Pseudo-Reality Representation
of Agan Harahap's Photography Work

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Abstract
Photography is a medium that is quite close to our daily lives and has even become part of the lifestyle; almost all intelligent devices now have it. The easier it is for virtual access to be obtained through instruments, the more people are flooded with text and images with a variety of content. The community's preparedness to sort out information and maturity in tracing cyberspace is undoubtedly needed to minimize communication or misinformation. Still, what happens in society, there are a lot of information defections that are used as a medium for herding opinions that provoke negative responses on a massive scale. This sparked Agan Harahap's desire to educate the public through his artworks. The focus and purpose of this study are to examine how Harahap constructed visual language to construct pseudo-reality. This research will be studied qualitatively with a semiotics method approach. Harahap, who is known as an artist who uses the medium of photography as his language, often carries out the process of editing photos to provide a representation of a 'new reality' in his work, a picture that transcends reality. Good art can ignite the debate from the discourse raised in position to give awareness. Departing from an issue that is being hotly discussed in the community, Harahap responded by constructing visuals and lessons of work that seemed to corroborate the conjectures of the community. The depiction is visualized in a satirical and humorous manner but full of symbolic constructions that build a narrative of a new reality that seems to lead public opinion on the issues being hotly discussed. A group of people who only see and read the text of the upload without confirming and correcting it from existing sources will respond aggressively

Keywords: *Agan Harahap, pseudo-reality, photography, digital imaging, semiotic*

INTRODUCTION

Art is a product of a civilization, so what is represented in a work of art is a description of the culture in which the work was created. As human society becomes complex, the artworks present will also become more specific and complex. Significant discoveries related to technology and materials certainly significantly impact the process of creating works of art. The emergence of alternative media used by artists to work gave rise to many new genres in art, no longer fixated on static mediums. Artists can now explore creations using dynamic technology and are supported by the latest technological devices that can represent the spirit of the times. The emergence of many new sub-genres in the arts fostered a new umbrella called media art or contemporary media art.

When media technology develops rapidly, especially in computerization and digital technology, societal changes occur significantly. The effectiveness, benefits, and operational convenience offered by new technology, primarily digital, make it easier for users to explore; of course, it does not take long for people to adapt and apply it in their daily lives. Changes in people's behavior and lifestyle due to technological developments are then manifested into a new culture, a new media culture. This then also influenced the development of media art today. Digital-based media art is overgrowing because it is in line with the existence and use value of digital-based devices, which are increasingly crucial in their function in society. No wonder many artists are exploring digital media closely related to their daily lives, especially young artists. With the advancement of digital technology today, the flexibility to build new narratives and realities more specifically and complexly is easier to achieve. They are no longer tied to the fact we often encounter in absolute terms but construct a 'false' reality (*pseudo-reality*) to awaken a new awareness of the truth that occurs.

The medium of photography, such as the camera, has become a medium that is quite close to our daily lives and has even become part of the lifestyle. Almost all intelligent devices now have a recording device. Photography is used not only to capture moments and aesthetic needs but the need to offer information to others. It is common when a photo becomes a medium to spread news, especially with the increasing ease of operationalizing software and applications to process and edit *images.* It is not difficult for some people to produce aesthetic images while having complex narratives or information. It no longer presents the picture as it is but can also present a 'fantasy' and appearance that does not happen in the real world. The easier it is for virtual access to be obtained through devices in their hands, the more people are flooded with text and *images* with a variety of content. The public's willingness to sort out information and maturity in tracing cyberspace is

undoubtedly needed to minimize communication or misinformation. Still, what happens in society, especially in Indonesia, there are a lot of information defections that are used as a medium for herding opinions to be trusted and provoke negative responses on a massive scale.

The easier it is for virtual access to be obtained through devices in their hands, people are increasingly flooded with text and images that have a variety of content. The public's willingness to sort out information and maturity in tracing cyberspace is certainly needed to minimize communication or misinformation, but what happens in society, especially in Indonesia, there are a lot of information defections that are used as a medium for herding opinions to be trusted and provoke negative responses on a massive scale. In a survey conducted by Microsoft, it was said that Indonesians are said to be disrespectful people on the internet in Southeast Asia (https://www.kompas.com/tren/read/2021/02/26/123200665/heboh-warganet-indonesia-disebut-paling-tidak-sopan-se-asia-tenggara?page=all accessed on Wednesday, June 2, 2021). A bad image that represents the stuttering of our society in responding to information as a whole.

