



E-ISSN 2338-6770

Submitted date : -

Revised date : -

Accepted date : -

Correspondence Address:

Thai Studies, Faculty of Arts,
Chulalongkorn University 254 Phaya
Thai Rd, Wang Mai, Pathum Wan,
Bangkok 10330. E-mail:
6688031022@student.chula.ac.th

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE DANCE WORK "COMIC SPACE" IN INTERPRETING THE IMAGINATIVE SPACE OF COMIC BOOKS

Retno Palupi ¹, Setyo Yanuartuti ²

¹ State University of Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

² State University of Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

Email: retnopalupi.21034@mhs.unesa.ac.id setyoyanuartuti@unesa.ac.id

Abstract : The dance work titled Comic Space is inspired by the imaginative space found in comic books. The choreographer explores several visual elements commonly found in comics such as panels, gutters, illustrations, speech balloons, and sound effects. These elements form a compelling two-dimensional space that can be utilized as material to create artistic dance movements. One of the key concepts highlighted is closure, the ability to interpret comic stories from separate images. This idea is applied to choreography by creating an illusion of transition between movements and assembling fragmented, seemingly disconnected movement pieces that, when observed as a whole, convey meaning. This is manifested through body gestures that may appear disjointed individually but form a coherent message when viewed collectively. The creation process follows Jacqueline Smith's Construction Method I, which includes stages such as finding inspiration, determining the type of dance, choosing the presentation mode, exploring movement, evaluation, and refinement. This work is categorized as pure dance, which emphasizes the beauty of movement rather than storytelling. The resulting performance presents contemporary dance that visualizes the world of comics through movement. The choreography emphasizes fast, staccato movements, with a characteristic black-and-white tone reminiscent of comics. This work aims to inspire further development in contemporary dance creation that blends visual arts with performing arts.

Keywords: Pure Dance, Comic Books, Imaginative Space, Closure, Comic Space

1. INTRODUCTION

Humans are social beings who require communication through both verbal and nonverbal expressions. Verbal expression is conveyed using words, either spoken or written, while nonverbal expression is communicated through gestures and expressions. Through expression, people can avoid misunderstandings that often occur in communication. When verbal understanding fails, nonverbal expressions such as gestures and facial expressions can serve as effective alternative means of communication. One medium for expression is art. Art is a creation stemming from extraordinary skill and is expressed in forms such as audio, visual, or literature. One form of visual art is comic art. Comics serve as a medium for comic artists to convey ideas and messages through a series of interconnected images that form a narrative.

Essentially, comics combine elements of visual art and literature, consisting of visual imagery (drawings) along with text or verbal descriptions (Sadewo, 2017:27). The word "comic" originates from the English word meaning "funny," or from the Greek word "kōmikos," which emerged around the 16th century. Initially, comics

were designed to depict humorous events (Gumelar, 2010:2). In the past, comics appeared in strip form with serialized stories published in newspapers and magazines. At that time, comics served as a communication tool to convey important events in a light-hearted and humorous manner. Over time, comics evolved and became a form of entertainment across all societal groups before the advent of digital platforms. Based on their type, comics now appear in strip form, digital/webtoon format, or as books with more complex narratives and graphic design.

Generally, people prefer reading illustrated storybooks over narrative-only books because the visual aspect makes the story more engaging and easier to understand. Illustrated books, particularly comics, contain illustrations, storylines, and elements of humor that captivate readers. The story is often understood visually through body gestures and facial expressions. Apart from the story itself, what makes comics appealing is the presence of characters. Comic creators introduce distinctive characters that not only shape the story but also evoke emotional connections with readers. As comics have developed, they are no longer limited to humor, expanding into a wide range of genres including horror, romance, fantasy, and action (Aprilianda, 2021:25–31).

According to Gumelar (2010:2), comics are sequences of images arranged according to the story and the author's intentions to make them easy to read. Comics typically include short texts as needed. Comic books contain various imaginative space elements such as panels, gutters, illustrations, speech balloons, and sound effects. Panels are among the most important elements in comics, housing all the icons and functioning as a general indicator of separate imaginative space and time. While panel shapes can vary widely, this variation doesn't affect the meaning of time but rather impacts the reading experience (McCloud, 1993:98–99). There are two types of panels: closed panels, which are bordered by lines, and open panels, which have no borders and present more open images. Besides panels, the space between them—known as gutters—also deserves attention. Gutters serve as transitions between panels, encouraging readers to imagine and mentally connect the separated images into a coherent narrative. This imaginative leap during transitions gives comics their storytelling power.

