

ABSURDITY-IDENTITY OF BODY AND CULTURE IN CONTEMPORARY ART CREATION

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Abstract

This paper discusses the creation of a contemporary artwork entitled Skibili, which emerges from the intersection between the global absurd phenomenon "Skibidi" and Balinese cultural identity. Digital anomalies such as Skibidi are understood as forms of brainrot, internet-born cultural products that are banal, repetitive, yet viral reflecting both entertainment strategies and mass consumption patterns in contemporary society. The presence of such anomalous culture collides with Balinese cultural identity rooted in sacredness and spirituality, thereby producing a new space of negotiation for the body and culture. The creative process employs the yajna approach as a symbolic, spiritual, and aesthetic method: beginning with the exploration of absurd phenomena, paying respect to traditional values, and culminating in the realization of a visual artwork using wood, charcoal, and plywood as mediums. The visualization of a human head emerging from a toilet, juxtaposed with the text "*Kau yang berkata, aku yang merasa*", is read as a metaphor of a marginalized body that nevertheless retains its agency and resistance against external power. Theoretical references include Albert Camus on absurdity as a condition of meaninglessness, Michel Foucault on the body as the locus of power and discipline, and Jean Baudrillard on simulacra and hyperreality. Through this framework, Skibili is interpreted as both social critique and cultural irony: the Balinese body and identity, situated at the crossroads of sacredness and banality, threatened by absurd globalization yet simultaneously finding ways to endure through contemporary artistic expression.

Keyword: Absurdity, Body, Identity, Balinese Culture, Contemporary Art.

INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, the world has experienced an acceleration of digital culture that has given rise to anomalous phenomena. Internet culture presents expressions that no longer adhere to traditional aesthetic logic, but rather move through virality, absurdity, and repetition. One example is the phenomenon of "Brainrot," which is semiotically interpreted as a cultural sign. It has evolved and serves the following functions: 1) as an affective symbol of digital fatigue, boredom, and emotional dissociation due to excessive exposure to media content; 2) It is adopted in the everyday language of teenagers to refer to "stupid but fun" content as a form of self-soothing or escape from the pressures of life; 3) it can also be used to identify groups and create collective irony in online communities, especially through the use of terms such as skibidi (Maknun, 2025: 63). "Skibidi"—an internet cultural product that was born without deep meaning, but dominates the digital space with its strange movements, repetitions, and virality.



This phenomenon, which at first glance seems trivial, actually reveals how contemporary culture is moving in a direction that is increasingly fluid, boundless, full of absurdity, and without fixed meaning.

This situation is not limited to the virtual world, but has spread to the real social sphere. Rituals, dances, and even public spaces are now often treated as backdrops for the production of absurd content. This global culture born from the digital space is anomalous: it has no historical roots, does not emphasize values, and often mocks established order. Albert Camus called absurdity a clash between the human search for meaning and a meaningless world, a futility and meaninglessness (Cahyana, 2024: 19). However, in the context of digital culture, absurdity is no longer just an existential condition, but a strategy for mass entertainment and consumption.

In this situation, Bali as a contemporary cultural space faces a major dilemma. Balinese cultural identity, rooted in sacredness, spirituality, and cosmological harmony, is now confronted with banal and absurd global signs. The term contemporary must also be examined in this study. Etymologically, the word "contemporary" comes from two words, namely *co*, which means together, and *tempo*, which means time, so that the word contemporary means current or reflecting the situation of the time being experienced (Masut, 2023: 306). This contemporary culture can also be called hyperreality culture. According to Jean Baudrillard, contemporary culture emerged due to major advances in information technology such as television, telephones, and the internet. This progress has also caused the concepts of space and time, which should be simultaneous, to become unsystematic (Piliang, 2015). As happened in Bali, the viral phenomenon of foreign tourists in temples, inappropriate poses in sacred spaces, and traditional dances reduced to "unique content" for TikTok, shows how technology and the internet have caused sacredness to be degraded into visual entertainment. Balinese culture is often seen as a representation of harmony, spirituality, and established traditions. However, in the tide of digital globalization, this culture increasingly faces global phenomena that are anomalous, fast-paced, and often absurd.

The impact of this situation is ambivalent. On the one hand, Balinese culture is becoming more widely known globally. However, on the other hand, the traditional and spiritual values inherent in Balinese culture are threatened with being displaced by the logic of consumption and instant entertainment. Balinese cultural identity is at a critical point, where the meaning passed down from generation to generation must contend with the absurdity of global symbols that lack depth. This is what can be called a cultural anomaly, where sacredness and banality blend together in one social space.

