

SEMIOTICS ANALYSIS OF PHOTO PROJECT “LAND OF THE SEA”

Markus Jiuhaneng*

Photography Programme/Faculty of Art and Design, Universitas Trisakti

Jakarta/Indonesia

jmarkus@trisakti.ac.id

ABSTRACT

“Land of the Sea” is a long-term project by young Indonesian female photographer Irene Barlian. The message from this photo project is the threat of sea level rising caused by climate change. The meanings and thoughts embedded in the photography produce different levels of cognition represented by the image mental experience. Photography is one of the mediums developing an image mental experience from a photography exhibition. With photography as the medium, photographers can uniquely convey various messages, signs, and meanings. The creative experience process has generated through the idea of delivering a message through the medium. Semiotics, the study of signs, explore how images can construct a perception of simulative experience. Through the immersive simulation process, an interpretation is carried out as a stimulus for an aesthetic expression and a simulation of reality. How do the interrelations between photography enhance the signs process and lead to cognitive stimulation? How can the interaction of sign simulations produce a simulative representation? What is the relationship between the power of authority and the image contained in the image? The difference in the level of cognition is no longer singular but becomes difference signification following the audience's background, perception, and use of meaningful signs. Semiotic dialogism explores visual literacies on the sign code embedded in the medium of photography to reflect various expressions and interpretations, which can convey the dynamic, immersive picture or sequences to the formations of meanings. The semiotics analysis describes and studies how a person receives messages obtained through complex intersections between the human mind and immersive experiences based on Saussure's semiotics theory. The author expected to study the signification process of the photo project Land of the Sea as a medium for visual cognition and how the photograph can signal, stimulate, and convey climate crisis messages.

Keywords: *Aesthetic, Climate Crisis, Immersive, Photography, Photography Exhibition, Semiotics.*

**Corresponding Author*

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A. INTRODUCTION

The subject of this research is a photo project entitled “Land of the Sea”. The female photographer Irene Barlian from Indonesia created this project. Irene Barlian, born in 1989, photographed the coastal areas of the island of Java; the villages are flooded due to rising sea levels on the mainland. The photographs from Land of the Sea during September 2022 in Jakarta are exhibited at two galleries. The first exhibition was at Kala Galery Blok M, and the other exhibition was at Serum Gallery Jagakarsa. Both are located in South Jakarta.

Watching the photography exhibition brings an experience related to a reality condition of the village. This experience results from reflecting the internal reality of humans. The mental world is innovative in that creative concepts can be generated. Responding to the presence of photography that can form an experience related to the message and conditions conveyed so that the resulting of art form reflects a simulation of reality, providing a basis for understanding the signs and messages conveyed by the photograph. The application of the concepts in immersive works is discussed so that they can understand the process of delivering messages. (Piliang, 2022).



Image 1. A deserted house stands out in Java Sea Pekalongan; coastal floods have submerged the settlement. Indonesia. Barlian, Irene. 2021.

Source: <https://www.leica-oskar-barnack-award.com/en/series-finalists/2022/irene-barlian.html>

B. METHOD

The earlier study of photography as a representation of reality more often discusses a particular examination. This paper method focuses on human interpretations of experience and how it connects the identity within the context of a hyperreal environment. Photography exists as a representation and a coherent series of signifiers. In semiotics, the elements of photography appear as a coherent series of signifiers.

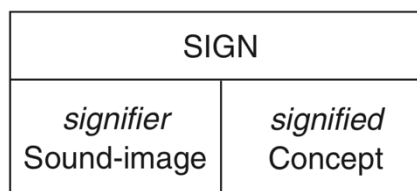


Figure 1. Saussure Sign system. A combination of Signifier and Signified
Source: Media Analysis Techniques. Berger, 2011

From a structural semiotics perspective, we need to describe the relationship between the sign (signifier/image) and the signified (signified / concept), this theory is called Saussure semiotics. It is like a sheet of paper, which cannot be separated from each other. The photo exhibition represents the relation of this sign to the existing elements as a convention that governs the sign and the meaning it produces. The relationship between these signs is referred to as the signifying process. (Piliang, 2004)

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Photo project “Land of the Sea” is a series of ongoing projects by Irene Barlian. The content of this documentary style photography is a representation which is mediated between concepts, ideas, ideas, and messages with the conditions of the crisis in Java Sea, Pekalongan and also the world’s climate crisis.

In this study case, the author wants to analyze the photo exhibition of Irene Barlian's “Land of the Sea” photos and the “Mengabarkan Tenggelam” exhibition, Galeri Serum Jagakarsa. The “Land of the Sea” is exhibited simultaneously at two exhibitions held at different locations. Although the photograph is the same, but on a different display. Budiman Setiawan curates the presentation “Mengabarkan Tenggelam”, and Asep Topan curates “Land of The Sea” at the Jakarta International Photo Festival 2022.



Image 2. Violent waves gradually collapsed a house in Pekalongan. Indonesia.

