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ME+YOU=MET: ACTIVATION OF THE COFFEE SHOP PUBLIC SPACE INTO A THEATER PERFORMING ARTS SPACE WITH AN ENVIRONMENTAL THEATER AND POST DRAMATIC APPROACH

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Abstract: This research examines the transformation of a public coffee shop space into a theater performing arts space by applying environmental theater and post-dramatic theater approaches. Public spaces, especially coffee shops, have great potential as alternative spaces for theatrical performances, given their informal characteristics and ability to attract various levels of society. The environmental theater approach emphasizes interaction between audience and actors as well as non-conventional use of space, thereby blurring the boundaries between stage space and audience space. Meanwhile, post-dramatic theater, which emerged as a response to traditional theater structures, prioritizes elements such as visuals, sound, and movement over linear narrative. The performance *Aku+Kamu=Bertemu* moves the perspective form of the arena stage and proscenium to the public space, by reading the issues in the public space. The conclusion from the *Aku+Kamu=Bertemu* performance is that integrating public spaces such as coffee shops into theater performing arts practices can revive the local culture and create a space for dynamic social interaction. This study also offers practical guidance for theater practitioners and coffee shop owners in designing and executing performances that take full advantage of the potential of these public spaces. Thus, this thesis contributes to the development of new strategies in the performing arts and public space management.

Keywords: Theatre, Environmental Theatre, Postdramatic, Coffee Shop

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Introduction

Me+You=Met performance moves the perspective form of the arena stage or proscenium to the public space, by reading the issues in the public space. This performance is designed at the beginning as if there is no theater performance in general, such as the announcement from the MC that the show will take place, accompanying music that adjusts to the visitors, artistic and stage settings that use the layout of the coffee shop itself.

The concept of staging presented is the result of research, empirical experience, and reading the development of theater audiences who come to the performance hall, especially in the West Sumatra region. Although in fact theater has great potential to become alternative entertainment other than music. Through the work *Aku+Kau=Bertemu* The author explores deeply the work that must be done by theater activists, so that a correlation occurs, so that theater can become a new alternative form and be widely known in cafes.

Above phenomenon in the form of the performance *Aku+Kau=Bertemu* with the

Environmental Theater approach initiated by Richard Schechner and Postdramatik initiated by Hans-Thies Lehmann. The main objective of the staging style Environmental Theater is about engaging audiences in a shared experience that entertains and educates. The idea Environmental Theater has become very strong in the development of today's theater, this type of staging can take place anywhere, does not require expensive tickets, and is enjoyed by all ages and backgrounds.

The quote above can be understood that the benefits of Environmental Theater allow for a deep experience for the audience, this gets a strong and emotional reaction for them, because the audience is closer to the players and they are also involved in the show. This type of Environmental Theater performance is also more accessible than indoor performances, because the audience has easier access to the show.

The artist provides audience involvement in the performance, as if the visitors present are part of the performance, they are free to occupy the tables and chairs provided by the spatial layout presented. The players and audience also interact in several scenes, such as dialogue and participating in the drama of the show.

The involvement of communication media and cameras and other performance elements is also a new offer for the audience, they not only watch the action that takes place on stage, but they are also surrounded by cameras, communication media and other performance elements. The involvement of the media is presented by the creator through a smart TV operated through the OBS application in multicam. This can create a stronger and more emotional reaction in the audience, because the audience and players feel more connected to the story and its characters.

The thing analyzed in postdramatic theater is the insight in seeing the performance text with all the compositions that make it up. All visible or sensible components that are performed, in the postdramatic view, can be assumed as text.

The creators made the issue of the coffee shop phenomenon into an idea for the creation of the work *Aku+Kau=Bertemu*, all the compositions of the coffee shop phenomenon, drama, music, dance and new media became components that built the integrity of the performance. All these aspects were arranged in forming a component that was seen as text in the performance. The *Aku+Kau=Bertemu* performance utilizes a spatial arrangement and people who come that we cannot control, this helps to tell an interesting story to watch. The creators make the issue of coffee shops, empirical experiences and the short story *Sepotong Senja Untuk Pacarku* by Seno Gumira Ajidarma into a story and stage exploration.