FIGURES OF ANOMALY IN JEAN BAUDRILLARD'S STUDY OF SIMULACRA AND HYPERREALITY

The word "anomaly" literally means something that deviates from the norm or convention. In this context, the character "brainrot" is considered unreasonable, disturbing, or absurd. They are portrayed with strange names, illogical behavior, and visual aesthetics that deviate from the normal narrative, hence the term anomaly. The concept of anomaly in digital culture studies can be understood as a form of deviation or disruption to established social patterns and collective identities. In the context of digital communities, anomalies appear in the form of unusual spikes in interaction, shifts in the focus of conversation from the core to the periphery, and sharp changes in the expression of community identity. This shows that anomalies are not only technical problems, but also reflect disruptions to social constructs powered by digital media.





Figure 1. Figures of Tralalero Tralala, Bombardiro Crocodillo, Brr Brr Patapim, Bombombini Gusini, Tung Tung Tung Sahur, Balerina Cappucina.
[Source: Hardiansyah, 2025]



Figure 2. Skibidi character.
[Source: Pinterest/redbubble]

These absurd figures live in a world of simulacra (images, pictures, or signs of an event that have replaced experience). Thus, postmodern society lives in a world full of simulations; nothing is real outside of simulation, nothing authentic can be imitated. The utility value of commodities and the imperative value of production have been replaced by models, codes, spectacles, and the hyperrealism of "simulation." Communication through the media has trapped people in a game of simulacra that has no connection to "external reality." We live in a world of simulacra, a world filled with images or signs of events that have replaced real experiences. Yes, we live in a world full of simulations: unreal, inauthentic, and irreplicable. The world is no longer real, because "what exists" is only simulation. Baudrillard explains that

in the present era, "society" has disappeared and been replaced by the masses. The masses have no predicates, attributes, qualities, or references.

Hyperreality creates a condition in which falsehood blends with authenticity; the past blends with the present; facts intersect with fabrication; signs merge with reality; lies combine with truth. Categories of truth, falsehood, authenticity, issues, and reality seem to no longer apply in such a world. Baudrillard accepts the radical consequences of what he sees as the pervasiveness of code in the late modern era. This code is clearly related to computerization and digitization, and is also quite fundamental in physics, biology, and other natural sciences, where it allows for the perfect reproduction of an object or situation. this is why code can bypass something real and open up the possibility for the emergence of a reality that Baudrillard calls hyperreality (Jauhari, 2017: 129).

CREATION METHOD

The method used brings us closer to understanding Yajna as a process of creation. Yajna is not merely ritualistic, but more importantly, it is a symbolic act or work that is understood as a concept in the context of opening the path to self-sublimation. The word Yajna comes from Sanskrit, from the word

"yaj" which means to worship or pay respect, also interpreted as offering or acting as an intermediary.

From yaj come the words "yaja" (words of worship), "yajata" (like receiving respect), "yajus" (sacred, ritual, religion) and "Yajna" (worship, prayer, offering). Yajna can also be interpreted as worshiping, respecting, sacrificing, serving, doing good deeds, giving, and sincerely surrendering what one has for the sake of prosperity, perfection in life together, and the majesty of the Supreme Being (PHDI. 2014: 157). It contains values that can be described in accordance with the structure of artistic creation:

Figure 3. Stages of Creation Chart



1. Sincere devotion is used as the initial model for the process of awareness, sincerity in exploring the phenomenon of absurdity in Bali. Sincerity is used as a bridge to uncover awareness and visualize it in artwork as a depiction of the situation in Bali. The orientation of sincerity is not merely an exploration of awareness, but also plays a role in bringing out the artistic and aesthetic processes as well as spiritual meanings. Various attempts were

made to explore the human figure and the toilet as mediums related to absurdity. Not limited to mere images, the mediums of the toilet and the human figure were also presented in performance art events to strengthen the exploration of the connection between the body, culture, and absurdity.



Picture 4. Exploration of the body and toilet as a medium for performance art at PUSDIKLAT KEMDIKBUD Depok.

