

THEATER AS AN AWAKENING VACCINE (BRECHTIAN CONCEPT)

Warih Witjitra Wening, M.Pd

SMA N 1 Bontang

citrawening50@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

As soon as this article discusses the theater opportunity as an awakening vaccine in Indonesian society during the Covid 19 pandemic. Art has become the most powerful medium to reach the public area in the middle of a fairly tension and uncertain national situation. This discussion will present Bertolt Brecht concept of thinking in a different form of thought, but the author believes that in the social condition that occurs in the middle of Indonesian people who are panicking, theater is the right solution. Brechtian concept has the idea that all apparatus of performance, including audiences are required to stay apart nowadays, this is a reality that examines artists and audiences due to physical distancing from the actual theater. Nobody realizes that the concept of *verfremdungseffekt* which is defined as isolation, distance, or alienation is now becoming more powerful in the middle of the pandemic. The basic thinking makes the writer believe that to create a healthy physical condition, theater vaccine is the answer as awareness both conceptually in performance and in presentational performance fragment, the author thinks that it is a strategy in the social condition nowadays.

Keywords: Brechtian, Verfremdungseffekt, Vaccine, Awareness

PREFACE

The Covid-19 pandemic infects the world, it is also experienced by Indonesia, this is an epidemic that cannot be avoided, but in this situation it has a negative impact on the economic, political and health sectors, especially entertainment. Massive impact also occurs in the arts sector, this is because entertainment license is no

longer obtained by artists and even art groups have also experienced complicated situations due to *less show*. The government policy of issuing Large-Scale Social Distancing (PSBB) is as a bitter pill for artists to swallow because this has caused all performances to be canceled due to there is no allowance in a crowd from the police.

As if never ending situation after the PSBB policy there is another policy of PPKM. The Enforcement of limitation on Society Activity, this policy is not much different, but if we look closely at the quote "Mr. President requests so that the Enforcement of limitation on Society Activity (PPKM) to be continued, from January 26th to February 8th, 2021," said the Chairman of the Committee for the Handling of COVID-19 and the National Economic Recovery (KPCPEN)"

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative research methodology with a research library approach according to Mardalis (1999) stating that library research is a study used to collect information and data in the assistance of various kinds of materials available in the library such as document, book, magazine, historical stories, etc. This approach is chosen because in the current situation, PPKM The Enforcement of limitation on Society Activity is implementing so that library research

is the right step to collect digital literacy data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Some activities are limited, and delay, furthermore it is failed to be done. The impact affects all levels of society, including the Surabaya artist, Meimura.

As Surabaya *ludruk* artist, Meimura realizes that mutual cooperation, mutual help and care for others are being values that are done together to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic. Meimura is one of them breaking down the limitation of activity into an activity that is actively done to fight Covid-19 in the middle of Surabaya city peoples.



(Meimura Documentation)

Meimura uses the market as a medium for performing space to convey an awareness message of the importance to be alert to Covid 19 and promoting the culture of wearing mask, this is considered quite

effective because the impact can be directly felt by peoples who are hypnotized by the character Rusmini who is played.

Rusmini is a female character with East Java style of clothing as a dancer and amaze the people who watch it.

The fast information is mazy by the condition of people who easily accept the news on social media and *getok tular*; the news spreads by somebody to others , this makes news about covid 19 becoming lot of misinterpreted and uncertainty, the source of information leads to the truth, the point is we can be aware but don't panic because it can drop the immune system.

Issues which spread among the people are considered as truth. Most of our society accepts one-way information that is pedagogical. Issue that is made then easily remade by some people in the society without thinking about and analyzing the content and context of the issue, besides it leads to hoax or fake news.

Aesthetic value is often only as an artist creativity through art media, but behind that art has another side that is important for

society even though in the pandemic situation because art can give inspiration, understanding, appreciation and aesthetic experience that is essential in the awareness process. In the framework of critical social and cultural theory, the artist activity is understood not only as ritual activity but also what artist doing is cultural action by Freire (Sachari 2002:27).

This basic thinking inspires Meimura to go directly into the peoples situation who are in the situation of entertainment crisis as a reflection of the tension of the pandemic time.

When Bertolt Brecht offers the concept of *verfremdungseffekt*, German critical society represented by the thinkers of Frankfurt School is against the tendency of German film and television industry to constantly produce false consciousness through television dramas. Brecht bravely rejects Aristotelian "involvement" in the shows. For this reason, the concept of *verfremdungseffekt* or the effect of defamiliarization or the effect of isolation is needed so that the audiences can take the distance by themselves from the show.

