

The Aesthetic Forms of Postdramatic Theatre Work “Under the Volcano” Directed By Yusril

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*The research is financed by Kemertian Riset Teknologi dan Pendidikan Tinggi Republik Indonesia,
(Postgraduate Dissertation Research Scheme) 2019*

ABSTRACT: This study discusses the aesthetic forms of postdramatic theatre work "Under the Volcano", directed by Yusril. The aesthetic forms of postdramatic theatre introduced by Hans-Thies Lehmann through his book *Postdramatic Theatre*, which was later translated into English by Karen Jurs-Munby offers a system of work through text, space, time, body and media. These five work systems, in the theatrical work "Under the Volcano", are built in the form of collages, which are based on artistic composition through the power of narrative texts, the movement of actors in vertical and horizontal space, non-linear time, bodies centered on the power of *silat* and Ulu Ambek, media elements embodied through artistic elements (set, property, lighting, makeup, and costumes), and musical elements. Text, space, time, body and media elements are reflected in every scene of the theatre work "Under the Volcano."

KEYWORDS: *Theatre, Under the Volcano, Yusril, Aesthetic Form, Postdramatic.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Theatrical work entitled *Under the Volcano* (hereafter abbreviated as UTV) was the production of the West Sumatra Black-White arts community, collaborated with Bumi Purnati Indonesia led by Restu Imansari Kusumaningrum⁵ (abbreviated to Restu). This theatrical work has been featured in The 6th Theatre Olympic in Beijing-China in 2014, at Theatre Works Singapore, April 21st-23rd 2016, and in Borobudur Writers and Cultural Festival (BWCF) at Borobudur temple, Magelang, Central Java, on November 24nd, 2018.

UTV is Restu's idea, sourced from a book under the name *Krakatoa: Saat Dunia Meledak 27 Agustus 1883*, by Simon Winchester's work, translated by Prisca Delima (the original title was *Krakatoa: The Day the World Exploded, August 27th, 1883*) and Lampung poetry *Karam* by Muhammad Saleh. These two sources are then transformed into the form of a theatrical text by Rhoda Grauer (dramaturg), and directed by Yusril.

Rhoda Grauer's theatre text is later interpreted by Yusril into universal natural disaster problems. Natural disasters can occur anywhere, anytime which are really difficult to understand by human objective reasoning. In the form of the work, Yusril includes the idioms of Minangkabau culture which are reflected

⁵Restu Imansari Kusumaningrum is the Managing Director of Bumi Purnati Indonesia. She is active as a dancer, manager and producer in performing arts and visual arts activities. As a producer, Restu has collaborated with Indonesian and foreign artists, one of which is the *I Laga Ligo* theatre project involving Rhoda Grauer (Dramaturg), Robert Wilson (Director), and Rahayu Supanggah (Composer)

through the expressions of the actors' gestures, like *Silek*'s movement (*silat*)⁶, *Randai*, and *Ulu Ambek*⁷. Besides, music and *dendang* (singing) also becomes the other strengths of the UTV theatre work. Music and *dendang* (singing), on the one hand serves as an illustration, reinforces the atmosphere at each event, and becomes a marker for changing scenes.

The UTV theatre work do not refer to dramatic texts (drama scripts) but it contains information on events and narrative texts spoken by the actor. Thus, during the production process, the director has leeway in interpreting and even in providing artistic enrichment to the UTV theatre work. The artistic elements in the form of properties used by actors, such as stairs, plates, umbrellas, mats, fabrics, baskets, and bird cages, are explored by each actor based on the motives of the events built in the work. The actor's body movements correlate with the presence of property sets on the stage. Actors respond to set-properties, while providing meaning to property that is explored based on the motives of the events built in the work.

Another element that reinforces the artistic strength in the UTV theatre works is the presence of multimedia in the form of video art, containing animations that display videos in the form of mountains, storms, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, volcanic ash eruptions, and lava. This multimedia presence is supported by stage lighting. Multimedia elements and lighting in the UTV theatre work give a reflective impression on situations of natural disasters that affect nature, ecosystems, and even human life.

The reflective impression above is illustrated through the actor's body movements, property-exploration sets, actor relations with multimedia, and lighting. It is seen on how the actors or actresses respond to animated video shows (sea waves, tsunami, volcanic eruptions, storms) that appear on the stage. In addition, the presence of lighting in the UTV theatre work serves to reinforce the atmosphere, as well as being a substitute marker (transition) of scenes that are built in the form of collages.