The short story trilogy *Sepotong Senja Untuk Pacarku* by Seno Gumira Ajidarma became a performance script that the artist processed into a stage of exploration and experimentation of the story presented in the performance. This short story tells the story of a Sukab who sends a letter to Alina, but because of his lack of courage to tell her how much he loves her, the letter finally arrives for 10 years to Alina. In this case, life plays an important role in delivering Sukab's feelings to Alina.

The short story trilogy is an exploration stage in creating a theatrical performance, where all human relationships certainly involve meetings, separations and developments. Likewise, the creators see coffee shops as a place for meetings and farewells that often occur in this place. People who come to this place have their own goals and interests.

The quote above suggests that a creator must have creativity in a creative process. The emptiness can be taken from the environment to provide strong inspiration for the emergence of creative works. This can encourage creativity and support artists in defining what happens in a work. This is what encourages creators to re-read the environment around them, especially coffee shops, to make it a new exploration space and space activation, so that theater is also popular among coffee

shop communities.

Methods

Taking an approach to the developing phenomenon around the object starting from research, looking for various sources of references and ideas for creating a work of art, is an important and basic part in creating a theatrical art creation. This research is carried out by the artist starting from several coffee shops located in the West Sumatra area, in order to reduce the objects that become the mapping of the artist's thinking.

The next step, the creator collects data by seeing how many viewers come to the theater to watch the theater performance. The data was obtained from the Balai Theater performance in Bukittinggi City with the title of the work *Biduk Berkeping* on December 2, 2023, from this activity the data that the creator obtained was that the audience who came to the theater was 150 people, the audience came from 50 students of SMK Taruna Bukittinggi, 40 people from the production team and the rest of the audience came from outside the area.

The theater performance held at the Mursal Eisten Arena Theater ISI Padangpanjang, entitled *Dokter Gadungan* by Moliere is a final exam for Theater students. In this case, the creators paid attention to the audience who attended around 165 people, where 50 or more were final year students and crew from the production team, 20 interns from UNIMED, 10 Theater lecturers and the rest were ISI Padangpanjang students. In this case, it can be presented that the performance building with a capacity of 400 people was only filled 25 percent.

The first step the creator did was field observation such as observing the behavior of coffee shop consumers, who came and what their needs were for coming to the coffee shop. This involved visitors aged 15 years to adulthood, staff, managers and the community living around the coffee shop. The initial steps are as shown in the following picture. Creating a theater performance in a coffee shop has a different way compared to conventional theater, because the space is more intimate and often more interactive. Therefore, the creators carry out several stages, starting from looking at the possibilities of the coffee shop that will be used to reading the issues and phenomena that are happening in the environment.

In this field observation stage, the creator observes why the audience's interest in coming to the performance building to watch theater is decreasing. The creators found that the audience was starting to get lazy and had shifted media from the stage to digital platforms to make it easier to watch theater performances.

Dramaturgy design of the performance is the initial process in creating the concept of the work to the concept of staging, thus creating a cohesive and meaningful theatrical experience. Dramaturgy combines elements of story, character, narrative structure, and cultural context to build an effective performance. The performance *Aku+Kamu=Bertemu* is the artist's reading of the crisis of theatrical staging, thus seeing the possibility of a coffee shop as a suitable space activation for a new form of performance that is in demand by today's audience.

Concept mapping stage is the creation of the directing concept and design of the *Aku+Kau=Bertemu* performance. At this stage, the creator has begun to design the dialogue, cast, artistic, type of music and other supporting performances used in this *Aku+Kau=Bertemu* performance.

Casting process in the show *Aku+Kau=Bertemu* different from casting in conventional theater, because in the environmental theater and postdramatic approaches, scripts and characters are often not the main focus. This performance emphasizes broader visual, performative, and experimental elements, involving actors who must have acting, singing and dancing skills.