This isolation effect has function to create an empty space between the audience and the show. The empty space will become an arena where there is a dialectic between what is understood by the audience and what is produced by the show. The involved condition that Aristotelian will close the empty space so that there is no space for consciousness. "Involved", in this context is a mixed emotional condition so that someone cannot see the show as the dialectic process which occurs between the show and the audience, it can also occur between the player and the character that they are played. It seems that Meimura (through the performance of "Rusmini" which is performed in the middle of the market in Surabaya) is trying to realize the condition of being "not involved" for the Indonesian audiences. Some of the audiences feel that there are small climaxes which are intentionally "failed to be climax" in the show.

Verfremdungseffekt Concept and Public Awareness. Erving Goffman said that all of us are social actors who live and living the social stage. The social stage is divided into

two, namely the front stage and the back stage (Goffman: 1990).

In the social drama that we have watched recently, it can be seen how the actors are presented roughly at the front stage. Similarly, it can be seen clearly how the actors in the back stage prepare their performers.

Brecht theory of theater is the antithesis of Aristotle theory of tragedy, which he calls dramatic theater. Meanwhile, based on his idea, the theater is called epic theater, which is a type of performance that he considers most suitable for entertaining people who are in the science era. If dramatic theater aims to achieve catharsis, so epic theater aims to make the audiences aware of the living condition around them. In epic theater empathy, or the audiences' emotional involvement with the show is avoided, but instead of they are aware that what they are watching is not a real event, but only pretend. In order to achieve that situation, the V-Effect is created or it calls alienation effect. It is through this alienation effect that the audiences seem to be disturbed by their enjoyment of watching the event on the stage. It is hoped that

with this situation, the audiences can keep their distance from what they are watching, and then can critically evaluate the problems presented in the show which they are enjoying. Epic theater seems to have similarity with traditional Indonesian theater which always mixes between the real world and the fictional world.

Brecht, who calls Aristotle theory as a dramatic theater, firmly rejected it. According to him, the main purpose of theater show is not to grow catharsis, but to make the people involved (actors and audiences) aware of the changing social condition of the society in which they live. The fate of human, the social situation and condition that surround them, it is not something that has been given, and from its beginning / "sono", but a construction, man-made, and therefore if humans want, they can change it. The deity laws are just an artificial rationalized human being in power. Brecht is greatly influenced by the thoughts of Karl Marx. Therefore, to understand Brecht theory, a little mention of Marx thought can help in understanding.

In Marx view, something that determines the development of society is not awareness, thus, it is not what society thinking about himself or herself, but the real situation of society (Magne-Suseno, 1999: 138). For Marx, humans are determined by their production, both what they produce and how they produce it. The way society produces what it needs to live that is called the situation of society, and this is the way that determines human awareness. Marx statement as is quoted by Magne-Suseno (1999: 140): "Awareness is impossible difference from the situation that is realized, and the human situation is a truly human process." Therefore, human tends to think according to his/her interest. He/She only considers what is considered good if it can support the interest of his/her existence and bad if it threatens his/her existence.

Theater means reproducing events between humans, both those it has happened and it has made up, and the presentation is meant to entertain. At least, what it is meant when we talk about theatre, whether

it is the old or the new (Brecht, 1980: 251).

If the entertaining function is ignored, according to Brecht, for example to make a market, then the prestige of the theater will be insult. It does not mean that moral issue can not get into the theater, but the things dealing with moral must be something fun, or something that entertains the audiences. The main purpose of the audiences going to the theater is they can be entertained by the theatrical performance.

The problem is something entertaining which is so relative from one era to another. It means, something that is originally entertaining, in one particular era, it will not be sure entertaining people who are in another era. Generally, urban youth is no longer entertained by *wayang kulit/golek* puppet show, but for children in the earlier era, *wayang* show is the most popular and preferred entertainment.

Even though certain types of arts are no longer entertaining for people who come later, it does not mean that all types of past arts can no longer be enjoyed by the descendants. Tragedy that is

considered a classic like the artwork of Sophocles, Shakespeare, da Racine, is still able to fascinate many people. Similarly with *wayang* show, although many people have been abandoned, a few people feel entertained, and thus can enjoy the show.

