Reinventing Ephemerality and Indigenous Knowledge
in Virtual Dance at Gorontalo

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Abstract
The digital technology created a virtual world, which allowed an acculturation of our dance with digital technology as a new culture, virtual culture. Strengthened by the global condition of Covid-19, the process of deconstructing dance creativity wishfully participated to the innovation demand of the contemporary. Now that we meet the post-Covid 19, the nature of dance has again been challenged to reposit and redefine the dance form into the age of post-digital. While some questions remained unanswered, we must explore the consequences of digital era for the benefit of dance novelty. Concerning young choreographers at Gorontalo who created their virtual dances through the facility of instant application, the imperative of my research is to find how the euphoria of choreographing dance virtual at Gorontalo will accommodate the presence of "the spirit of ephemerality", and how the indigenous knowledge will be re-explored to bring back the humanity themes in their future creations beyond the digital technology. The research focuses on the investigation upon young choreographers at Gorontalo, conducted through observing their virtual dances. The unstructured interviews were attempted to obtain emic data of choreographers and performers' new experiences of creating virtual dances during post-Covid 19. Selected literature sources on virtual art and technology were used to construct the insight into aesthetic inquiries, and to reflectively evaluate dance essentials. The result shows that the positive responds upon the outcome of having their dances digitised and virtualised bring the Gorontalo young choreographers put the effort in reinventing the "spirit of ephemerality", and that by exploring the indigenous knowledge they also bring back the sense of humanity in embracing their future creations beyond the digital technology.

Keywords: virtual choreography, indigenous knowledge, ephemerality, sense of humanity

INTRODUCTION

Today we have overcome a radical situation that changed many substantial elements to meet the demand. It is the well adapted of mostly art form within the

seemengly advanced digital technology. Since the modern time, technology had strongly affected our society, and we brought it to become more and more advance. It was also a consequence of a contemporary society in the postmodern era. The digital technology created a virtual world, which seemed to allow an acculturation of our dance world with digital technology as a new culture, virtual culture. We are in the process of deconstructing dance creativity so we will wishfully participate to the innovation demand of the contemporary – digital world. Strengthened by the global condition of Covid-19, the process of deconstructing dance creativity wishfully participated to the innovation demand of the contemporary.

We are aware that creating virtual dance is not the same as recording a dance performance. Pioneering dancers – choreographers since the modern era (the 1900s and above) have been carrying out their efforts to preserve their dance into archives through video recording or dance films. As revealed by dance creators after experimenting with cameras and the cinematic process of dance, another artistic-based research package is needed to make dance archiving form feasible. Submitting the editing process for choreographic work is not an option considered by all contemporary choreographers and dance movies. Ellen Bromberg in her writing implied that it was necessary to understand editing as the second stage of the choreographic process of translating her work into video or film. She realised to work with both dance and media in time, so when a succession of images assembled the meaning, she could essentially recreate the work in editing suite. The choreographic and spatial elements became pigment on a palette with which she could paint a new picture (Bromberg, 2002:244). On the other side, it is not an undeniable fact that ephemerality had always been a quintessential character of dance stagings for centuries. It had been a challenge for the creators to choreograph within such nature of the dance, as Norton Owen confirm Ted Shawn's awareness upon the cruciality of the live bodies pouring all the creative efforts in executing his choreography (Owen, 2002:62).

The dancing body is visually tangible so that we can catch a measurable and veriable form. Nonetheles, what we tend to miss out on is the nuance and the subtleties of motions that exist in a "split second of the moment" to suddenly flee or dissolve into the next. If the spectators are not totally tuned into the detail of the spaces between the moves or places amongst the routine, they just lost the moment McCuthen mentioned as the "colored-light" of the dance (McCutchen, 2016). McCutchen refered to two phenomena correspond to dance as the ephemeral visual art, that: 1) in dance the body becomes an art instrumen through transcending its own exhaustive – intimate self, so it delivers such beauty of form and exquisite combinations of motion, and 2) such momentary-movement medium produces

short-lived images that evaporate into the whole remaining image in our memory without a concrete trace. This ephemeral nature of the dance also evokes the dancer to pour her vibrant energy to compeletely involve in manifesting a perfect execution of the choreography, just before the stage curtain falls. This is an intense, dramatic and often an achievement of a succesfull crest of the performance, that cannot be repeated the same way. Langer said that was a manifestation of active forces, a "dynamic image" through the presentation of physical reality of a place, the gravitation, a dancing body, the intensity and restrain of muscles, secondary tools such as lighting, aural element, and property. These are dissolved into a virtual reality that are never be so clear or ordinary but are symbolic and developed into a complex syntesis to reveal the inner subjective experiences. The less appearance of the physical forces, the more perfect the dance is (Langer, 2006:6-7).