II. THEORETICAL BASIS

Theory is a set of constructs (concepts), definitions, and propositions that function to see phenomena systematically, through the specification of relationships between variables, so that it can be useful to explain and predict phenomena (Sugiyono: 2008, 52).

Referring to the theoretical foundation used in the study of the theatre work "Under The Volcano", the study is seen from two theoretical perspectives, namely dramaturgy theory and aesthetic theory. Dramaturgi is understood as an operational system in the process of creating theatre. It contains all aspects that establish the manifestation of the theatre itself, such as the presence of texts (drama scripts or performance texts), artistic elements (sets, property, makeup, costumes, multimedia and lighting), and music. The presence of this spectacle element does not stand alone, but it becomes one important unity in the theatre work as a whole.

Aesthetics is the realm of philosophy that addresses beauty. Beauty in this context is seen in two perspectives, namely the beauty obtained based on The Creator, such as the beauty of nature, mountains, sea, sky, stars, and others and the beauty obtained based on human creativity such as works of art (dance, music, theatre, literature, sculpture, paintings, ceramics, etc.). A.A.M. Djelantik (2004: 7) provides a definition of aesthetics, she defines aesthetics as a science that studies everything related to beauty, learns all aspects of what we call beauty. In relation to the study of the theatrical work "Under the Volcano", at first the study was seen as a theoretical framework, then in detail it was analyzed using postmodernism aesthetics and dramatic aesthetics.

Postmodernism was born as an antithesis to modernism which was considered no longer relevant to the constellation of contemporary life. Modernism is the implementation of modern society in representing a radical movement of secession from the static nature of traditional society. In the context of the theatre, postmodernism is present to give a strict boundary to the genre and the style of creation of theatre works that are different from the patterns of the modern era which tend to have a basis on conventional drama scripts. Tuiren Hurstfield, in Fathul A. Husein explained that postmodern theatre performances are non-narrative and non-representational. Various forms, types, and traditional practices have been largely abandoned (2015: 204). In line with Hurstfield's mind, Elinor Fuch emphasized as follows.

The characteristics of a postmodern theatre differ from modern theatre. Modern theatres, characterized by the core of logical intertwined narrative plots and sequential patterns such as those performed by

⁶ The form of Minangkabau traditional art which functions as a form of martial arts attraction, and aesthetic function that only presents *silat* flowers or *Mancak*.

⁷ *Ulu Ambek* is a form of Minangkabau traditional dance that is developed in Pariaman, West Sumatra. *Ulu Ambek* is rooted in *silat*'s motion, accompanied by *dendang* (singing) called *Dampeang*. This *Dampeang* is sung following the *silat* movements that are played. In *Ulu Ambek*, the term *Dampeang* is divided into two, namely *Dampeang* male, and *Dampeang* batino (female).

plays like Harold Pinter, Jean Paul Sartre, or Edward Albee. The actors take the roles of people's daily life who tell about life tragedies or existential conflicts and who bring up tragedies or comedies in a stretch of linear lines, starting with the prefix and ending with the ending of the play. Meanwhile, the goal of postmodern theatre is to change the ways that exist in terms of perceiving the world and the human itself ... postmodern theatre intentions are to deconstruct reality, not to interpret or find authentic cash with the audience, as brilliantly demonstrated by the performances of the Living Theatre and the Theatre of Visual by Robert Wilson (Fathul A. Husein, 2015: 206).

Postdramatic theatre is a new trend in the map of European, American and Asian theatre performances since the 1970s, including in Indonesia. Karen Jurs-Munby (2006: 1) explains that postdramatic theatre has become a reference point in international discussion of contemporary literature. Moreover, Hans-Thies Lehmann's research on the post theatre has clearly answered important needs for a comprehensive and accessible theory to articulate the relations between drama and the forms of theatre that is 'no longer dramatic' compared to its appearance in the 1970s. Hans-Thies Lehmann has systematized his reading of the new theatre form into several aspects which are actually different from dramatic theatre readings. The aspect can be seen from the sub-title written by Lehman in his book *Panorama of Postdramatic Theatre*, including text, space, time, body and media as an analysis category in reading new theatre forms / dramatic theatre.