This then tickled Agan Harahap's desire to educate the public through his works. Harahap, who is known as an artist who uses the medium of photography as his language, often carries out the process of editing photos to provide a representation of a 'new reality' in his work, a picture that transcends reality or people's expectations. This study that the author will try to put forward in this paper, how Harahap is creative and produces information that prioritizes pseudo reality. Not only limited to the social terrain of art, but Harahap expands his works on social media and is responded to by the general public from various aspects of society. This is an interesting thing to see that there are not many artists who are able to embrace all levels of society to appreciate and respond to their work, especially in Indonesia. Based on this, the author will try to examine the process of Harahap's creation in forming a false reality that is put forward in his work.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research was conducted with a qualitative research method with a semiotic approach to read the meaning contained in the visuals presented. By using a semiotics approach, we can read the tendency of visual language used by artists to build discourse while responding to the social symptoms that were being carried out when the work was created. This study will use Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis approach in a more specific practice. Barthes classified two stratified marking systems, namely denotation, and connotation. Denotation is the first order

of signification, and connotation is the second order. The meaning of denotation is direct, meaning a substance directly visible or depicted in the visual without being accompanied by a more profound sense. In comparison, the connotational meaning is a second-layer meaning that has been given an additional charge of feelings or mental concepts, the interpretation of the symbol, and the reading of the construction of the visual message intended by the artist.

FINDING/RESULTS

A reality is awakened from the information data collected, then and agreed upon by the public is widely believed to be believed. There is no absolute truth or reality, and reality tends to be dynamic, depending on the information available and how one responds to the news. Even the continuous and repeated manipulation of data can be believed to be a reality. This is what Agan Harahap tries to play in his work. He tried to jerk society in attempting to reconstruct another fact that was false and imaginary to invite appreciators to see, correct and reflect back on these works with the reality that actually happened.

Harahap developed his concept of work on social phenomena that are happening in Indonesian society. Some of his works reconstruct the great histories and events that are being hotly discussed by incorporating some iconic fictional figures to juxtapose with actual historical actors into the work, with situations that remain humorous. 'other' reality is formed to provide an offering to a fact that we have always understood with a parody approach in virtual space. The use of social media, especially Instagram as a showroom carried out by Harahap, is a reasonably exciting discussion point. Unlike conventional galleries where access to appreciate works is limited to visits made by appreciators to the gallery space, the use of Instagram as a gallery of Harahap's work allows appreciators to access it without being bound by time and space so that the work can be seen and appreciated widely by the general public, not only the art community. 'other' reality is formed to provide an offering to a fact that we have always understood with a parody approach in virtual space. The reading of the reconstruction carried out by Harahap will be the author of the surgery through the reading of Harahap's work below.

Figure 1. Jackie Chan
Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/BxyqS76goAf/
accessed on June 30, 2022, at 14.00 WIB

The initial stage in analyzing work is the denotation stage, which describes the visuals present in the work without involving the interpretation of the visualization present in an image. If we look at the display present, we will see a slightly blurred image display, where the background time is displayed at night, which is visible from the dark background, and the light beam of the lights are so contrasting. The central figure seen is a man wearing an Indonesian police costume, which is defined as a bulletproof vest worn with the words "POLICE", in a position to look to the left by grasping the gun with both hands and in the look on his face and standby position preparing to move towards the left side of the work. In the foreground can be seen stacking wet shields and helmets that have the label "POLICE" as well. In the background, a group of people who are restrained by the guardrail and attempting to penetrate it can be seen. Several figures behind can also be seen carrying sticks. In the captured screen view, a caption on the right side of the image is seen explaining the picture presented.

After describing the visualization seen in the image, the next stage is to read the connotation stage, where mental concepts play an essential role in interpreting the visual objects present in the previous denotation stage. In the picture, we will see a central figure who can be recognized as an international action actor of Chinese nationality, namely Jackie Chan. Referring to the pose applied by Chan, in the

picture, it seems to be seen how he tried to carry out an act of attack on something with a firearm in his hand. If you look at the attributes worn in the form of the Police Uniform of the Republic of Indonesia, then we can capture the narrative on which side Chan is on, especially seeing a group of people in the background who look aggressively penetrating the guardrail and wearing more general clothing attributes, without uniforms that negate the possibility of being on the opposite side of the police. Furthermore, suppose you look at the dominant characteristic imposed by the police in the form of shields. In that case, it can be concluded that the efforts made by the policemen are an attempt to survive something, which in this case can be said to be an attack from the other party.