[Source: Research Team, November 2023]

2. Devotion and worship of Hyang Widhi, Gods, Betara, Ancestors, Country, Nation, and Humanity; The stage of devotion is the second phase in the creative process, where at this stage involves paying respect to God, ancestors, nation, country, and humanity. This respect is manifested through prayer, requests for blessings, and smoothness in the creative process. At this stage, appreciation is carried out by seeking new forms through experiments (such as sketches), which aim to explore the signs found during exploration and observation in the field. This stage is sensitive because it is related to imagination, which is not always easy for everyone to understand. Therefore, a deep understanding and special study of the symbols that arise from the imagination are necessary, while still adhering to the principle of devotion.



Figure 5. Sketches of Absurd Figures
[Source: Research Team, May 2024]

3. The implementation is adjusted to the capabilities of each individual according to place, time, and circumstances (desa, kala, patra); In the third stage, namely the implementation stage, which is the process of creating works that take into account the place, namely the conditions that have been explored and observed, in this stage the creative process is very much bound by time and circumstances. In line with the exploration related to the presence of the body and the toilet, an effort is made to use simple media in order to connect human characters with toilets. The choice of wood, charcoal, and plywood as media is the most feasible approach to respond to the figures of absurdity, because the materials and results displayed are not striking, as if they still look natural.



Figure 6. The creation process of the work using wood, charcoal, and plywood, adapted to the village, time, and place.
[Source: Research Team, May 2025]

In addition to displaying images of humans and toilets, it is necessary to convey ambiguous text to explore the audience's thoughts on the phenomena occurring today. The creation of text is still integrated with visual images and continues to use wood, charcoal, and plywood as mediums.



Figure 7. The creation process of the work focuses not only on artistic exploration but also on the collaborative effort to maximize the work while remaining aligned with the principles of place, time, and context.

[Source: Research Team, May 2025]

4. Sources of knowledge and truth; In this final stage, to describe the sources of knowledge and the non-singular orientation of truth in the created work, a theoretical study is needed that can explain specific matters related to the science contained in the work, in the form of symbols that present meanings and refer to the essence of truth, namely the search for a form that is believed and inherited but is able to represent today's situation. These sources of knowledge and truth will be described through a study of the body and power relations, which will be elaborated in the Results and Discussion section of the work.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION



Figure 8. Artwork 1 [Source: Research Team, June 2025]
SkiBili Charcoal on board Variable size 2025

This work visualizes the figure of a human head emerging from a toilet bowl, accompanied by the text YOU WHO SPEAK, I WHO FEEL. The visual and text are intertwined with an ironically smiling face, paired with a sentence that implies an imbalance of experience between

those who have the power to speak and those who must bear the consequences. In Foucault's view, the body is not merely a biological entity, but the main arena where power works, is implanted, and regulated. The body becomes a medium for social control, discipline, and normalization. His concept of power over the body is called "body discipline." Body discipline is an effort to monitor all aspects of an individual's body, including behaviour, intelligence, appearance, and how they become a more useful individual. Body discipline is a technology of power that is carried out to discipline the body and make it obedient and useful (Mustofa, 2017: p. 159). In this work, the human body is reduced to a part of a closet, a symbol of waste, garbage, and marginalization. This can be read as a metaphor for a body marginalized by the mechanisms of power: it remains present, but only as a vessel for the results of external power.

The term "Skibili" is taken from a combination of Skibidi and Bali, which opens up a new space for articulating critical discourse on the phenomena occurring in Bali. Phonetically, this word is light, humorous, even absurd, but behind it lies the desire to convey complex and reflective meanings. Skibili is used as a symbol of the hybridization of digital and local culture. It represents simulacra, or false realities born of repetition, reproduction, and visual imitation without any real reference. Skibili appears as a form of "Bali" that has lost its roots of identity because it has been reduced to Skibidi-style viral content.

The work Skibili was born from this contradictory encounter. It combines the global absurdity of Skibidi with iconography of the body and language laden with social criticism. The representation of a human face emerging from a toilet and the text "You say it, I feel it" voices how the body and identity- s experience pressure amid the clash between local tradition and global absurdity. Thus, this work is not merely a visual game but also a critical commentary on Bali's current condition: a cultural space straddling sacredness and simulation, between inherited identity and identity commodified by globalization.



Figure 9. Artwork 2 [Source: Research Team, June 2025]
Winged Victory of Balinese 30 x 42 cm Pencil on paper 2024

This work depicts a Balinese man wearing an *udeng* headdress combined with a classical Western statue, namely the *Winged Victory of Samothrace*, a marble statue from the Hellenistic

era depicting Nike, the Greek goddess of victory (Tutupary, 2019: 68). The winged body in the style of classical Greek sculpture combined with the head of a Balinese man creates a strange yet evocative image, relating to two worlds: East and West, sacred and profane, traditional and modern, spiritual and secular. The work, titled *Winged Victory of Balinese*, is a kind of portrait of identity that lives in absurdity, a reflection of humans who continue to search for meaning amid cultural clashes and global images.

