) suggesting that how intermediality can be understood as a mode of performativity. He emphasises that intermediality addresses media performances that alter the relations between materiality (ontology), mediality (functionality), and modes of perception, taking into account medium-specific conventions. This change is characterised by the refunctionalisation of the media used and the re-sensitisation of perception, which is part of the process of 'staging'.

Departing from our work titled *Cuy*, we already have the basis of previous research on the body's interaction with cutting-edge technology. A body that tends to lack movement, communicates with machines, does not require physical interaction with others, and always follows viral trends to be considered modern. Our meeting this time stemmed from a shared concern about the era of instantaneous technology, which makes most people scrolling through mobile phones that are considered more interesting. During this time, a very popular term emerged in Indonesia to describe most people, especially the younger generation, who tend to spend a lot of time lying down while playing with their gadgets, such as mobile phones or laptops. These characteristics became known as the "lying down generation". This habit of lying down is often associated with numb nails such as scrolling social media, watching videos, or playing games excessively. This generation emerged as a response to the development of digital technology and lifestyle shifts that led to less physical activity and more virtual social interactions. The existence of social media has affected people's social lives. Changes in social relationships or as changes to the equilibrium of social relationships and all forms of changes

in social institutions in a society, which affect its social system, including values, attitudes, and patterns of behaviour among groups in society.

Realising such situation, we both then questioned whether performing arts would still find an audience in the midst of this technological domination. Our discussion led to thoughts about the relevance and adaptation of performing arts in the digital age.

How can art survive and transform to appeal to a generation that would rather look at a mobile phone screen than attend a live performance? Or a further question is how the reality of the body in virtual and real life and its relationship in everyday life.

The experimental collaboration conducted by IKJ's Art and Technology Laboratory and ISBI Bandung's Body Laboratory, which took place on 22 October 2023 at the National Gallery, Central Jakarta, Indonesia, is one of the programmes in the series of National Culture Week 2023 events organised by the Ministry of Culture, Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia. The National Gallery as one of the event venues also held other exhibitions and performances, and the Nge-Glitch performance was one of them. We try to explore the relationship between the body and technology through artistic experiments in performing arts. "Glitch" is a term that emerged in computer usage, referring to problems or disruptions in Internet connections. We borrowed this term because the symptoms of "glitch" also often arise in the social life of today's society. This symptom is present in our observation of the behaviour of people around the cities of Jakarta and Bandung who depend on technology through electronic devices, becoming a space for the expression of all emotional feelings that are often beyond the limits of reason.

Dialogue, Body, and Interactive Technology

In developing my directing strategy, I made an adaptation based on Lenong, a Betawi traditional theater that historically emerged in Jakarta around the 1920s. Regarding directing in Lenong, Ninuk Kleden-Probonegoro (1996) in her book *Teater Lenong Betawi- Diachronic Comparative Study* explains that it is the director who will accommodate the ideas in the lenong performance. The director will not create a detailed scenario. The script is never made in full, but only enough to describe the course of the story and its chapters. The script is usually written down on a piece of paper, or if the director is reluctant or unable to write, it is committed to memory. This way of constructing a show adapted from lenong was a possibility. Lenong was a suitable choice so that in the studio practice work, the search for answers to the research questions could be found. Lenong Betawi as a traditional performing art gives room to explore all possibilities and certainly opens up the possibility of discussing issues.

The form of performance used here is of interactive nature that allowing a fluid relationship between spectacle and audiences this is done so that there is audience involvement in the performance. Usually in lenong the involvement of the audience greatly influences the spectacle.

This lenong-like performance, the story is a romance, a love story between a human and a virtual human (avatar). Dramaturgy is built into the story of a person who falls in love with an avatar, and the human does whatever the avatar asks. The avatar becomes a human, and the human becomes a machine. In this performance, the main goal is to experiment with the audience following this love story and whether the audience follows whatever the avatar asks. ISBI Bandung's body laboratory consists of Tony Boer, Mohammad Wail (Wail), Salira Ayatusyifa (Salira). The team from the ISBI Bandung Body Laboratory all have a background

in theater arts education at ISBI Bandung and have regular body training led by Tony Broer. In this experimental work Tony Broer and Salira as performers and Wail as assistant director.