A phenomenon related to panels and gutters is known as closure. Closure is the act of observing parts of an image and perceiving them as a whole (McCloud, 1993:63). This occurs when the reader participates in connecting the images between panels. From static images, a story emerges as the mind bridges the gaps between panels. There are six types of transitions between panels: moment-to-moment, action-to-action, subject-to-subject, scene-to-scene, aspect-to-aspect, and non-sequitur (McCloud, 1993:70). Comic book narratives follow a specific reading pattern, usually left-to-right, right-to-left, or top-to-bottom. Supporting elements within panels include speech balloons, which contain dialogue, narration, and sound effects. These balloons are imaginative spaces to place text and help visualize character speech or narrative information (Maharsi, 2011:120). The shape of a speech balloon can vary depending on the character's emotion or expression.

Color also plays a vital role in comics. According to Aristotle, color is a blend of light and dark, black and white. Though color

enhances visual impression, its history in comics is closely tied to business and technological advancements. Black-and-white comics reduce printing costs and speed up production. While colored comics may appear more lifelike, readers often seek the imaginative experience over realism. This proves that black-and-white or monochrome comics can still effectively evoke imaginative perceptions of space, time, and color (Nugroho, 2021:11–12).

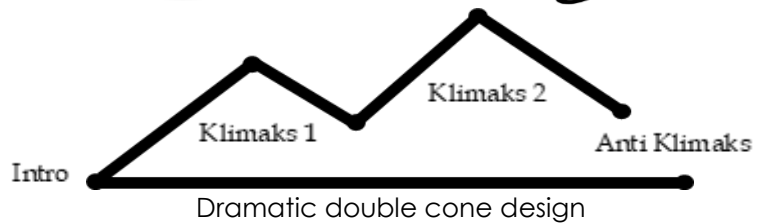
Comic books have a unique appeal compared to other comic formats. Their complexity lies in their graphic design and the multi-dimensional imaginative spaces they portray, which allow readers to imagine different spatial layers. This gives rise to the phenomenon of closure, where readers observe individual parts of an image but perceive them holistically. This concept intrigued the choreographer to explore the imaginative space of comic books and incorporate the phenomenon of closure into choreography.

2. METHOD

The creation method refers to a structured approach for realizing something new in this case, a dance work. This method consists of a series of stages carried out during the creative process, starting from determining the approach to forming a complete dance composition. According to Smith, in her book *Dance Composition* (translated by Suharto), the construction method includes several stages. This work applies Construction Method I, which consists of: initial stimulus, determination of dance type, selection of presentation mode, improvisation, evaluation, selection and refinement, and motif development. This method serves as a guideline for each step in the creation of a dance work.

The initial stimulus is necessary to spark the desire to create a piece. For the dance work *Comic Space*, the choreographer drew inspiration from the experience of reading comic books. Beyond personal reading experiences, the choreographer also encountered an ideational stimulus from the contents of Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*, particularly the elements of comic books. The choreographer discovered the phenomenon of closure—when one observes parts of an image but perceives them as a whole—leading readers to imagine the connection between otherwise separate images. In comic books, there are often two distinct panels with different scenes, encouraging readers to observe each scene in parts and ultimately synthesize them into a complete interpretation.

This dance work falls under the category of pure dance, which focuses on the aesthetics and beauty of movement rather than conveying a narrative. Pure dance emphasizes the quality and technique of movement rather than expressing emotions or telling stories. In *Comic Space*, the choreographer applies a double cone dramatic structure, which features two climaxes. The first builds from a low climax toward a higher one, and the piece ends with an anti climax.



In terms of presentation mode, Comic Space combines representative and symbolic approaches. The representative approach is used to clearly depict elements commonly associated with comic books such as panels, speech balloons, and black-and-white coloring. The symbolic approach is used to express ideas more abstractly, with a focus on movement and musical accompaniment.

During the improvisation stage, the choreographer explored movements inspired by previously conducted explorations. Through movement experimentation, the choreographer sought to create an illusion of transition between gestures (mimicking the shifts between comic panels) and assembled fragmented movements that seem unrelated but are actually interconnected (visual fragmentation).

