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# VIDEO ANALYSIS OF *DIALECTIC OF ENLIGHTENMENT* AS A SYMBOL OF WOMEN'S UNCONSCIOUSNESS IN A PANDEMIC *ANALISIS VIDEO DIALECTIC OF ENLIGHTENMENT*

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**Abstract:** Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis theory entered and influenced the domain of art, one of which manifested itself in the movement of surrealism. Dhyani Widiyanti's work entitled *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2021) maybe considered to possess elements of surrealism. This research focuses on interpreting, exploring the deeper meaning of the video *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and studying its surrealistic elements. This study utilizes qualitative research method using a psychoanalytic theory approach related to ideas on the objects of surrealism which is related to dream analyses, free associations, efforts to free the imagination and juxtaposition. This method is adopted to study and to grasp the meanings behind it accompanied with a textual reference provided by the artist. Analysis result shows that *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is made in a surrealistic style, seen from the existence of objects and events that are depicted unrealistically and tend to be dream-like as well as the presence of juxtapositions both in the relationship between objects and scenes. The symbolization of both objects and events describes her problems as a woman who experiences stress during a pandemic, but still has to stand in balance between her duties in the family and society.

**Keywords:** Psychoanalysis, surrealism, video art

## Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic is causing uncertainties in everyone's life. These affect the mental state of almost every individual. Some of these states are outwardly expressed, but some remains in the subconscious. People may suffer from feelings of being under pressure or even depression but the symptoms are not apparent from the outside; it is suppressed in the unconscious mind.

The subconscious mind began to be studied at the beginning of the 20th century in a scientific field called psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis was first developed in Vienna, Austria, by Sigmund Freud, a neurologist who had an interest in finding effective ways to treat patients with neurotic or hysterical symptoms (lo Dico, 2018). The results of his conversations with patients led Freud to formulate the premise that the actions and behavior of individuals today are triggered by psychological trauma in the past (Kupfersmid, 2019).

Freud's psychoanalysis focused more on repressed sexual fantasies and childhood experiences as the basis for all adult behaviours. In contrast to the previous trend of thoughts which rested on conscious thinking, Freud proposed a different idea: consciousness is, in fact, the tip of an iceberg, it is that small part that is observed and seen. Meanwhile under the iceberg tip, there is a deeper, darker and a larger part which Freud called unconsciousness (Bargh, 2019).

Freud's thought entered and influenced the domain of art, one of which manifested itself in the movement of surrealism (Jiang, 2019). One of the founders of surrealism, Andre Breton, studied medicine and psychiatry at a psychiatric treatment centre which practiced Freud's psychoanalytic methods. Breton defines surrealism as a pure automatism of the soul which leads to expression of, whether in verbal, written or other means, the mind that is free from any preoccupation with reason, aesthetics, and morals (Breton, 1969). According to Breton, surrealism must contain dream analyses, free associations and efforts to free the imagination. There is another key expression which is juxtaposition, akin to comparing two very different things in the same frame in order to produce an "illogical" form (Malt, 2004b).

Within this context, Dhyani Widiyanti's work entitled *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2021) maybe considered to possess elements of surrealism. In the 5:04 video images that represent characteristics of surrealism such as dream impression, free association, imagination and juxtaposition are demonstrated (Malt, 2004c, 2004a).

In the text written by the artist, the video depicts a relationship between the stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the integral experience of a woman in maturation over matters that have been ordained by the Creator.

This research focuses on interpreting, exploring the deeper meaning of the video *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and studying its surrealistic elements.

**Method**

It is qualitative research using a psychoanalytic theory approach. Prior to analysis Dhyani Widiyanti's work *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is divided into several segments.

The psychoanalytic theory in use is Freud's psychoanalytic theory which has been adapted for studies of surrealism as formulated by Breton.

The formula is related to ideas on the objects of surrealism which is related to dream analyses, free associations, efforts to free the imagination and juxtaposition. This method is adopted to study the video and to grasp the meanings behind it accompanied with a textual reference provided by the artist.