The characterisation in the story is built through a woman who falls in love with an avatar named Ai. The woman is played by Salira and the avatar Ai is played by Tony Broer. In the story, Salira is infatuated with avatar Ai to the point of obeying whatever avatar Ai wants so that she can meet and be with avatar Ai.

Wail compiled a draft script, which was the result of studio exercises with Yola Yulfianti. The following is the draft script that then became the initial basis for research development. In traditional lenong performances, scenarios are rarely written down, but in the context of this experimental work, scenarios are needed as a reference for audio and visual technicalities.

The following is a draft script of Nge-Glitch :

DRAFT SCRIPT OF NGE-GLITCH PERFORMANCE

GREETING THE AUDIENCE

- Good Evening, here you are.... All is well tonight....
- Introducing..... Who am I? Later everyone will definitely know who I am.
- Well, ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, keep your distance
- Everyone is carrying a smartphone right....
- Kindly lift it high.... (RESPONSES TO AUDIENCES WHO DON'T TAKE OUT THEIR PHONE).

PINK DOES NOT TAKE OUT SMARTPHONE

- Ma'am, you, yes ma'am who wears pink! Try pointing your hand, yes. Raise your hand. Sister, come forward.
- Where's the smart phone? Okay, okay. Put it in your bag first.
- Now we're going to exercise for a while,
- Eitss, I think I know you deh ... you are Piu, aren't you?
- Sis PIUUUUUUUUUU

- The audience all say his name, let's call his name 3 times slowly ... for example like this (MOVING PIUUUUUUUU). Now together, one... two... three... PIUUUUU-PIUUU-PIUUUUU-PIUUUUU

- Piu, I am sitting on a chair... Can you find it? Try see around you ... okay Piu? While looking for a chair, I'll play a song Music.....

PIU IS LOOKING FOR A CHAIR, LOOKING AROUND THE AUDIENCE AND NOT FINDING ONE. THE MUSIC THAT IS SET IS THE SONG "NO COMMENT BUNDA CORLA REMIX VERSION TIKTOK" LET'S DANCE WHILE ENCOURAGING PIU. PIU IS CONFUSED ... SUDDENLY YADI AS THE CREW ENTERED CARRYING A CHAIR TO THE CENTER OF THE STAGE.

- Gooddddd Piu .. Stop the music first. Later we dance again okay Piu.
- Please sit down Piu. PIU FACING THE SCREEN
- Nooo... Don't face me Piu. You have to face the front....

PIU FACING THE AUDIENCE

- That's it. Guysss give a round of applause for Piu.
- Now, put the bag on the side first...

PIU PUT THE BAG, CUY TURNED INTO A VIDEO RECORDING, Ai BEGAN TO BE PRESENT IN THE AUDIENCE JUST GOING AROUND. PIU FOLLOWED THE INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE VIDEO RECORDING ON THE SCREEN.

- Piu, follow my instructions ... Piu Stand up, goodddd
- Get on the chair, try now Piu dance....

PIU DANCING WITH NO ENTHUSIASM / CRINGE....

- Confused ... or lazy, it looks like your zodiac Pisces ... it looks, must like to lie down. Hmm,, come on spirit! I chose you because you are great Piu. Try to repeat it again ...
- Now, I'll add some music. Go!

FADE IN VIRAL TIKTOK MUSIC. PIU FOLLOWS THE TIKTOK DANCE TO THE SONG. MUSIC FADES OUT.

- Wowwwwwww.... Piuuuuuuuuu, piuuu.... Now I understand, that means your love language is words of affirmation right ... even though I only encourage you a little you immediately wow wow wow. Hehehehee ...