Exploration in the show *Aku+Kau=Bertemu* focus from linear narrative and conventional characterization towards more experimental and non-linear forms of expression. This exploration can encompass a variety of aspects, including the use of (1) Money, (2) Time, (3) Body, (4) Text, (5) Technology, and (6) interaction with the audience. After conducting research, creating a performance concept, and exploration carried out by the actor on the body and space which then developed into a performance text. The artist uses several methods to make the issue of the coffee shop phenomenon, empirical experience and to make the short story text *Sepotong Senjan Untuk Pacarku* by Seno Gumira Ajidarma into a performance text. Starting

from making a script played by female and male actors adapted from the short story.

The selection of the type of music used is done from the beginning so that the song and storyline become a unity. The actors and music designers in this show also do regular rehearsals. The choice of musical instruments is also a consideration for the creators, such as presenting modern musical instruments such as acoustics and making the voices of the actors into music that will be processed by the music arranger.

Visual video is an important part of this performance, this is because the media is based on supporting technology in this theater. The presence of the video will be designed from beginning to end in several scenes in the performance, the design of the contents of the video is an issue that is being discussed in the script such as the proliferation of coffee shops in Indonesia, young people, women, space, waiting, emptiness and so on. At this stage the creator and Vjing discuss the theme and contents of the performance, so that the visuals displayed in the performance become a complete unity.

The development stage is a search stage by exploring space, setting blocks and acting business that will be played by the actors. This aims to make the actors comfortable in acting, familiar with the space, tempo of the game and sensitive to the music played by the musicians. This stage provides an emphasis on the actor's dialogue game in setting the tempo, rhythm and dynamics for affirmation and emphasis in each scene..

Result and Discussion

The performance *Aku+Kamu=Bertemu* is a performance carried by the creator as a new form of theater performance in public spaces such as coffee shops, where the creator sees a new opportunity for theater performing arts to survive and become a performance that is in demand by today's audience. This is because currently, especially in the West Sumatra area, theater is still not popular and commonly discussed in the coffee shop community, and there is a theater staging crisis after the post-covid-19. In this way, the creators see that theatrical performances have great potential to become alternative entertainment in coffee shops besides music.

The artists use the performance approach *Aku+Kamu=Bertemu* with Environmental Theater by Richard Scheehner and Postdramatik by Hans-Thies Lehmann. Both approaches have theatrical forms that are contrary to conventional theater, emphasizing sensory experience, interaction, and innovative use of technology and space. Both of these approaches allow for the use of new media in performances, so that the audience is faced with something new and interactivity in watching theater that can happen anywhere, such as in a coffee shop.

The elements that form the performance *Aku+Kamu=Bertemu* are: (1) Deconstruction of the narrative /text. (2) Characters. does not have a fixed character and changes. (3) Use of technology. (4) Emphasis on the action and performance of the actors. in text or dialogue. (5) The use of collage techniques in forming the structure and texture of the performance. (6) The use of non-conventional space and stage. (7) Interaction with the audience who are not just passive spectators. (8) Narratology.

The concept of "*Aku+Kamu=Bertemu*" encapsulates the essence of creating a theatrical space within a coffee shop, employing the principles of environmental theater and postdramatic approaches. This synthesis of ideas reflects the evolving nature of performance spaces and highlights the significance of public spaces in fostering community engagement and artistic expression. The integration of theater into non-traditional venues like coffee shops represents a shift towards more inclusive and accessible forms of art, where the boundaries between performer and audience blur, creating a shared experience that is both intimate and communal. Environmental theater emphasizes the interaction between the performance and its surroundings, transforming the space into a dynamic participant in the theatrical experience. This approach aligns with the findings of Suminar et al., who discuss the importance of public spaces in facilitating social and recreational activities (Suminar et al., 2021). The identification and management of such spaces are crucial for optimizing their functions as venues for community interaction. Similarly, Saputra et al. highlight the role of placemaking in revitalizing urban areas, demonstrating how the character and culture of a space can enhance public engagement (Saputra et al., 2019). By situating theatrical performances within coffee shops, the

environmental theater approach allows for a reimagining of the space, inviting patrons to become part of the performance, thus enriching their experience.