In the evaluation stage, the choreographer reviewed the entire process from exploration to movement formation. This involved analysis to identify areas that needed adjustment, ensuring that the resulting movement aligned with the conceptual framework.

This was followed by selection and refinement, where the choreographer revised elements based on the analysis conducted during the evaluation. An external collaborator was also invited for discussion to gain feedback on the creative process. This step helped the choreographer identify sections that needed improvement or further development. This stage marks the final phase of the creation process.

Motif refers to movement patterns that have been selected, evaluated, and refined. Motifs serve as a foundation for developing variations in future movement patterns. The choreographer uses motifs to establish movement characteristics that suit the work and to apply the principles of choreographic form. To create a meaningful dance work, the choreographer must thoughtfully consider these choreographic principles (Smith, 1985:32).

The creation process is a manifestation of human creativity in expressing ideas and producing artistic works. According to Murgiyanto (1983:37), dance themes can also be drawn from lived experiences such as social conditions, psychological states, moods, or impressions. The choreographer was drawn to the nature of comic books, which suggest a complexity of graphic design and imaginative spatial elements such as panels, gutters, illustrations, speech balloons, and sound effects. This inspired the central theme of complexity in the dance work Comic Space.

The title of this dance work is Comic Space. This title is not merely a name but carries meaning that aligns with the concept and structure of the performance. "Comic" refers to comic books, while "Space" refers to expansive space. Together, Comic Space signifies the spatial world within comic books.

The style of this work reflects the choreographer's movement technique and the spatial exploration of comic books. The choreographer explores movement characteristics that mimic comic aesthetics, such as staccato (disjointed) movements. These

movements resemble static comic images that, when viewed as a sequence, appear to be in motion.

For dancer selection, the choreographer considered the need for diverse bodily expressions, which reflect the various character traits found in comic book figures. As a result, four dancers were selected: three females and one male. Gender differences do not impact the work because the movements are unisex, meaning they are not gender-specific.

The movement techniques developed in this work include relaxed and contrasting energy; the collapse technique, which involves releasing a body part with quick and contrasting force (typical in contemporary dance); and the staccato technique, which features disjointed, segmented movement with sharp and rapid energy.

Makeup design emphasizes sharp shading on the face, nose, and eyes, to create a 2D illusion under stage lighting—making dancers appear like comic illustrations. Dark and light tones are used to emphasize facial lines, particularly around the eyes, from a distance.

Hairstyling for female dancers features loose hair with small braided sections, creating a unique effect and dramatic hair movement. The male dancer's hair is dyed blonde to complement the stylized appearance.



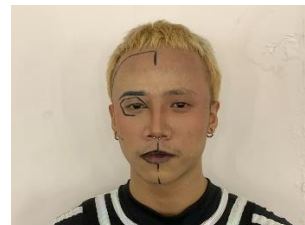
Female Dancer Make Up



Left Side Vie



Right Side View of Male



Dancer's Make Up



Dancer's hair

The costume used in the Comic Space dance work is not merely functional as body covering but is purposefully designed to support and enhance the dancers' movements and the artistic intent of the piece.



Costumes for Male and Female Dancers

The Comic Space dance uses digital music composed with a Digital Audio Workstation (DAW). This music is produced from a combination of virtual instruments, without the need for physical instruments during the creation process. It involves recording real instrument sounds such as drums, piano, guitar, violin, percussion, and more, then arranging them digitally into a cohesive soundtrack.

This choice allows for:

- Rich and diverse musical textures
- Greater control over timing and intensity
- Support for the abstract, imaginative atmosphere of the dance

The use of props plays a crucial role in reinforcing the conceptual content of the dance. In Comic Space, three types of props are used:

- Fabric Panel Boards – Representing comic panels, these props are large rectangular frames covered with fabric. They visually simulate comic book panels, helping to frame the dancers' movements and define spatial transitions on stage.
- Line Ornaments – Abstract visual elements placed around the stage to suggest the motion lines and effects often used in comics to convey movement or emotion.
- Helium Balloons – Representing speech balloons, these floating props interact with the dancers. Each dancer responds to the balloon in a way that mimics how characters react to dialogue or internal thoughts in comic panels.

These props not only enhance the aesthetic of the performance but also serve as storytelling tools, bridging the physical stage and the imaginative world of comic books.