- Now Piu rotates slowly ... move at will Piu
 - Ouch, stop first..... It's really complicated with her hair.
 - Try tying her hair first...
 PIU TYING HAIR.
 - Well, here comes PIUUUUU. Clap again guys for Piu.
 - Next challenge. Piu moves from slow to fast.
 COY IS GONE FROM THE AUDIENCE; GET READY FOR THE MEETING SCENE. MUSIC FADES IN (IPHONE PHONE RINGTONE) PIU EXPLORATION. COME IN CUY LIVE AGAIN.
 - Stop Piu, I miss you.
 - Do you want to meet me?
 - Piu please sit down again. Halloooow, crew. Can you get Piu a drink?
 YADI CAME IN WITH AN AQUA.
 - How is Piu? Okay Piu... Guys! I want to meet you. Raise your hands, everyone.
 - Okee, then. I'll be your guide. Because soon I'm going to disappear. clingg ...
 CUY DISAPPEARED ON THE MAIN SCREEN, ONLY SOUND WAS HEARD
 - Try now Piu take smartphone. Already?
 - Everything, Guyss come on, take the phone too...
 - Lift up... Let me check first...
 - Turn on the flashlight...
 ENTER A (FREE) SONG LIKE A CONCERT
 - Good, good. Everything can be used. You still want to meet me rite...
 - Follow the steps. Every body participate, yaaaa
 - First try opening your Youtube application.
 - Then type in the search button "xxxxxxx"
 - Already? Try piuu help crosscheck piuuuu ..
 - Okee. Next, guys, click on the photo profile section. Finally turn up the volume. Come on, everyone turn up the volume...
 THE MISSING Ai IS PRESENT ON YOUTUBE
 - Hello, helloowww
 - Xixixixi meet akyu again. Can't wait to meet me ...
 - Sip. Piuuu... we are in the front position. Follow my directions.
 - Guys, you stand up, come on, stand up. Now everyone walk to xxxxxx
 Walk 1 (Walk in a straight direction, while bowing) Lestgo Piuu
 Walk 2 (walk to xxx, then turn to xxx, TREAT THE AUDIENCE LIKE JUMPING/WALKING UP/walking backwards/etc.)
 Street 3 (same as street 2 until the end point)
 SPECTATOR PIU IS ALREADY AT THE LOCATION OF Ai. Ai AS A REAL ENTITY.

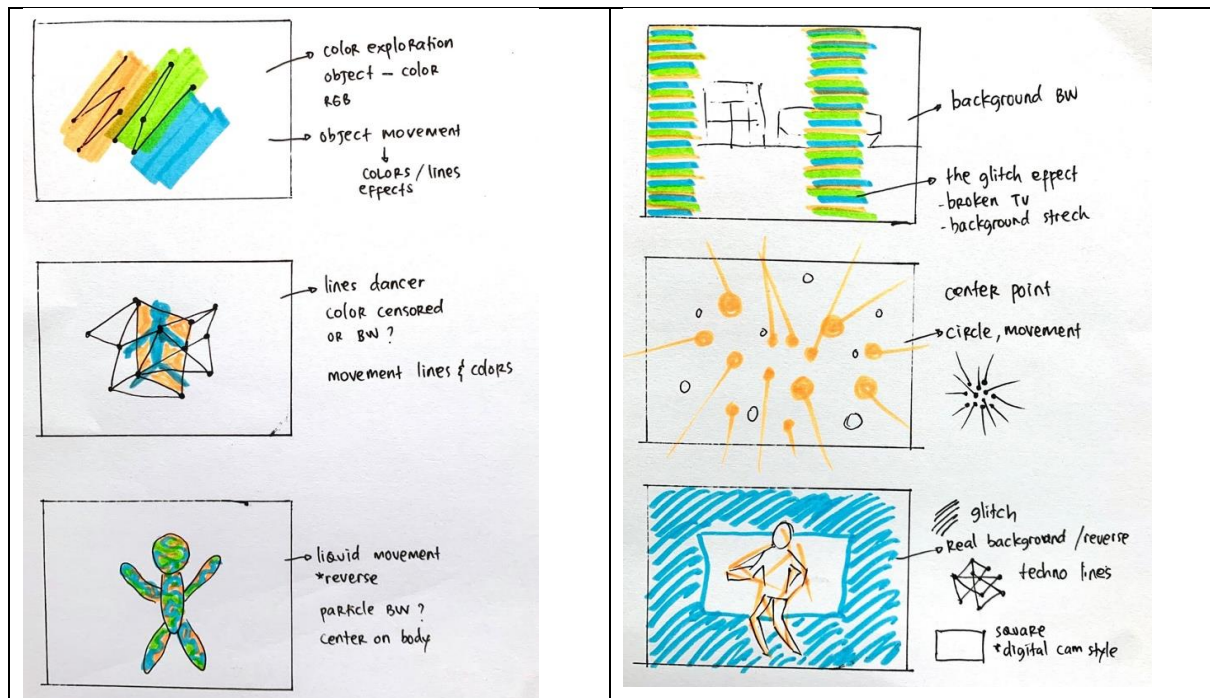
Dita Rachma, one of the collaborators in this performance, is in charge of the performance's visual content while Kelvin Djunaedi, another collaborator is in charge of the composition of the digital music. They are members of the IKJ Art and Technology Laboratory team. This team joins this performance to find the relationship between the body and the sensor using Kinect Xbox version 2 and CPU: i5 12400, VGA: RTX 2060Ti, and 32 GB RAM. This project uses Kinect as the main sensor device. In Kinect, there are depth sensors, cameras, and motion index players that are used to digitise visual objects. Meanwhile, Touch Designer software is used to process Kinect captures, manipulate visuals, and project them onto the stage and YouTube. For audio, Touch Designer is used as a glue code that signals to Ableton via M4L (Max for Live) to trigger and manipulate the composition.