The postdramatic theater further complements this framework by shifting focus from traditional narrative structures to a more fragmented and experiential form of storytelling. Berceanu et al. note that postdramatic structures prioritize social functions such as empathy development and community building, which are essential in fostering connections among audience members (Berceanu et al., 2020). This is particularly relevant in a coffee shop setting, where the informal atmosphere encourages spontaneous interactions and shared experiences. The practice of postdramatic theater emphasizes the importance of audience participation and the dissolution of the traditional performer-audience divide, making it a fitting model for performances in such intimate venues (Ivanovna et al., 2021).

Moreover, the exploration of postdramatic aesthetics in Indonesian theater reveals how contemporary practices are moving away from conventional narratives towards more abstract and poetic forms of expression (Gusrizal et al., 2021). This evolution allows for a broader interpretation of what constitutes a theatrical experience, particularly in non-traditional settings. The coffee shop, often seen as a social hub, provides a unique backdrop for such performances, where the audience's engagement becomes a vital component of the artistic process.

The significance of public spaces in the context of theater cannot be overstated. As Nurjaman points out, the comfort and accessibility of public spaces greatly influence their utilization for social activities (Nurjaman, 2023). In the case of coffee shops, their inherent design and ambiance can enhance the livability of the space, making it conducive to artistic endeavors. This aligns with the findings of Hermawan, who emphasizes the need for adequate facilities and comfort in public spaces to optimize their potential for hosting various activities (Hermawan, 2023). By leveraging the existing infrastructure of coffee shops, theater practitioners can create a welcoming environment that encourages participation and engagement.

Furthermore, the concept of heterotopia provides a theoretical framework for understanding how coffee shops can serve as alternative spaces for artistic expression (Putra & Fathony, 2022). These venues can be seen as "other spaces" that challenge conventional notions of theater and public engagement, allowing for a reconfiguration of social interactions and artistic practices. The dynamic nature of such spaces fosters a sense of community and belonging, which is essential for the success of any theatrical endeavor. In addition to fostering community engagement, the integration of theater into coffee shops also presents opportunities for innovative artistic practices. The postdramatic approach encourages experimentation with form and content, allowing artists to explore new ways of storytelling that resonate with contemporary audiences, particularly in informal settings where traditional theatrical conventions may not apply. The coffee shop becomes a canvas for creative expression, where the interplay between space, audience, and performance can lead to unique and memorable experiences.

Moreover, the role of audience perception in shaping the theatrical experience is crucial. The interaction between different cultural elements within a performance can enhance the richness of the experience, particularly in a multicultural setting like a coffee shop (Chang, 2021). This intercultural dialogue not only broadens the scope of artistic expression but also fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of diverse perspectives among audience members. The potential for coffee shops to serve as venues for postdramatic theater also raises questions about the future of performance spaces. As traditional theaters face challenges in attracting audiences, the shift towards more accessible and informal venues may represent a sustainable model for the arts. The findings suggest that exploring visual and performative elements in non-traditional spaces can lead to innovative artistic practices that resonate with contemporary audiences (Tudella, 2023). This evolution of theater reflects broader societal changes and the need for art to adapt to new contexts and audiences. In conclusion, the concept of "Aku+Kamu=Bertemu" embodies the transformative potential of integrating theater into coffee shops through environmental and postdramatic approaches. By reimagining these spaces as platforms for artistic expression, we can foster community engagement, encourage innovative practices, and

create inclusive environments that invite participation from diverse audiences. The synthesis of these ideas underscores the importance of public spaces in the contemporary artistic landscape, highlighting their role as vital sites for cultural exchange and creative exploration.

Conclusion

The performance "Aku+Kamu=Bertemu" is present as an innovation in the world of theater performing arts, by utilizing public spaces such as coffee shops as alternative stages. The creators see an opportunity to make theater more relevant and interesting to today's audience, especially in West Sumatra, where theater is not yet popular. Using Environmental Theatre and Postdramatic approaches, this performance emphasizes interactive experiences, the use of technology, and the deconstruction of traditional narratives, aiming to revive interest in theatre. The show emphasizes collaboration between actors, technology, and audiences to create a more dynamic and engaging experience. Other containers for the activation of performing arts spaces, such as seeing the possibility of theater performances having opportunities in public spaces such as coffee shops, public interest and the staging crisis can be overcome by other theater artists. With the note that theater must also follow technological advances and read today's issues.

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