Barlian, Irene. 2021

Source: <https://www.leica-oskar-barnack-award.com/en/series-finalists/2022/irene-barlian.html>



Image 3. Irene's Barlian "Land of the Sea" photo exhibition at Jakarta International Photo Festival, located at Kala di Kalijaga Galery. Source by author. 2022

Therefore, even though these photographs are the same photo series, the cognitive impact is different because of the photo display formation. Photos made by photographers cannot be separate from the mental formation of an image of the existing reality. In the "Land of the Sea", exhibited at the Jakarta International Photo Festival, and "Mengabarkan Tenggelam," presented at the Serum Jakarta gallery. The author is interested in conducting a study of photos from this same series with an immersive presentation room. The condition of "Immersive Experience can occur because there are various efforts to present a concept by combining photographic works with various supporters. The message about the climate crisis through a series of photos taken by Ms. Barlian on the coast of the island of Java. Interestingly, the exhibition at Serum gallery is presented unusually. Visitors to the exhibition had to take off their footwear because they entered the exhibition space, which was submerged by foot in the water in a space that only measures 4 x 5 square meters.



Image 4. Land of the Sea at Galeri Serum. Source: author

Exploring the photo “Land of the Sea” supported by water installations as a medium to present an atmosphere of reality produces an immersive simulation experience as a motivation for self-exploration that can be put together as a reference in the reality simulacrum. In the process, there is the possibility of a shift motivated by reality conditions.

Semiotics, the signs that have similarities produced by the elements in the exhibition, are designed so that the effect on the result resembles reality. Therefore, semiotics, signs that support the effect of this reality, can be referred to as motivated signs. (Saidi, 2020).

The picture's visual element is a signifier related to the signified through a structure. Other elements outside the language do not determine the relationship between the signifier and the signified. In other words, the meaning of language is not determined by something outside itself. (Saidi, 2008). In this context, the land of the sea photo image was chosen as the sample analysis, paying attention to the background and visual elements of the photo. For example, the water flood, the chair, the bed, background wall, shadow, painting, expression, and gesture become a visual text in language to distinguish meaning on image 5. Thus, reading land of the sea photos with this analytical method can be interpreted as a typical of structuralism image text reading.



Image 5. Siti Mardyan Budhiastuti, 54, wishes to move out, but she is having a difficulty to sell her house. Indonesia. Barlian, Irene. 2020. Source: <https://www.leica-oskar-barnack-award.com/en/series-finalists/2022/irene-barlian.html>

It can be seen from the photo that Siti's house is experiencing flooding due to rising sea levels. Sea Level Rise caused by the increasing global temperature of the earth or commonly referred to as global warming. In analyzing meaning, we do not start with a concept or any kind of mental nature, then choose a photo (as a visual medium) to find the delivery of expression. However, reading the signs and being marked or marked as a concept (signified) as a form of message and manifested in a system. So if there are concepts that are conveyed (for example in "Land of the Sea" there are concepts of hope, fortitude, surrender, suffering that are captured by Irene Barlian. Therefore, these signs are shown as a limited entity, which is a definition.



Image 6. Jaiyyidah Azna, 9, the child running happily in front of her home in Pekalongan. Indonesia. Barlian, Irene 2021.
Source: <https://www.leica-oskar-barnack-award.com/en/series-finalists/2022/irene-barlian.html>

The photo in image 6 is a representation of visual grammar where the photographer's involvement presents signs and references such as connecting stop motion, hand gestures, soil, wood, building walls made of bricks, zinc and part of the roof tile. Each of these elements can be read as a reference that connects the child's smile to the photo. The visual arrangement of the composition is also a part that completes the story. A story consisting of visual elements that unite displays the discourse of life at that location. The scope of this analysis displays the content of the photo and brings it in a thought about perspective.

D. CONCLUSION

Semiotic analysis conducted on Land of the can be positioned as part of a planned creative process. To be able to carry out simulation construction, a photographer needs an understanding of the structural patterns of presenting stories in a structured way. Here the photographic works that are presented as visual simulations become the object of conveying messages from the reality of the concept to be conveyed, namely the impact of the climate crisis. The results of this simulation can also be referred to as a referent. With the additional installation of water on the photo exhibition, the water becomes a message catalyst medium that can be called a motivated sign for the photographs. It is these signs that construct immersive experiences to deliver messages from the "Land of the Sea".

The communication process to achieve communicative goals in this study is an effort to decipher the visual grammar from the description of the “Land of the Sea” itself. This includes the humanistic, moral and descriptive aspects of life described in this photo project. The message that can be drawn from “Land of the Sea” is that photography can convey messages of climate crisis while dramatically deliver a message to the eyes of visitors to the exhibition. Every sign in a photograph supports this message continuity and every physical appearance gives expression to the audience. Expressions arising from the impact of the climate crisis. What is shown is the documentary style photographs of suffering of the affected land and community. “Land of the Sea” not just displays portraits of suffering, but also displays hope, fortitude and enthusiasm. Thus, Irene's “Land of the Sea” sends a message through what has sunk on the coast of a Java seaside village that has been affected by abrasion into a struggle against the climate crisis. So that the climate crisis sent as the main message looks very important and visitors get to experience life affected by the abrasion. In addition, how important it is to prevent the global climate crisis.

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