III. METHOD

Research methods are understood as systematic work steps to obtain concrete data or information that is relevant to the topic of dissertation. This process wants aspects of the quality of data obtained qualitatively. Qualitative methods pay attention to natural data, data in relation to the context of their existence.

1. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection techniques in compiling this dissertation were carried out through three stages, namely, (1) Library Studies; it was conducted by inventoring several sources related to Yusril's theatre performance works. Primary data sources are photo and video performances, photos and videos of the training process. Secondary data in this study were taken from journals, magazines, clippings of newspapers and internet sites that contained observers' reviews or critics of UTV's theatre work, directed by Yusril. (2) Observation; it was conducted to relate to the problem of this research carried out in two stages, namely observation of the training process of UTV theatre work, directed by Yusril; and observation of the performances of UTV theatre works, directed by Yusril, and (3) Interviews, it was conducted based on the profession of the informant who will be used as the subject of the interview. The informant's professions are director, dramaturg, actor or actress, and observer / theatre critic.

2. Data Analysis

The process of data analysis was done after finding data in the field. Based on the data obtained through literature studies, observation and interviews, the work stages of data analysis are (1) Data of interviews that have been recorded, then it was transcribed. The transcription process of this interview aims to retrieve the information needed and relevant to the research problem, (2) At the stage of data reduction, observations were made of audio-visual recordings of UTV theatre works, (3) Sorting out parts that were considered relevant to the research problem, especially with regard to the form of the performance and examining the meaning of the performance, and (4) the data of observations and interviews that have been transcribed, were used to answer the formulation of problems associated with the concept of creation in the UTV theatre work.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The theatre work "Under the Volcano" or UTV has six scenes. Each scene consists of several events in the context of exploring narratives, sets, properties, lighting elements, multimedia, and music. Visually, UTV's theatre work was constructed by Yusril aesthetically and artistically. The forms in question are as follows:

1. Scene One: "The Early Life"

The first part of the UTV theatre work is manifested through *dendang* male, portraying the gentle Minangkabau woman, while having the courage in guarding the matrilineal Minangkabau nature. This *dendang* male is followed by the choir. Then, it is followed by *dendang* female. *Dendang* is followed by the presence of female players upholding a pile of dishes overhead. The visual appearance of the mountain illustrates the calm and peaceful atmosphere of the village.



Figure 1: The actress enters the stage, while carrying a pile of plates on her head
(Photo: Bongky Hardian)

The second female figure enters from the right rear wing, moves diagonally towards the front-left stage while carrying 2 plates. She moves back and forth filling the area on the light line. The second female figure performs dance movements followed by the first female figure. A depiction of nagari children's games is carried out through the Minangkabau *silat* movement.

2. Scene Two: "At The Market"

One male player enters while carrying an umbrella from the left-rear wing. Move diagonally to the right-front part. After that, he is followed by four other male players while carrying umbrellas with different movements. Until finally they form a configuration of the market atmosphere symbolized through umbrella and body gestures. Five male players carrying umbrellas formed various patterns from umbrellas that were explored. After *dendang* male, the performance is then followed by a combination of applause, which is accompanied by a shrill voice (*goreh*⁸) like in the Randai show. Later on, one of the players appears carrying an umbrella and basket, walks towards the front of the stage. It is silence at first, the player who acts as the narrator faces the audience saying the narrative text. Next, the narrator moves towards the left of the stage towards the back of the stage. Each player involved on the stage moves in the form of dance choreography, doing buying and selling transaction activities in a market atmosphere. In the market, it looks like the traffic of human and merchant umbrellas constructed realistically. They have dialogue, quarrel, before other people come to fill the market, becoming sellers and buyers.



Figure 2: Photograph of the market atmosphere
in the theatre work of Under the Volcano
(Photo: Bongky Hardian)

⁸ *Goreh*, in the art activity of *randai* functions to give a marker of the *galombang* movement, *galombang* clap, and the transition scene through the shouts made by the expert of *goreh*.

When community activities look normal, volcanoes presented through video art show significant visual changes. Slowly, smoke billow towards the sky. People who are still busy with their activities, have not expected that a sign of natural disasters will occur. The narrator gives a sign that a natural disaster will occur. This event, showing the initial situation of the community situation which originally lives in calm and peace situation but then it begins to look chaotic and uncontrollable when they face natural disasters.