The text that accompanies the image is an essential key to being able to read the visuals in more depth. It says in the text that there were clashes between the community and the police, in which the police attempted to take refuge behind shields from stone-throwing by mobs and were cheered on by foreign policemen suspected to be from China (in this case Jackie Chan). Another marker that appears is the date when this picture was uploaded on Instagram, namely on May 23, 2019. This date is an important marker that led public opinion to the events of large-scale demonstrations that occurred before, namely on May 21-22, 2019, in Jakarta. The time setting depicted at night, as shown in the picture, is another marker that clarifies the situation of the great riots that also occurred at night.

The hot issue of foreign workers filling positions in government institutions became widespread in society at the time. People are carried away by hoaxes circulating on social media about foreign workers employed by the government even though the unemployment rate is still relatively high. This culminated when the 2019 elections were held. Indications of fraud felt by a group of people led to massive demonstrations that ended in riots. This is where Harahap then constructs the growing issue and visualizes it in a parody style by involving actor Jackie Chan as the central figure in his work as if to assert that the problems that develop in society are actual. Judging from the comments made by netizens, many were then provoked by emotions to respond to the existing emotions, but also not a few were aware and then laughed at the context raised by Harahap. It took confirmation and a little precision to identify the figure was an international artist, and this was a satire of Harahap.
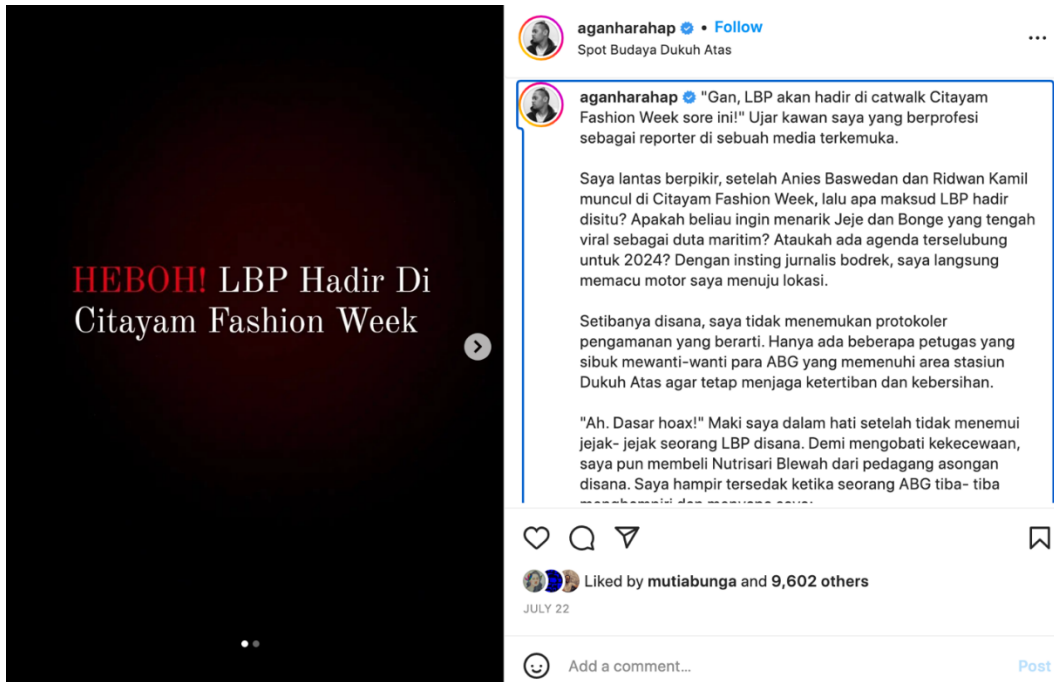
Figure 2. LBP page 1
Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CgTYO-OJ61j/
accessed on September 14, 2022, at 13.40 WIB

Figure 2. LBP page 2
Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CgTYO-OJ61j/
accessed on September 14, 2022, at 13.40 WIB

The denotation stage or initial description of the visual above is done by reviewing the text present on the first page, which reads "EXCITED! LBP Presents At Citayam Fashion Week". Furthermore, on the second page, a woman is shown in a pose waving her right hand towards the camera, where the direction of her face is also facing the camera and smiling kindly. He is wearing a black long-sleeved T-shirt and white text on the front and wearing blue jeans, wearing a side bag on his left, and wearing black slop shoes. He stood tall in the middle of the zebra cross, where there were about two people walking in the opposite direction on the left side of the image plane. In the background, there are several crowds of people looking at the camera. In addition, you can see the text in several paragraphs accompanying the image upload.