The following are the stages of the visual design process:

1. Reference Search

References were sought for early stage visualisation in the creation of mood boards that fit the concept or message of the show. Reference sources included Pinterest, films or videos, as well as digital UX in the development of digital media. From this particular search, we found distinctive colours, effects or textures that emerge from digital media, irregular but repetitive shapes, and the feeling generated from digital graphic elements. All these elements provide a different experience compared to real life that can be seen directly without the help of technology or digital media.

as an initial guide that helps in planning the code structure and visual design, so that the digitisation process can run more smoothly and in accordance with the desired concept.

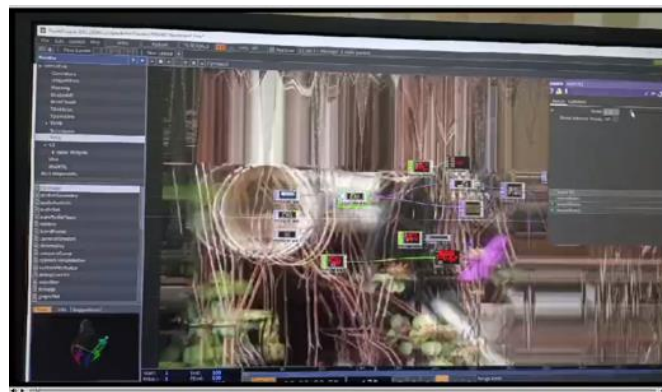


Visual planning sketch of the Nge-Glitch performance
Source: Dita Rachma's document