3. Scene Three: "The Storm Coming, Burning & the Wave"

In this scene, various events related to natural disasters and the tragic impacts experienced by the community because of natural disasters are described through the power of video art, lighting, costumes, property, and movement of players on the stage. It seems as if it gives a picture of the situation of natural disasters such as hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tsunami waves, and others.

Storm is coming. Merchant umbrellas fly, people run around. Merapi begins to emit its strength, the storm wind devastate everything. The stage is empty. There are only items scattered about. One by one the residents arrive, picking up the remains of their belongings.

Suddenly the earth trembles. The earthquake happens and volcano erupts and rocks fall down. It is seen like one of the players being caught in the event of a disaster. He moves, divagates, run about in an uncertain direction, trying to save himself. Shortly thereafter, several players enter the stage, run to the stairs, climb the stairs, and moves from one ladder to another. This event seems to provide an overview of the people's efforts who feel the impact of the disasters; they try to save themselves by moving into a higher place. The earthquake subsides. The stage is quiet and empty.



Figure 3: Photo scene
The Coming Storm, Burning & the Wave in the UTV theatre work
(Photo: Bongky Hardian)

The backstage wall is illuminated by blue light, it is seen that the players are in a static position forming various body gesture compositions. One of the players slowly appears to shake his body, the longer he moves, the faster it becomes. As if the player wants to reach the steps above him, then fall hanging on the stairs with the head down.

When one player hangs on a ladder in a head down position, followed by a *sarunai*⁹ instrument, the other player responds, looking at the audience, giving a picture of the anxiety and trauma that is being experienced. Each of them moves again, up and down the stairs, moving from stairs one to the other in turn. Until finally, they line up on the highest stairs.

Natural disasters approach repeatedly. The video art depicting lava bursts from volcanic eruptions, accompanied by smoke eruptions, slowly melts the hot lava down, follows the steps of each player slowly down the stairs, towards the front of the stage. When the walls and the floor of the stage appear red through the presence of video art and lighting, each player forms a choreographic motion to fill the stage space which is constructed vertically and horizontally.

Male players are at the top of the stairs, while female players move around eight stairs lining up on the backstage wall. Meanwhile, in the middle of the stage each player describes different death gestures. When the female players look surprised to see the death event, the musicians play the drums. This *Dendang*, used as a

⁹*Sarunai*. is one of the wind instruments found in Minangkabau.

transition of events in the scenes of *The Coming Storm, Burning & the Wave*, depicts the romantic atmosphere of two humans reunited after natural disasters occur. Both of them are separated by natural disasters that engulf the village. When they meet, they both recall the beautiful romantic memories that had been undertaken before.

Two male and female players perform dance moves, forming a simple choreography. Followed by blue lighting on the backstage wall, and excerpts of Sunda and Minangkabau harps are seen to reinforce the romantic atmosphere that is being built by the two players. The next event in the scene of *The Coming Storm, Burning & the Wave* is the occurrence of a large tsunami wave; this is indicated by the sound effect of sea water and a tsunami wave. The movement of three players hanging above the stairs is a sign of the emergence of video art splashes of water, waves, tsunami waves. The players, as if in a wave, are trying to get out and save themselves. They are like bobbing carried by a large current that cannot be controlled.

4. Scene Four: "Pole Death"

This scene is a description of traumatic situations and deaths experienced by victims of natural disasters. In this scene, three events occur simultaneously, namely (1) female players weigh ladders, and male players hold umbrellas, (2) three male players form a pole configuration through three stair properties. The female player climbs the staircase, after being on top she performs Minangkabau martial arts movements, and (3) two male players form a wall configuration, female players climb down and move from one ladder to the other before running towards the ladder that is formed like a tall pole.

Pole death scene presents the color of lighting that is dominated by red. Then, it is followed by the form of wind instruments and percussion to help the reinforcement of the atmosphere's events. In addition, the presence of drumming is an important part in giving musical fillings to the choreographic movements performed by female players.

The next event in the pole death scene is the death incident. The male player carrying an umbrella, along with a female player with a staircase property move straight, walk slowly towards the right of the stage. Meanwhile, the other three players formed the death configuration, with female players in it. They move slowly to the left of the stage.