In the context of eclectic interaction of Indonesian contemporary dance with the mixing factors of advanced digital technology, the intensity of virtual world of the post-postmodern society, and the emergence situation of Covid 19, the desire upon choreography being virtual is inevitable. Despite the main actors of the dance, which are choreographer and the dancers, are having less competence to master digital technology for both choreographic works and scientific study, the presence of ephemerality of dance performance in a virtual space remains questionable. While some questions remained unanswered, we must explore the consequences of digital era for the benefit of dance novelty. Now that we meet the post-Covid 19, the nature of dance has again been challenged to reposit and redefine the dance form into the age of post-digital. I stand for the term post-digital as the paradigm where the digital culture brings the artistic practice as an attitude that is more concerned with being human rather than being digital. It entangles with the discourse of art practice involving four theses of aesthetic dimensions: 1) distributed artworks, 2) hybrid subjects, 3) fluid materiality, and 4) blind spots. The prefix *post* should not represent the condition that is finished or stopped (of digital). Instead, it indicates that we are now at the point after and beyond the novelty value of digitalisation, the era at which new forms of dealing with these developments are emerging (Klein, 2021:27).

The notion of post-digital also refers to the digital technology as an expression of human desire, so that once it was understood as a critical reflection of 'digital aesthetic immaterialism'. Today, it represents the centre of intercorrelation for contemporary art and research projects, which is well established in the arts, the humanities and social sciences, and in transdisciplinary approaches. In the artistic practice, post-digital is more concerned with the possibilities of unconventional ways in using technology through aesthetic manner, and it often refers to the

creativity that describes the paradox, uncanny, and enigmatic art forms within the digitally composed processes and structures. However, as Klein added, 'The Post-Digital concept has so far been less prominent in art education. This is mainly due to the fact that research on digitality in art education tends to center the individual and the use of digital tools rather than systemic thinking and broader implications' (Klein, 2021:30).

I have put the effort to trigger a broader discussion amongst my students of the Jurusan Pendidikan Sendratasik at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo and Gorontalo young choreographers of how we reconcept our virtual works to produce reliable post-digital dance forms. Regardless of the shortcomings, their enthusiasm extends to exploration and "nothing to lose" experiments to reinventing the nature of dance. Concerning young choreographers at Gorontalo created their virtual dances through the facility of instant application, the imperative of my research is to find how the euphoria of choreographing dance virtual at Gorontalo will accommodate the presence of "the spirit of ephemerality", and how the indigenous knowledge will be re-explored to bring back the humanity themes in their future creations beyond the digital technology.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The research focuses on the investigation upon young choreographers at Gorontalo and it was conducted through observing their virtual dances. I interviewed Feri Pomontolo (Sanggar Makuta), Dian Restyani (Sanggar Satya), Dian Paneo (freelance), Siska Maele (freelance), and Masni Zakaria (freelance). The unstructured interviews were done well enough and delivered the data of choreographers-performers' new experiences of creating virtual dances during and after Covid 19. Selected literature sources on virtual art and technology were used to construct the insight into aesthetic inquiries, and to reflectively evaluate toward dance essentials.

The last two semesters of social distancing due to Covid 19 outbreak were a nightmare for those who still work with conventional ways in creating dance. Either the professional or the freelance-learners, young choreographers at Gorontalo have struggled to keep their creativity flowing within all the restrictions and cancellations due to vulnerable condition of health. The main idea of my research is to study the existence of dance composisition through and within the virtual room, which means that there is a technical skill of video editing to be mastered. What I called master is refering to the skill that is advance, not only understand about the codes used in multimedia language, but also apply the previously mastered skill, which is a

choreographic skill, into digital – multimedia processing. The concept of virtual choreography is to imply the choreography stages in and with a virtual space.

