Defamiliarization of video clips and aesthetic value in the “Lathi” song from weird genius

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ABSTRACT: Video clips, as a medium of communication, have begun to use narrative and experimental cinema styles in conveying their messages and meanings. However, the video clip entitled “Lathi” from Weird Genius has problems when it is interpreted by the audience. There are those who consider it as creative or novel through its aesthetic value and those who criticize it as something that is misleading. The purpose of this study was to understand how visual defamiliarization changes the aesthetic value in terms of expression and position related to the experience of the aesthetic subject in interpreting Lathi’s video clips. The study was conducted using Peirce’s trichotomy semiotic research method with interpretive descriptive techniques through stages of understanding: representamen, objects (icon, symbol, index), and interpretants. The main purpose of this research is to increase the understanding of the audience in interpreting, understanding, and appreciating the work of video clips.

Keywords: defamiliarization, visuals, aesthetic values, video clips

1 INTRODUCTION

Video clips are mediums of expression to deliver messages and the meaning of a song so that the audience can better understand it. One of these cultural products has its own narrative structure and character, both related to the lyrics, visuals, aesthetics, meanings, symbols, movements, sounds, and visual language styles that are displayed. From each structure, it can be explored or exploited for the sake of conveying the meaning of song lyrics through visual construction.

This research revealed what was constructed in a part of the “Lathi” video clip from Weird Genius, an Indonesian EDM and synth-pop music group pioneered by 2 YouTubers and a DJ (Eka Gustiwana, Reza Arap, and Gerald Liu) featuring a rapper from Surabaya, Sara Fajira, as vocalist. Lathi’s song was chosen because of its viral phenomenon since it was uploaded on YouTube in March 26, 2020. In just three months, this song reached more than 50 million viewers and is still increasing up to the moment of this research. Surprisingly, its popularity is not only in Indonesia, but also worldwide which is indicated by various Lathi Challenge made by influencers and also the song reviews made by YouTubers. As a result, this music group can prove its existence with their poster establishment in Times Square, New York.

There must be ways for how this Indonesian music group gained their notoriety. The song and video clip “Lathi” (meaning “tongue” and symbolically “utterance” in Javanese) has the theme about a toxic relationship. The theme is quite popular and one of the phenomena that currently exists in social relationships. Yet, what makes it interesting was the visual narrative construction which was packaged with a new form so that it becomes something unfamiliar/unusual, but very aesthetic, making the purpose of this work to be more “visible” to public which was achieved. This is called the defamiliarization technique (Fiske 2007).

The concept of defamiliarization has been applied in various disciplines, including in domestic technology which presents “novelty” in designing residence and furniture (Bell et al. 2005). In several pedagogical studies, defamiliarization in music was also used to provide students with new

insights, knowledge, and writing skills in the teaching process. The defamiliarization approach was carried out in many literary studies such as research on novels and songs by Toni Morrison which were rich in metaphor and symbolism (Vegge 2000). Even the technique of defamiliarization was juxtaposed with software for creating creative writing (Gabriel 2012).

The application of the defamiliarization concept changes the aesthetic value of each audience because the audience has a different worldview depending on the culture they have. In the context of position, aesthetic values that are not tied to other values are classified as independent values. On the contrary, aesthetic values associated with other values are called dependent aesthetic values (Junaedi 2016).

In this research, the authors explored techniques of defamiliarization and aesthetic values contained in the “Lathi” video clip. It was interesting to observe it to discover the aesthetical value and the perspective/point of view of the spectators appreciating it. This research can provide an alternative interpretation in watching the video clip of “Lathi”’s song from Weird Genius, along with accusations of some people who think that “Lathi” is closely related to mystical nuances considered as one of the rituals to summon spirits.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This research used the qualitative method, a study that uses interpretation through various methods, which aims to obtain a holistic understanding (Mulyana 2006).

In collecting data, the literature study and observation methods were used. Observation was made on the object of research (“Lathi” video clips) taken from YouTube, as well as observations on other media, such as “Lathi” challenges and various “Lathi” video clip reviews. In addition, data collection was also taken through literature study to gain the theories needed.

Data analysis was conducted to examine the defamiliarization techniques and aesthetic value of video clips through the selection of scenes needed in research based on Todorov’s five-step narrative theory: (1) equilibrium which is the beginning of a narrative; (2) disequilibrium is a scene where problems begin to occur; (3) recognition of the disequilibrium is a scene where the protagonist and other characters are aware of the problem; (4) attempt to restore the equilibrium is a scene where the problem is resolved or usually in a video clip depicting emotional support between characters; and (5) new equilibrium, usually at the end of the narrative, the protagonist will build a new equilibrium to make this video clip more interesting (Ward 2019). The scene taken is the fourth scene from the narrative video clip.