Figure 4: Photographs of traumatic and death scenes in the Pole Death scene of the UTV theatre work (Photo: Bongky Hardian)

The photo above illustrates the atmosphere after a natural disaster that result in trauma and death. The community is faced with a tragic and dilemmatic situation in dealing with natural disaster situations. The earthquake and tsunami disaster cause the trauma experienced by the victims. They tried to continue to restore the situation by building tall walls and tall poles. Larger disasters can come at any time, high walls and pillars can be torn down, and death becomes a tragic end to life.

5. Scene Five: "Missing"

This scene is an overview of events about the efforts of the community trying to re-restore the situation after the natural disaster occurred. After the disaster, people began to reorganize their ruined life. This scene is illustrated by the game of *enggrang* that is played by three actors, while the other two actors perform the Minangkabau martial arts.

Before the game of Minangkabau martial arts and *enggrang*, narrative texts are expressed by one of the actors. The narrative text referred to is as follows.

This game of *enggrang* and *silat* illustrates that life must be lived positively and optimistically because every disaster that has been experienced by humans being can be used as valuable learning so that we can

appreciate and love the nature of God's creation. Through the color of lighting that is dominated by green, there are two male players moving to the center of the stage, while performing attractions in the Minangkabau martial arts movement. Meanwhile, one player with two stair properties that is shaped like a bridge, stands upright on it.



Figure 5: Photograph of the atmosphere of the arrangement after the earthquake in the theatre work of *Under the Volcano* (Photo: Bongky Hardian).

Enggrang's game in *Missing* events is accompanied by narrative text and spoken by three players who are on the top of *enggrang*. The three narrative texts in question are as follows.

6. Scene Six: "New Life"

People continue to fix the destruction that has occurred, clear the thoughts and feelings so that life continues to be carried out clearly and optimistically. In this event also present the motion of *Ulu Ambek* which is based on Minangkabau martial arts movements. Dominated by blue lighting, followed by a combination of harp (*kecap*) music, and percussion, eight players form an artistic configuration through gestures, staircase properties arranged in various forms (towers, mountains, fences, etc.). Two female players perform dance moves, accompanied by music and singing.

The next event in the scene "New Life", is an event when one of the male players is on the stairs arranged like a mountain. Meanwhile, five players holding the stairs are in a static position, while holding the stairs. Two female players, sitting on two stairs, line up behind the stage. The male player at the top of the stairs, moves slowly, followed by a *sampelong* blow. The male player then utters the narrative text.



Figure 6: New life atmosphere after the earthquake in the theatre work of *Under the Volcano* (Photo: Bongky Hardian)

The movement of *Ulu Ambek* is supported by the presence of *dendang* called *dampeang*. After the *Ulu Ambek* movement was displayed, each character raises a ladder with a high position. Then one by one, male figures slowly come out of the stage. A line of light emerges from the right rear corner of the audience and a figure of a female player appears again with a pile of plates above her head. She walks, while accompanied by *dendang* Minangkabau, moves in a diagonal line towards the front left of the stage, until the lights go out slowly.

V. CONCLUSION

The UTV theatre work, directed by Yusril, is the production of the Black-White arts community, West Sumatra, in collaboration with the Bumi Purnati Foundation Indonesia. This work has been featured in three places, namely Dayin Theatre, Beijing-China in the 6th Theatre Olympic in 2014, at Theatreworks Singapore in 2016, and at the Akshobya stage, Borobudur Temple, Magelang-Central Java in 2018. The UTV theatre works has the form and the structure of work based on the visual power constructed in the form of collages of events through the presence of body language expressions manifested through the Minangkabau and *Ulu Ambek* martial arts movements, artistic exploration manifested through property (stairs, umbrellas, plates, baskets, etc.) lighting, costumes and video art. In addition, this work is also reinforced by the presence of music, representing the atmosphere manifested through vocals, as well as the exploration of musical instruments. The theme of natural disasters that become a source of inspiration, managed in such a way, becomes a post-dramatic theatre work that does not refer to Aristotelean dramatic patterns. But it is arranged in six different scenes, but still in a thematic corridor that has the same red thread in addressing the problem of natural disasters in human life. Thus, the reflective elements of the theatre works can communicate with visual language to the audience.

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