I imagined that in the process the choreographer would do physical choreographic routines and got them complete in a virtual chamber of video editing. In this case, the digital process inevitably has to be done totally from the beginning of the concept: exploring, improvising, composing, and finally presenting a dance work. As an initial illustration, virtual - digital dance products can depart from the concept of dance movies. The starting point could refer to the work of a film director, who has to do everything from the very beginning of filming. I assumed that doing virtual choreography with likely has the same way, as they started from casting dancers, interpreting themes or maturing work ideas, and selecting dancing spaces, but all be done remotely and through web interaction or electronic communication. Thus, dancing spaces are no longer sufficient as physical spaces measuring 5 x 6 m, for example, but also imaginary spaces that will later be developed in and with the digitization process.

The literature investigation stems from Judi Mitoma, et.al's *Envisioning Dance on Film and Video* and experience- based writings from other dance scholars to guide me back and forth between choreographic investigation and theoretical analysing. Some thought of the thinkers in the *Post-Digital, Post-Internet Art and Education* edited by Kevin Tavin, et.al delivered important discourse upon the term *post-digital* from the genealogy of the words to the comprehensive arguments, so that I might not fall into unbalanced subjective opinion. The prime data was gathered from the respective 5-7 minutes virtual dance performance of those five subjects. The five young choreographers had become reliable source people whose works were attained through a set of genuine choreographic processes. Coincidently, the five choreographers-performers acquired choreographic knowledge from me, and they have put the knowledge and experience from the classroom into the real digital world. I observed the virtual dances either presented on YouTube or voluntarily provided to me directly. Some selected virtual dances were reliable enough for me to find the answers to the problems I listed above. The virtual dance choreographed by Feri Pomontolo entitled *Tinelo Eya* (2021), *Mo Sikola* (2020), and *Tumbilotohe* (2021) provided enough information for me to observing and investigating some crucial aspects correspond to ephemerality and the exploration of Gorontalo's indigenous knowledge. I also got some clarification from Pomontolo's verbal prologue about how he affirmed the neccesity of a clear choreographic concept before filming the motions.

Dian Paneo (*Melarat*, 2021), Masni Zakaria (*Bangkit Sendiri*, 2021), and Siska

Maele (*Suram*, 2021) with their presentation of dancing in open space made a major investment to my analysis upon the choice of natural site and neigbourhood for dancing, while Dian Restyani (*Sampunang Lunga*, 2021) provided the technique of video shooting in a single narrow-closed chamber. From the the first three (Pomontolo's) and the second four of dance works, I found some interesting significance to discuss correlated to virtual choreographic presentation. The first three especially, showed perceptible notions discussing the aesthetic aspect of virtual art involving sinematic technique what Deleuze described as the power of art as a sensational logic.

FINDINGS/RESULTS
After I observed and analysed the works Pomontolo, Paneo, Zakaria, Restyani, and Maele, I could just have my research outcome. The findings could be elaborated into separate broaden discussion. However, I prefer to discuss the works as they are integrated to each other, for the virtual choreography itself is an art of a complex process of interwoven aspects both cognitive and practice. All that matters address to the primary concern of reinventing the ephemerality in the virtual dance, and the role of their respective indigenous knowledge in coloring their works.

The first result is that the competency aspect of choreographer to master digital technology is crucial, as of analysis or scientific study for dance scholars. A dance work in a virtual space is certainly not the same as a digital recording that records a dance performance. The choreographer needs to think from the start of his idea of carrying out the choreographical process as the essence of creating a dance work, how he undergoes the exploration, the improvisation, the formation/composition upon the dance materials, and finally manage the presentation in a virtual space. The virtual space is the space for dancing, the stage for the presentation of motion compositions in rhythm, dynamics, expression, and spectacles. Video trimming, video - audio editing, codification - decoding, encryption and so on are the minimum operating techniques choreographers must know. Then he could integrate these abilities with his choreographic knowledge and experiences.