4. From concept to programming

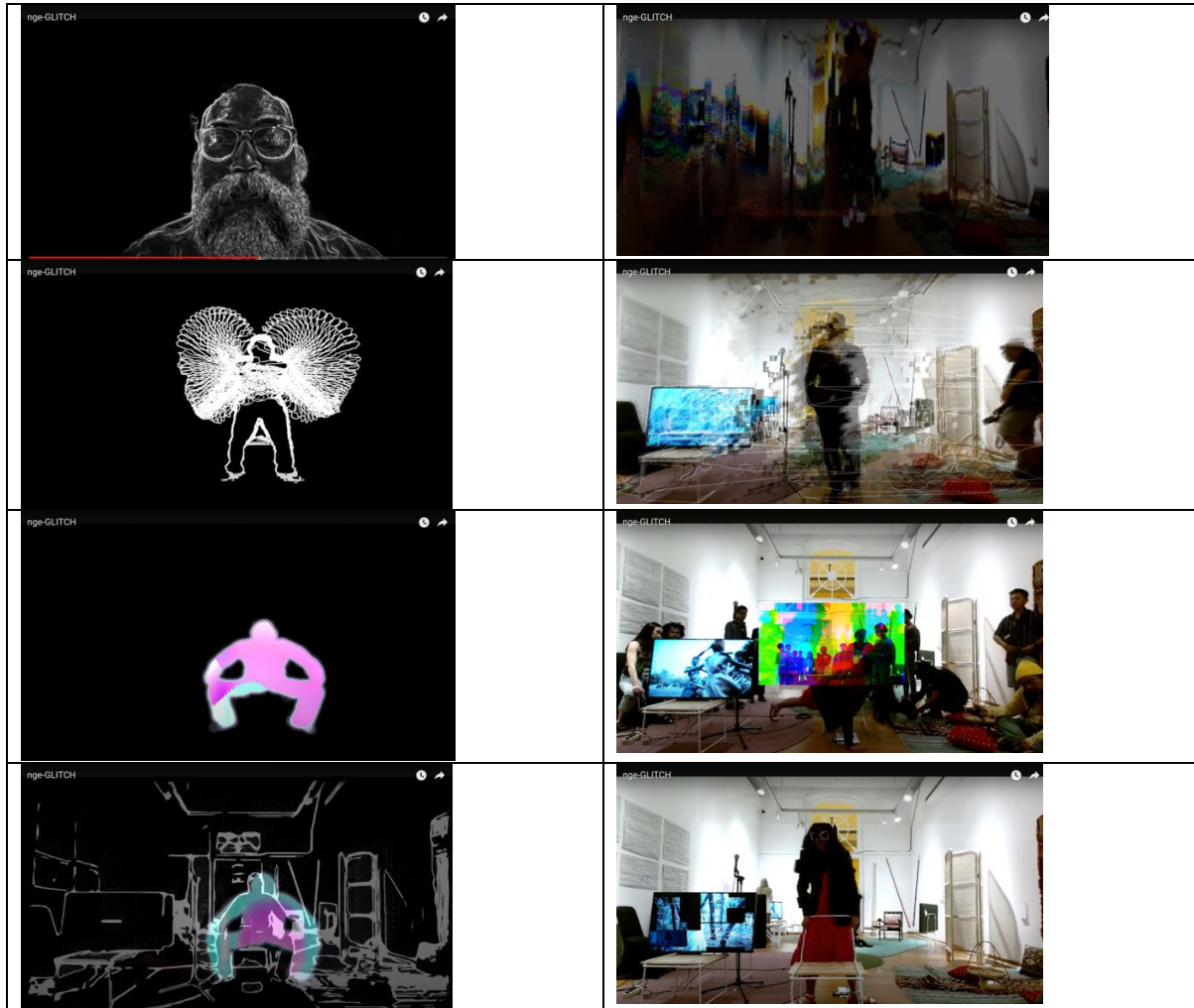
The process of working in the application from sketch to digital goes according to the concept. Programming and Data Processing is writing the code to organise interactions and visual effects to build visual structures and manipulate visuals according to the sketches by applying special effects, textures, and animations that depart from the sketches.

5. Integration with sensor and audio devices



Visual enhancement and composing was done by connecting Touch Designer with the Kinect sensor device. In organising the interaction between visuals and audio, Max for Live (M4L) was used for integration with Ableton. Then testing was done with actors in a rehearsal studio.

Here is the final result of the virtual body used in the performance.



Performance and Audience

After going through the rehearsal process, the staging, as the final result applied to the venue, the National Gallery, uses the entire space. The flow of the stage starts from the foyer to the exhibition space and then backs to the foyer. This strategy was intended to mobilise the audience as a test of how far they would follow the flow of the spectacle.