In Albert Camus' philosophy, absurdity arises from the conflict between humanity's longing for meaning and a silent, meaningless world. This work depicts this absurdity, where the Western body (an icon of classical civilization's grandeur) is fused with the face of a Balinese man (representing the spiritual and simple Eastern man). The meeting of these two different bodies becomes a form of collision of consciousness, incomplete, out of sync, but precisely alive in its imperfection. This is in line with the condition of contemporary Balinese society, which lives amid the rapid growth of tourism, globalization, and digitalization, yet still strives to maintain its spiritual roots amid the absurdity of the modern world.



Picture 9. Artwork 3 [Source: Research Team, June 2025]
Absurd Memory 30 x 42 cm Pencil on paper 2025

This work depicts a fusion between the face of a Balinese man and the body of a mythological creature from Mesopotamian civilization, a hybrid between a human, a bull, and an ancient guardian deity known as Lamassu. Lamassu is a winged bull, its body resembling a male bull, but its head mimics a human head, which is usually found in front of the gates of the Assyrian Empire (Ashadi, 2016: 23). The smooth and expressive face of a Balinese man blends with the monumental and winged body typical of ancient Middle Eastern royal statues. This combination creates an odd, paradoxical form, yet one that is symbolically powerful.

This work speaks of vague memories and fragmented identities, of how humans today exist between two worlds: the past rooted in tradition and spirituality, and the present shaped by globalization and cultural simulation. In the encounter between Bali and Mesopotamia, two equally spiritual civilizations, there is the idea that identity is not something stable, but rather the result of encounters, collisions, and the reproduction of meanings that are constantly changing.



Baudrillard, in *Simulacra and Simulation*, argues that the modern world lives under the shadow of simulation: images replace reality, and reality becomes a derivative of constantly repeated representations (Adawiyah, 2023: 237). In this work, the fusion of Balinese humans and Mesopotamian gods creates a simulacrum of identity, a new reality that does not refer to its original source but to a pile of symbols.

This body can no longer be called Balinese, nor Mesopotamian; it is an image that stands alone—a "hyperreality" of identity produced by encounters, engineering, and visual reproduction. Like simulacra, it imitates what no longer exists: memories of a spiritual past that now remain only in the form of cultural signs. Through Baudrillard's perspective, this work is a portrait of postmodern humans living between image and reality. Their identity is no longer stable, but is constantly reproduced by the currents of globalization, tourism, and digital media that create "Bali" and "the East" as signs of cultural commodification.

CONCLUSION

The creation of works inspired by current phenomena, namely absurdity, identity, culture, and the body, serves as a critique of the chaotic situation today that can cause people to lose awareness of the importance of fighting for local values. The work was created using the yadnya method, which refers to sincerity, devotion, awareness of desa-kala-patra and sources of knowledge and understanding of truth, which made the process of creating the work coherent and neatly documented.

The process of exploration and observation, which began with an awareness of the connection between the body and the toilet in 2023, provides a kind of description and idea to further explore discontinuity, but in fact, it brings up many absurd things, especially in today's cultural and global media studies. The medium of the work utilizes natural materials such as wood, charcoal, and plywood, which are intended to represent organic change, yet they also present an ambiguous side that is difficult to understand.

Finally, in the context of the presence of artwork 1, which is examined using Michael Foucault's theory of the body and power relations, this work can be understood as a critique of the global power that dominates the way we interpret the body and identity today. The absurd phenomenon of Skibidi Toilet, which is internalized in the local context (Bali), presents a new form of power: algorithms, virality, and global pop culture that determine the representation of the body. At this point, the body is no longer sovereign over itself; it is shaped, ridiculed, and even turned into memes by larger power structures. In artwork 2, using Camus' theory of absurdity, which describes the clash between two different bodies, between the West and the East, between the traditional and the modern, which ultimately creates a figure of absurdity. Artwork 3, which concludes with Baudrillard's study of simulacra, addresses how images can shift today's reality by positioning imagination as a visualization between image and reality. Identity is no longer stable but is continuously reproduced by the currents of globalization.

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