Editing process cannot just be left to a videographer, as well as the motional recording that requires particular carefulness (of the floor pattern, the bodily expression, and the quality of movements). It is the choreographer who is truly familiar with the movements and supported essensials he created so he can do such "compositional play" inside the digital suite. As Gene McHugh asserted through the Klein's work that the meaning and condition of post-digital era are interconnected to the post-internet, which bring us to not only use the technology

as a tool, but more to the totally engagement of the idea from the beginning to the execution, "It's not work about the digital computer network, it's work about contemporary art's own entanglement in the digital computer network" (Klein, 2021:31). Here too, he builds spectacles both with dance movement and the digital features offered through the application. Again, because of the nature of dance which relies on bodily expressions to convey the details of dance messages, the presence of dance in virtual performances demands certain considerations.

The second result is the effort in reinventing the "spirit of ephemerality" in virtual dance performance. I bring back my reference of Paneo's bodily effort in creating the subtleties motion (Figure 1), and Pomontolo's *Mo Sikola* through vibrant energy of dancing body to reach a perfect execution upon the intense and dramatic sphere in a compositional group (Figure 2). I can say that the movement expression itself is the key, for the dancing body will manifest the message hidden through the composition of tension and resolution, equilibrium and disequilibrium, lingkage of the rhythm, and the unpredictable continuum. Such expression has to remain and intensely exist while the body is being watched through the lens and screen. In short, the technical aspect must show more fluidity, so all the movements look easy and effortless to execute in a clear structure. The body must be projective and predominant to deliver the organic forms, then any digital manipulation can do the rest.

Another ephemeral dimension presented at Maele's *Suram* that shows significant work in projecting a choreographer's desire through her charismatic – lived body with a passable dance technique, personal movement style, and fully dedicate to choreographic designs. The dramatic elements are there if she meant to have it, and without unnecessarily dramatising the content (Figure 3). One of other things must do to project ephemerality in virtual choreography is an organic face expression. It is also the reason why any movements, even one delicate – subtle movement, must be delivered smoothly and effortlessly. Restyani shows her gradual changing of face expression that comes from inner appreciation towards movements and dramatic structure. She presents a focus, calm and flat expression without any strain so the face lines remain clear throghout the sequence, then her expression produces a slight change just to intensify the movement she made (Figure 4).

Figure 1. The notion of subtle motion in the real natural dance space in Paneo's *Melarat*
Source: Screenshoot from Paneo's video, doc. Sitharesmi, 2022

Figure 2. The facing direction play in Pomontolo's *Mo Sikola* using only natural light
provided by *Kinemaster*
Source: Screenshoot from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2TAXLu_kJM;
doc. Sitharesmi, 2022

Figure 3. One of the static designs in Maele's *Suram*, showing a delicate statue-like
gesture that requires a proper technique to do
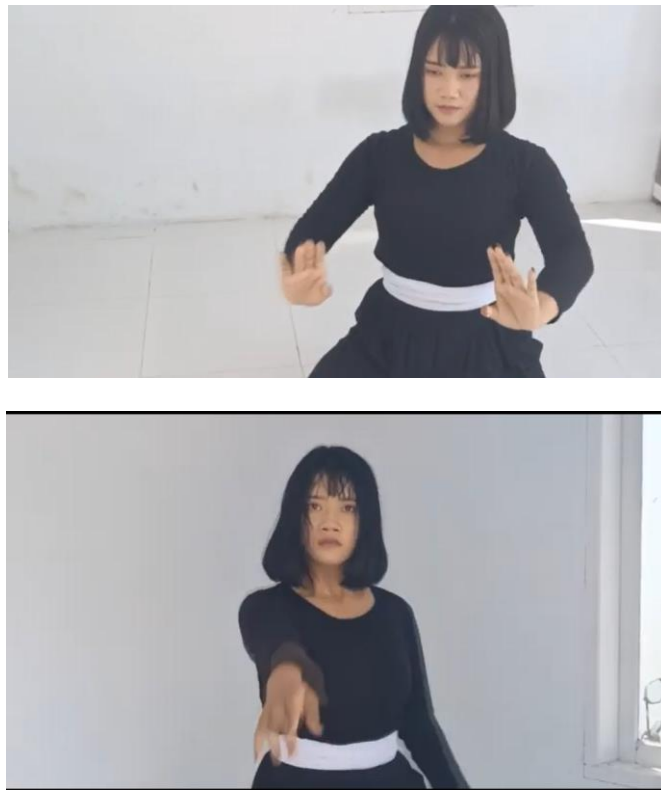Source: Video collection Maele, 2021; doc. Sitharesmi, 2022