No	Scene	Description
----	-------	-------------

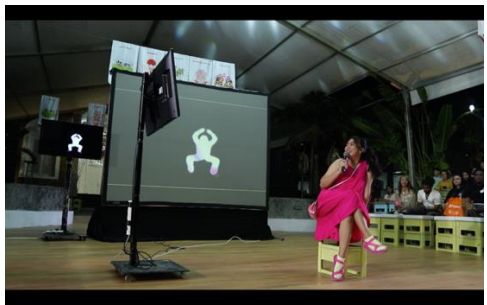


It's me who opened the first scene as the host; a character named Ai was shown on 2 projector screens in front and behind the audience and 2 LED TVs.

Ai's real form is in the gallery space; the image of Ai's face is generated using the kinect sensor, and our communication through the zoom platform and live steam YouTube.



Next comes the scene of drawing the audience. Salira was prepared as if she were the audience. This aims to make the audience more fluid and can freely interact with Ai's character.



The dialogue between Salira and the character Ai is getting more intense. The image of the character Ai is increasingly visible, not only the face. The visuals are also changing.

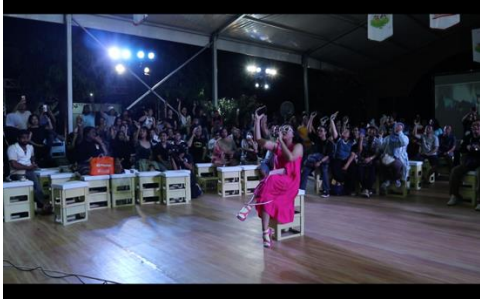
But on stage Salira seems to be dialoguing with the TV.



Salira can move more freely, even in the audience. This is so that there is no boundary between the stage and the audience.

Ai's character, whose form is on TV, is also moved manually by the crew that has been prepared. This is done as if Ai's character can see the audience and interact physically even though it is in virtual form.





The audience's trust in Ai's character that has been built with the audience can be said to be successful. When Ai's character asks the audience to take out their mobile phones and do some things with them, the audience follows her request.

At this moment the audience is given a barcode to be able to access Ai's image directly on her mobile phone.



Ai's character even asks the audience to enter the gallery area.

Indeed, at this moment the audience can choose not to follow, but in fact they do.



Inside the gallery area, there was already an Ai character in real human form. Then the meeting between Ai and Salira takes place.

In this scene, an exchange takes place between Ai who becomes alive and Salira who becomes frozen.





Salira, whose activities are getting more and more frozen, seems to be slowly abandoned by the audience.



The audience prefers to follow Ai's character.



Most viewers are still intensely following Ai's activities. Ai performs throughout the gallery space and responds to the works in the gallery with her body.



From inside the Gallery to back outside again, most viewers are still intensely following Ai's activities.

		
		<p>At the end of the show, the audience was still intensely watching the performance while holding their mobile phones, which they eventually used to take pictures or record.</p>

In this particular performance the audience is actually given many choices. The choice of what to watch is also given freedom.

How to watch	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Watching without using or holding smart phone 2. Watching using smart phone
Options to watch	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Watch Salira 2. Watch exhibition 3. Watch and follow Ai's character 4. Not continue watching

Based on observations throughout the performance, it was found that around 70 percent of the audience continued to watch using their mobile phones and followed Ai's character. 10 percent of the audience used their mobile phones to watch Salira. 10 percent enjoyed the exhibition in the gallery. 5 percent of the audience decided to watch without mobile phones and follow Ai's character and the remaining 5 percent chose to sit outside and not continue watching.

From the experimentation using this performance model, most viewers were unwittingly in two different realities, in the gallery watching the show but also staring at their mobile phone screens. There was very little choice to watch without a mobile phone or not to watch. The activity of always holding a mobile phone seems to be unconscious.

Conclusion

This experimental work, titled Nge-Glitch, adopts 3 elements of approach: Lenong as a model in directing strategy and issue development, the body as the main data source in building visual

imagination, and the interaction between body and technology. These three approaches play an important role in the development of contemporary theater.