According to Brecht, for such a long time, people are entertained by the Aristotelian-style theaters which focus on the audiences in empathy, the feeling of being involved with the show, with the characters on the stage, causing feelings of pity and fear, and finally it can achieve its main goal: catharsis. For Brecht this type of show, although entertaining, it is not suitable and appropriate type of entertainment for the present time (at the time Brecht lives). Nowadays, according to Brecht, is the science era, thus the type of entertainment must also be suitable for the conditions of the new century:

If we are looking for direct entertainment, seeking enjoyment that summarizes and complete which is within the reach of the theater to present human togetherness images, then we must see ourselves as

children from science era. Our common life as human beings – and it means our life is determined by a new scientific measurement (Brecht, 1980: 255).

In Brechtdefinition, V-Effect is a presentation that still allows the recognition of what is being imitated and also becoming something strange at the same time. A condition of society, for example, when we watchrepeatedly everyday so that it becomes familiar, and we do not realize that this condition is actually a construction, a building is created by people who have benefited from this condition. In order to grow our critical power toward the condition of the society, then the custom must be isolated or made to look strange, thus we usually do not care about the condition that always repeats it becomesasking. Making it odd or unusual, thatis V-Effect product.

Theatreshowwhich integrates V-Effect in it, this is usually able to keep the audience critical to what they watch. In addition, V-Effect always makes the audiences aware that what they are watching is not a real story, but only a play, a situation that makes up andintentionally it is

constructed. After watching Oidipus show by Sophocles, for example, the audience may feel a fear to have a fate like experiencing by Oidipus, who has tried to escape the God law. Because of the fear that the show has grown, we realize morethat it is impossible for human to fight or change the fate that is predetermined by the God. Humans become helpless and therefore must be willing to accept whatever the God have decided on them.

The helplessness condition is intentionally created in dramatic theater. In contrast to epic theater, with V-Effect in theatershow, the audience is prevented from influence in the events that emerges on the stage. In Brecht drama, Puntila, for example, V-Effect is presented by creating a character, Puntila, who looks strange and unusual, namely that he becomes a master who looks cruel and inhumane when he is conscious, but he is very humanistic and full of humanitarian consideration when in a drunken condition. This character is presented intentionally so that the reader or audience of the drama does not identify anything that can arise

empathy, thus, the critical power of the audiences become dull. V-Effect in Brecht theater is like an interruption to emotional feeling. Therefore, the audience is presented with issues to think about together. That is why Brecht, in his plays do not always include final conclusions; he only presents the issue, and through his critical power that is risen, then the audience is invited to find a solution together.

In his effort to present V-Effect, Brecht has created several methods or ways such as the structure of the story that performs in poetry and singing, the comments are directed to the audiences when they watch the show from either the person who acts as the puppeteer or the performer himself/herself, the words are used using the words that are commonly used in daily conversation, presenting characters who have unusual behavior, stage set is not made illusory, the use of light or projector and film are striking in the show, and et cetera.

The players in order to be able to create the V-Effect, according to Brecht, do not pretend or try to transform themselves completely

into the character that they are playing. If there is an actor who tries to become King Lear, for example, then the actor will kill the character that he is acted. Brecht said that players/actors should only show their characters. But even so, it does not mean that actors have to play cool. The actor just keeps his feeling not to become the roles that he acts. This should be done so that the audiences do not become the feeling of the character they are watching. Such an acting technique is called by Brecht as an epic technique in playing.

Performing arts event and activity that are mostly done in public places have become only at home. This also makes the theater stage less audiences and many artists use their house as a venue for their shows which of course are done online.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion of this research, the author concludes that the present social performance actually requires an apparatus that is aware of *verfremdungseffekt*. A dialogue on this virtual era appears in various forms. The dialogue that is

presence not only through verbal dialogue but also through news, meme, gesture, and even *gestus* (the term in Brechtian for all the actions of the actor). Social performance will never be without tendency. It always has tendency. The actors, both on the front stage and back stage, honestly have more hope in the presence of catharsis audiences. The audiences' emotions are intentionally fired up through long dialogues about their beliefs and the identity of their beliefs. The audiences for this social performance, in this case the wider society or grassroots, it should be the audiences who follow the story, observing, arousing, making decision, making distance, arguing, having knowledge and learning that will be able to change the world. The audiences who have *verfremdungseffekt*.

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