Figure 4. Gradual changing of Restyani's face expression in her *Sampunang Lunga*, an inner appreciation towards the movements
Source: Screenshoot from Restyani's video, doc. Sitharesmi, 2022

The third outcome is the presence of indigenous knowledge as the basis of movement vocabularies exploration. Pomontolo's *Tinelo Eya* and *Tumbilotohe* have the most perceptible gestures and motives that bring the technical aspect and dance style of Gorontalonese significance (Figure 5 & Figure 6). From the theme, the ideas elaborate to both representational and symbolic phrases to deliver the meaning of the whole. Being virtual and digitalised, the origin of movements and the characteristics of Gorontalonese local values remain undisturbed. However, as I cite from Pomontolo's words, he has to previously find the skilled dancers for him to convey all the choreographic construction, including to present the spirit of ephemarility through the individual improvisations. The improvisation itself can only emerge to the trained body of the dancer and is possessed by the dancer as part of her persona in playing her role for the dance. Undoubtfully, exploring the indigenous knowledge in the process of creating dance will bring back the sense of humanity not only to materialise in dance motives or themes but also the choreographer and dancer's attitude in embracing their future creations beyond the digital technology.

Figure 5. The presence of Gorontalo's classical phrase in the new creation virtual dance
Tinelo Eya
Source: Screenshoot from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_MeNJnptGVo,
doc. Sitharesmi, 2022

Figure 6. The presence of Gorontalo's traditional event in the new creation virtual dance
Tumbilotohe
Source: Screenshoot from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HO_TwkYE_zc&t=152s,
doc. Sitharesmi, 2022

DISCUSSION

Being ephemeral is both an advantage and disadvantage for the presentation of dance. The ephemerality of the dance content or accommodate the signature of choreographic powers from which the substance and surprises built from details related to actual space, time and physical impact. These powers create the performance atmosphere that could bring some mental – spiritual experiences to the audience (something what Aristoteles called "catharsis"). The power of ephemerality is the spectacles that happened in space in one particular time that are never be the same with those in the space in another particular time. The changing atmosphere is presented by different audiences, different moments, different sounds

in the background, and all differences of reality, a true real world. Hence, it is quite problematic when the dance's space is a static entity in the static time of virtual reality.

We could use, temporarily or for a longer period, some clues that have been investigated from selected contemporary virtual choreographies. The nature of dance relies on bodily expressions to convey the details of dance messages, so the presence of dance in virtual performances demands certain considerations. Watching dance virtually through web and sites, or digitally through video player dissociate the viewer from the nature of dance as an ephemeral art. Imagine of what would the classical dances with intricate details such as Balinese dance and Bharata Natyam do to face the challenge of digitisation. Will the *jeriring* (finger jingles), *seledhet* and *manis rengu*, which must be integrated with the movements of other body parts, be well presented on the screen? Or how *Bharata Natyam* and *Khatakali* convey messages through mudras and facial expressions that are rigorously expressive when they are put into digital stage?

Digital technology is a means for us to raise our civilisation, with which modern culture has achieved universal standards, presenting products that can be accessed globally. Such concept brings larger and more varied audiences both in quantity and quality. Nonetheless, standardisation always tends to be massif, along with the postmodern era that created pop culture. The concept of pop culture that promotes "eclecticism", "anything is possible" and commercialization - commodification, has a very good place in the life of modern society and cannot be separated from the support of information technology and social media which is increasingly used. Such conditions alone are enough to make the concept of staging dance in exclusive spaces no longer a necessity. We still could appreciate at least local, national and international festivals such as the Indonesian Dance Festival, World Dance Day (24 Hours Solo Menari), the Yogyakarta Arts Festival, and other small performances by dance communities. However, when the pandemi outbreak forces all of us to continue restrictions in almost all aspects of life, I deserve to worry about the dance survival.