Creative Process

This type of experimental work can be explained using what Kattenbelt (2008) says. Kattenbelt highlights how intermediality in performance can be understood as a mode of performativity. He emphasises that intermediality addresses media performances that alter the relations between materiality (ontology), mediality (functionality), and modes of perception, taking into account medium-specific conventions. This change is characterised by a refunctionalisation of the media used and a re-sensitisation of perception, which is part of the process of 'staging' in the context of the performance in culture and society. Intermediality refers to the incorporation of digital technologies into theater practice as well as the presence of media such as film, television and digital media in modern theater performances. This concept positions intermediality as the integration of medial thoughts and processes among the performers, observers, and media spaces, as well as other art forms involved in the performance at any given moment.

The phenomenon of new technology that is getting more sophisticated and changing at an unbelievably fast pace today makes everything accessible through mobile phones. This situation has given rise to the term "snooze generation," among young people. This term emerged during the pandemic and continues to be used today. By lying down or sleeping and holding a smartphone, most of this generation seems to have done a lot of things, when it is likely that their only activity is scrolling through social media, ingesting information that is most likely meaningless. Lying down and scrolling definitely makes the body lazy and unhealthy because it is not actively moving. From here there is also an effect that also raises symptoms of escaping from the real situation or procrastinating real work. So, it will reduce productivity and even the quality of happiness, because it's as if the world is vast.

Another important element is how the body is observed today. From our observations, 70 per cent of the audience chose to continue watching the performance and using their mobile phones. Technology brings an addictive influence, the body pattern that is built in daily behaviour is always holding a smartphone. These actions then result in habits that have become unconscious because they are trained. Can we conclude through this artistic research how

vulnerable the body is as a result of the symptoms of increasingly sophisticated technology? Going back to the aforementioned research question, the battle between the digital body and the human body has become so real; it has become a daily life challenge that must be faced. In the increasingly powerful influence of digital technology, is there still space for weakened human bodies? What is the reality of the body in virtual and real life and how does it relate to everyday life?

After the experimentation to answer this question, it can be concluded that further research is needed. However, the symptoms of vulnerability have already surfaced. From the results showing that 70 percent of people watch on their smartphones, most people have unwittingly lost the will over their own bodies. Daily behaviour has become so embedded that decisions to act are often not fully conscious because they are like auto pilot, seeing an event and then pulling out their smartphones to record it.

In Nge-Glitch, intermediality plays an important role in the development of contemporary theater. Intermediality refers to the incorporation of digital technology into theater practice and the presence of media such as film, television and digital media in modern theatre performance. This concept positions intermediality as the integration of medial thoughts and processes among the performers, observers, and media spaces, as well as other art forms involved in the performance at any given moment. Another important element is how the body is observed today. From the results, 70 percent of the audience chose to continue watching and using smartphones. Technology brings an addictive influence; the body pattern that is built in daily behaviour is always holding smartphone. These actions then result in unconscious habits that have become the body because they are trained. Can we conclude through this artistic research the vulnerability of the body as an effect of the increasingly sophisticated technology? Answering this question requires further research. However, it can be concluded that the symptoms of vulnerability have surfaced.

References

Cahyono, Anang Sugeng. "Pengaruh Media Sosial terhadap Perubahan Sosial Masyarakat di Indonesia." Accessed on date May 25, 2024 from <https://journal.unita.ac.id/index.php/publiciana/article/view/79/73>

Kassai, Toshiharu (1999) A Butoh Dance Method for Psychosomatic Exploration. Accessed on date December 30, 2020 from <https://www.ne.jp/asahi/butoh/itto/method/butoh-method.pdf>

Kattenbelt, Chiel. "Intermediality in Theatre and Performance: Definitions, Perceptions and Medial Relationships" in *Culture, Language and Representation*, Vol. VI/2008, hlm. 20-21

Kleden, Ninuk, 1996. *Teater Lenong Betawi: Studi Perbandingan Diakronik*. Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia dan Asosiasi Tradisi Lisan.