In the connotation stage, the beginning of the reading is done by examining the first page where the text is sufficiently large, and the acronym LBP is focused. In the political system in Indonesia, LBP is an acronym for Meter Coordinator for Maritime Affairs and Investment of Indonesia, Luhut Binsar Panjaitan, and this acronym is widely known in Indonesian society. In addition, the next focus is the text of Citayam Fashion Week, which the Indonesian people around June-August 2022 quite widely discussed. Citayam Fashion Week is a street fashion show held around the Sudirman Central Business District (SCBD), Jakarta, on July 16-28, 2022. Referring to the name used, Citayam is a village in the Bogor regency area, which later became known because some of its young people went viral on social media because they interacted, dressed uniquely, and did fashion shows in the Sudirman area, so the event was called Citayam Fashion Week which refers to one of the biggest fashion shows, namely Paris Fashion Week. This phenomenon is unique; the development of street fashion is organically conditioned without the involvement of designers, fashion critics, supermodels, and the venue where the fashion show should be held.

On the second page, we see the figure of a woman identified as an international celebrity of a Korean girl group BLACKPINK named Lisa. He smiled kindly and greeted the camera, and his position stood in the middle of the road. Referring to the text conveyed in the first picture, it can be said that the location where Lisa 'BLACKPINK' stands is the SCBD area, where the Citayam Fashion Week performance is taking place.

Citayam Fashion Week, which went viral and became the center of public conversation, attracted the attention of celebrities and public officials to attend and appreciate the performances that took place, such as the presence of the Governor of Jakarta, Anies Baswedan, and the Governor of West Java, Ridwan Kamil. The

present caption is accompanied by visuals, emphasizing the context that Harahap wanted to raise. The text contains a narrative about the disappointment of Harahap on the issue of the presence of LBP (in this case Luhut Binsar Panjaitan) at Citayam Fashion Week, which ends in his absence. Referring to the relationship between the first and second images, it is possible that the acronym LBP presented in the text is not Luhut Binsar Panjaitan, who has been familiar with the acronym, but Lisa BLACK-PINK. The text accompanying the visuals also emphasized this LBP acronym's misunderstanding. The presence of the names of Anies Baswedan and Ridwan Kamil, who are public officials in the narrative, indeed led public opinion to read this acronym as another public official, namely Luhut Binsar Panjaitan, and of course, many parties did not expect that then LBP here referred to Lisa BLACKPINK before looking at the second picture. The relationship between these two images is felt to be able to present a communication pattern that should be seen as a whole and, ultimately, not just a piece that is then able to deliver a misunderstanding—a method to raise awareness in the community about the importance of confirmation in responding to information.

CONCLUSION

Good art can ignite the debate from the discourse raised in work to provide awareness and movement for change. Through his artwork, Agan Harahap could spark discussion among the public, the art community in particular, and the wider community. Photography became a medium for Harahap to build his narrative. A medium that can present reality in a 'realistic' and straightforward manner while having intimacy and being close to the daily life of modern society, which does not provide barriers and distance for the communication that Harahap wants to build to his appreciators. His technical ability to process digital data presents a very smooth and realistic visual representation, and if not observed in detail, it will look like a live photographic capture. Not limited to the space of physical galleries and museums that tend to provide distance for the wider community, Harahap uses social media platforms that can reach the public widely and without borders.

Departing from an issue that is being hotly discussed in the community, Harahap responded by constructing visuals and discourses of work that seemed to corroborate the conjectures of the community. The depiction is visualized in a satirical and humorous manner but is full of symbolic constructions that build a narrative of a new reality that seems to lead to the opinion of people who want to get approval and evidence of the issues being hotly discussed. A group of people who only see and read the text of the upload without confirming and correcting it from existing sources will respond aggressively. It is this motive that Harahap wants

to put forward in his work, social criticism and awareness from the public of the importance of confirming, clarifying, and correcting information, because, after all, during a great flood of information and ease of visual manipulation, communication is straightforward to lead for a purpose. This process of education and maturation is what Harahap is trying to share with the broader community. Although it seems whimsical and playful with the *resulting image*, the moral and educational message that Harahap wants to convey is well constructed. A picture of how art is like two sides of a coin that has a considerable impact on the broader community. Agan has successfully placed his work as a medium of criticism and education.

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