Using the codified system of digital technology can help us to represent the symbols, including ethnic symbols, that are usually done in choreography. Virtual dance is a breakthrough in contemporary works productivity, making the dance performances accessible internationally by numerous audiences. However, since dance is an ephemeral art and it has to have some specific elements to be named "dance", the lived performance is still the real way to convey meaning (or the value). Let us not to be that pesimistic, for we have to be aware that the digitization

of dance has always brought both advantage and disadvantage in providing contemporary dance with a good transition to the new culture. The world of dance does not only produce artists but also encourages scientists who continue to process their analytical power as well as those who work in creativity. Choreographers are true dance lovers, who will continue to explore alternative concepts and ways to animate and present the art of dance beyond time and space. If the technical competence, physical experience, artistic – creative experience, choreography, and cognitive abilities are not sufficient for analysis, then at least more advanced knowledge of information technology and computer operation must be added. Within this way, the choreographers might find themselves.

On the other hand, the euphoria of choreographing virtual in Gorontalo during and post-covid 19 turns on the more competitive dance festivals, but in a slightly false manner. Since the competitors cannot be free from the hegemonic committee, such as FLS2N and PEKSIMIDA, the dance creations barely meet the genuine performance. So, if the post-digital, like Klein said, brings the digital culture on to the paradigm artistic practice that is more concerned with humanity, I worry that the Gorontalo young dancers-choreographers have been misguided instead, of conveying their *being*, of being human rather than commodity. It is not the knowledge they're after, nor the advanced skill and competency for consciously embracing "the others". Instead, they are lulled to chase victory over victory. Once the expensive-premium devices are provided (by the school or whoever hiring), the virtual dance creations fall into technical-physical spectacles. After all, it is hard to distinguish the different dance titles and themes due to uniformity of reapeted common gestures and movements.

CONCLUSION

In all the limitations caused by Covid 19, work from home, financial instability, and potential deficits in many aspects of life in the future, this project is only a small part of all efforts to optimize our human aspects. Although dance may be on the last list of necessities of life that must be held or may not need to be held at all, dancers and choreographers are true dance lovers, who will continue to explore alternative concepts and ways to animate and present dance beyond space and time. This research is conducted to meet the needs of the soul of art itself, while continuing to look for a "place" for the existence of Indonesian contemporary dance in a virtual culture.

I would not say that the exhibition of virtual dance performances I have reviewed have succeed in making the desired choreographical composition, namely making

the virtual room as an arrangement space, a kind of collage to present a dynamic image of dance movements in the virtual space. Beside the more complex applications and digital media, the requirement is primarily addressing the choreographer competency itself. On the other hand, the projects of choreographing in virtual space worth the effort, for there always be an appreciation towards the first challengers.

It is not enough to do the collage and montage in creating virtual dance in terms of choreographic concept. Choreographers need to advance their competence with some technical knowledge to operate selected digital devices, so they can work simultaneously or back and forth between choreographic process and digital editing. It has to be done by choreographers themselves, as they are the most familiar with the movements, floor designs, dramatic matters and resolution. Finally, our holistic consideration addressing the technical ability conforming to a standard contemporary choreographic technique is not sufficient to satisfy virtual needs. It is important to consider the bodily features have a "body-genic" as well as the face expression that is photogenic, so they will invest to the attractiveness of virtual dance.

In his *Tinelo Eya*, Pomontolo add the significant motives and gestures of female character in Gorontalonese classical dance, *Tidi*. The motives are essensial as the notion of specific character for the eight *Tidi* of Gorontalo, so they always be done in a manner that always be the same from one *Tidi* to another. When he put the motives into a new creation dance, he asked the dancer to explore them within more powerful energy quality, to compensate for the quality of staccato motion. The title *tumbilotohe* in Pomontolo's *Tumbilotohe* directly points to the special traditional event in Gorontalo's culture held annually the end of Ramadhan. The tradition is one of the souls of Gorontalo associated to the Gorontalonese Islamic values, which also the symbol for internalising the Gorontalo's philosophy *Adat hula-hula'a to Syara, Syara hula-hula'a to Kur'ani* (*Adat bersendikan Syara, Syara bersendikan Kitabullah*). The *Tumbilotohe* conveys the meaning of *tumbilotohe* through and within its presentation in a more broaden way. At the end of the day, the post-digital era leaves the question of what will happen to conventional dance and will such methods and precedented praxis of artistic-based research still be actual in our today's society.

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