To analyze the scene, this study also used Peirce’s trichotomy semiotic research method with interpretive descriptive techniques through stages of understanding; representamen, objects, and interpretants to determine whether the existing aesthetic value is universal/general (independent value) or other factors that determine, for example “world view”, or the aesthetic subject’s view of life (spectators and creators) about the phenomena around, or it can also be cultural values that are the pride of the nation (Junaedi 2016).

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the observations of the video clip, the scene was taken using the defamiliarization technique. The refrain scene uses the Javanese language and some Javanese cultural rites. The use of Javanese language lyrics “*Kowe ra iso mlayu saka error Ajining diri ana ing lathi*” means “You cannot run away from mistakes because your pride lies in your tongue/utterance”. Analyzing the microstructure, the discourse element of “Lathi” is an expression which means “one’s self-esteem is determined by his words”. This is an ancient Javanese language expression.

The use of Javanese lyrics is a referential function associated with names or objects and ideas that are represented in the world around them, that is, speech or in one of the proverbs is “untrustworthy

words”, which means that humans are very easy to lie or make promises. Effectively, the lyrics link who can have “rights” to say “what”, which is very closely related to power and social status.

Analysis related to the technique of defamiliarization was also conducted through visuals that multiply the perspectives of meaning in the “Lathi” video clip. The following is the analysis of the visual text of “Lathi”’s video clip.

Table 1. Visual Text Analysis Table: Visual, Index, Icon, and Symbol

No	Visual	Index and Icon	Symbol
1	<p><i>Kowe ra iso mlayu saka kesalahan.</i> <i>Ajining diri ana ing lathi 1</i></p>	<p><i>Index: Black smoke billowing around a woman’s body</i> <i>Icon: A woman in anger</i></p>	Displeasure
2		<p><i>Index: Scattered dry leaves and gray background</i> <i>Icon: Three modern dancers dancing fast, full of energy</i></p>	Confusion
3		<p><i>Index: Scattered dry leaves and gray background</i> <i>Icon: A traditional dancer dancing fast, energetic, and full of strength</i></p>	Resistance
4		<p><i>Index: Scattered dry leaves and gray background</i> <i>Icon: A lumping horse artist spitting fire from his mouth</i></p>	Anger
5		<p><i>Index: White background with silhouette of a mastermind and Rahwana skin pup</i> <i>Icon: A puppeteer playing the character of Ravana puppet</i></p>	Antagonists
6		<p><i>Index: Scattered dry leaves and gray background Context: outdoor</i> <i>Icon: A lumping horse artist playing his whip</i></p>	Violence

The results of the visual text analysis on this representamen showed a paradox through denial or resistance, to the powerlessness of women who try to maintain their existence to become authentic human beings. The object presented was a technique of defamiliarization, namely, the power of women who are transformed into a new force that is not necessary or ordinary automation that is understood by the general public. Paradoxically in humans, in female souls, there is also a male soul and vice versa. In the visuals, it can be seen how Javanese female dancers who are supposed to dance smoothly and gently turn into fast, energetic, and full of strength. Then it is depicted by a lumping horse male artist with magical powers, namely the symbol of the fire, that represents the

anger and whip as the strength, and the character of the Ravana shadow puppet as an antagonistic symbol.

The concept in the lyrics “your self-esteem lies in your mouth/utterance” is inseparable from the self-concept as an awareness that is continuously involved in reality. In fact, the self is constructed by someone else or the other, both in person, culture, experience, religion, and others. Hence, to be true or authentic you need to have a moment of vision. In the video clip, “Lathi” shows the “existential anxiety” of a woman who strives to become an authentic human being.

Changes in visual defamiliarization formed aesthetic values associated with the expression and position of the audience. The aesthetic value position in the clip is an aesthetic-dependent value, an association with Javanese cultural values. While the expression of aesthetic value uses chaos, providing surprises both in lyrics and visuals, as a form of creativity, as well as the musical disharmony in the major-minor and *pelog* barrel as a form of aesthetic values resulting from cultural blending.

4 CONCLUSION

It is concluded that defamiliarization techniques were used in forming aesthetic values. The aesthetic value will certainly be interpreted differently by the audience because each audience has a different worldview. The concept of defamiliarization as a strategy and form of cultural dialogue is an effort to establish relationality in modern-western and eastern-traditional thinking.

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