Fabric Panel Board Properties



Helium balloon and Line ornament properties

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 DESKRIPSI KARYA

The dance work *Comic Space* is an inspirational piece that offers a form of pure dance performance exploring the imaginative space of comic books, while linking it to the phenomenon of closure. In this work, the choreographer draws on personal empirical experiences—specifically the act of reading comic books and the realization of the closure phenomenon that occurs during the reading process. This realization deepened with further analysis of comic books, leading the choreographer to understand that comics are not merely picture books but also contain profound artistic value that can inspire creative works. This marked the initial stage of the choreographer's creative ideation, which later developed into a dance performance.

Table 1. Work Description

No	Design Element	Description
1	Title	Comic Space
2	Synopsis	Lines, icons, symbols become illustrations within an empty space that is filled with action and imagination.
3	Number of Dancers	4 dancers (3 female, 1 male)
4	Music	Digital Audio Workstation (DAW)
5	Properties	Panel boards, line ornaments, helium balloons
6	Scenario	Described below

Scene	Motivation/Action	Duration	Lighting	Music	Description
Intro	A brief depiction of words with images	1.35 mins	Blue light	Balloon farty sound	1 dancer enters from side stage
Scene 1	Sketchboarding (rough sketch creation)	2.05 mins	General light	Lively	3 panels appear; 1 dancer moves in front
Scene 2	Panel placement and setting the mood to define genre	2.50 mins	Red light	Horror	1 dancer moves fearfully in the corner
Climax 1	Explaining inter-panel connections	2.05 mins	General light	Lively	All dancers move in turns
Scene 4	The influence of speech balloons on events in the panels	2.05 mins	Purple-green	Cheerful	Dancers interact with helium balloons one by one
Climax 2	Composition of panels, speech balloons, and complex graphics	1.00 min	Purple-green	Tense	Dancers enter and exit while exploring props
Anti-Climax	Imagining something from the word "COMIC" from one direction, then rearranged chaotically from another	0.35 sec	Purple-green	Flowing	Dancers move slowly while carrying balloons to the line ornaments

3.2 PROCESS OF THE WORK

The creation process is a form of human creativity in realizing an idea into a concrete work. This process begins by responding to initial stimuli, followed by choreographic processes such as exploration, improvisation, composition, and evaluation.

In the creation of *Comic Space*, the choreographer was initially inspired by the personal experience of reading comic books. Beyond this reading experience, the choreographer also encountered ideational stimuli from Scott McCloud's book *Understanding Comics*, which introduces fundamental elements of comic books. One key discovery was the closure phenomenon—the ability to perceive a whole image from its individual parts—allowing readers to imagine how separated images are actually connected. In comic books, two panels with distinct scenes are often spaced apart, encouraging readers to observe each moment individually and then synthesize them into a cohesive understanding.

After being triggered by this initial stimulus, the choreographer proceeded to the exploration phase, which involved conducting various movement experiments aimed at finding appropriate forms and achieving integrity in the results. One of the choreographer's prior works, "*Selemba Kertas*" (A Sheet of Paper), served as a foundational embryo for *Comic Space*. *Selemba Kertas* was a body-theater performance that helped the choreographer develop the initial concept, techniques, and artistic ideas that would be expanded in *Comic Space*.



A Piece of Paper Work in the *Comic Space* Exploration Stage

This process of developing and refining movements continued through the creation of choreography, building upon the insights from earlier exploratory works. During this phase, the choreographer identified which physical expressions could represent the complex visual characteristics of comic books such as panel divisions, staccato motion, and spatial fragmentation then translated those into dance.



A Piece of Paper Work in the Comic Space Exploration Stage

4. CONCLUSION

The dance work *Comic Space* is an inspirational creation that presents a form of pure dance performance, designed to explore the imaginative space of comic books while incorporating the concept of closure. In this dance work, the choreographer draws from empirical experiences, particularly the act of reading comic books and experiencing the closure phenomenon that arises during that process. One of the most identifiable aspects of comic books is the use of panels and gutters. The role of these two elements is critical in comic storytelling, as they work together to establish the narrative flow. In *Comic Space*, these components are not only acknowledged but transformed into choreographic elements, producing new types of movement inspired by the transition and fragmentation found in comics. The two-dimensional structure of comic books is artistically reimaged through dance, allowing the work to express a narrative through visual abstraction and motion. The creative process integrates comic book elements into a choreographic framework so that the final performance can be clearly perceived and appreciated by the audience. From this dance work, it can be concluded that a wide variety of new discoveries emerged—particularly in relation to the movement vocabulary, floor patterns, musical accompaniment, and other supporting elements. These findings collectively demonstrate effective techniques for exploring and translating the imaginative space of comic books into a dynamic stage performance.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All praise is due to Allah SWT for His abundant grace, blessings, and guidance, through which this article titled "Conceptualization of the Dance Work *Comic Space* in Interpreting the Imaginative Space of Comic Books" was completed on time. This article was prepared as a requirement for the completion of the Performing Arts Education Study Program, Faculty of Language and Arts, State University of Surabaya. Gratitude is extended to all parties who have provided support, particularly to Dr. Welly Suryandoko, S.Pd., M.Pd., as Head of the Study Program, Dr. Setyo Yanuartuti, M.Si., as academic advisor, Dr. I Nengah Mariasa, M.Hum., as examiner 1, Dra. Enie Wahyuning Handayani, M.Si.. Special thanks also to family and close friends for their immeasurable moral support. May this article prove beneficial and may all the help and support given be repaid in kind.

REFERENCE

- Aprilianda, R. (2021). Tinjauan Visual Tokoh Miiko Yang Berjuang Dengan Gigih Menggunakan Teori Tokoh Dan Penokohan Dalam Komik 'Hai, Miiko!'
<http://elibrary.unikom.ac.id/id/eprint/5106>
- Aviecena, S.A. & Nuffida, N. E. (2022). Penerapan Ruang Imajinatif dan Ruang Belajar Optimal di Sekolah Dasar. *Jurnal Sains Dan Seni ITS*, 11 (4), G32–G37.
- Fajrie, N. (2023). Pembelajaran Seni Rupa: Karya Seni Tiga Dimensi dengan Bahan Tanah Liat (Cetak I). Penerbit NEM.
- Gumelar, M. S. (2010). Comic making: Membuat Komik. In Jakarta: PT Indeks.
https://books.google.co.id/books?hl=id&lr=&id=xLcuDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR4&dq=gumelar&ots=DXEv_ezs9w&sig=Bmd7RdbAMl-lUg576Gb4kxRvtA&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=gumelar&f=false
- Hidayatulloh, M. T. (2014). Eksplorasi Bentuk Non-Figuratif Dalam Seni Lukis. *Jurnal Saraswati*, Abstrak.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24821/srs.v0i0.603>
- Maharsi, I. (2011). Komik: Dari Wayang Beber Sampai Komik Digital. In Badan Penerbit ISI Yogyakarta.
<https://books.google.co.id/books?id=FH58DwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=id#v=onepage&q&f=false>
- Maida, Rosmiaty, & A. (2024). Tata Rias Wajah Khusus (Cetakan I). Tahta Media.
- McCloud, S. (1993). Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art. In Mark Martin (Ed.), Kitchen Sink Press.
<https://archive.org/details/UnderstandingComicsTheInvisibleArtByScottMcCloud/mode/1up>
- Murgiyanto, S. (1983). Koreografi : Pengetahuan Dasar Komposisi Tari (B.M Effendy (ed.); 1st ed.). Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan.
- Nugroho, A. T. P. (2021). Tinjauan 5 Karya Ilustrasi Pada Buku Puisi "Melihat Api Bekerja" Karya M Aan Mansyur Menggunakan Analisis Formalistik. <http://repository.stsrdvisi.ac.id/id/eprint/425>
- Padmodarmaya, P. (1988). Tata dan Teknik Pentas (Cetak 1). Jakarta : Balai Pustaka.
- Sadewo, A. (2017). Analisis Semiotika Representasi Industri Rokok Dalam Komik "Perusahaan Rokok Untung Besar!!"
<https://doi.org/10.7788/boehlau.9783412218348.99>
- Smith, J. M. (1985). Dance Composition (Komposisi Tari) : Sebuah Petunjuk Praktis Bagi Guru (B. Suharto (ed.); Perdana). Ikalasti Yogyakarta.
- Soedarso, S. (2006). Trilogi seni: Penciptaan, Eksistensi, dan Kegunaan Seni (Cetak 1). Badan Penerbit, Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta.
- Soedarsono, R. M. (1999). Seni Pertunjukan Indonesia dan Pariwisata. Masyarakat Seni Pertunjukan Indonesia.