**Discussion**

The 5:04 long video *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by Dhyani Widiyanti is be divided into several segments:

**Table 1.**  
*Dialectic of Enlightenment Segments*

Segment code	Visual	Description
(1)		In this segment, the video shows the atmosphere of a meadow which is shown several times with feet walking on the grass. The color of the video is rendered unrealistic as grasslands are generally green, here it is imaged a slightly golden brown.
(2)		This segment shows a figure carrying an umbrella, a fort and the sky in the background. The color is also made unrealistic with the sky not made entirely blue but partially golden.
(3)		This segment shows the silhouette of a figure carrying an umbrella against a golden sky background.
(4)		In this segment, a figure with an umbrella is shown facing a large tree. Behind the big tree there is a blazing sun. The figure is shown with her back to the audience.

(5)



A figure with an umbrella, sitting on the rocks by the sea. The color is made blue overall; it looks unrealistic because generally stones are grayish in color.

(6)



The figure has her back to the audience and walks in a field with large plants.

(7)



Shadows of two people communicating cast by sunlight in the morning/afternoon/evening.

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Based on the descriptions of the various segments above, unrealistic illustrations exist for two reasons.

First, the colors of the objects presented, mostly do not match the colors of the real objects. For example, the sky in the morning/afternoon/evening is blue, in this segment it is presented as golden brown; the color of the rocks on the seafront is made blue.

Second, is the relationship between segments that are not narrative or are not composed of stories which form sequential continuation. Here one finds the element of juxtaposition or juxtaposing opposite effects in an event. Juxtaposition is found both in the relationship between segments and the relationship between objects in the segment. For example, the relationship between the umbrella object, figure, fort, and meadow as found in segment (2) does not have a logical relationship and is reinforced by the absence of a narrative explaining the scene.

Furthermore, it is quite clear that this video has elements of surrealism because of the colors of objects which are not realistic; there is an attempt to display a dream-like impression, the relationship between segments and the objects are not narratively connected (Malt, 2004c). It seems the artist wants to impart juxtaposition as a strong feature of surrealism.

The presence of meadows, plants, and landscapes against a backdrop of the sky is also present in most of the works of the surrealist painter, Salvador Dali, which gives the impression of a dreamlike realm because there are also juxtaposition objects (Ball, 2008). Grass also has hair-like elements as another characteristic of the object of surrealism. Based on these various characteristics, it can be concluded that the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is a video that attempts to describe aspects of the unconscious mind.

The following analysis starts from the text provided by the artist as a reference. The text is as follows:

“As a woman spiritual and life balance is understood as being in contentment with material and spiritual worlds. Life requires balance: the balance of mind and heart, the balance of family and work, the balance of profession and social life and the balance of spiritual and physical worlds.

There are other interesting matters that can explain the relationship between the stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the integral experience of a woman who functions as a maturation of a person who has been appointed by the Creator. Which when we become aware it can empower aspects of our self-actualization as women. Spiritual experiences and spiritual resources provide a sense of power, and they are a guide to finding meaning in life.”

By connecting the text with the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* video, it is clear that the artist wishes to symbolically show the problems of her life. Scenes in the video do not openly express what is said in the text, but are reflections through various objects and events (Wango, 2021).

The objects that are present include umbrella, fort, and large tree and these are repeated throughout the video. Incidentally, the artist presents figures whose faces are deliberately hidden, who moves from one scene to another in a contrasting atmosphere, and the two shadows that are in dialogue with each other.

The umbrella serves as a symbol of a woman protecting herself. A fort and a large tree are objects that stand firm to withstand various threats and tragedies; they also reinforce the symbols of strength. The faces of the figures which are not shown can be interpreted freely as women subjects who are often "unrecognized" because as individuals they are forced to be absorbed in family and community tasks. In other words, the symbols are depicting a role which is meaningful and significant, although it is not clear "who" is behind all the balance and harmony.

Moving from one scene to another the resulting contrast also shows the symbolization of the artist's text, namely: "... the balance of the mind and heart, the balance of family and work, the balance of profession and social life, and the balance of spiritual and physical worlds ...". Women here are presented facing various problems which are of different nature; they can be very contrasting but must be resolved one by one in a good and balanced manner.

Finally, the scene of two shadows having a dialogue represent the inner dialectic of the artist, which is the difficulties in finding a way out. The way out is not infrequently obtained through quarrels not only with others, but starting with quarrels with oneself.

## Conclusion

These followings are the conclusions of the study on *Dialectic of Enlightenment* video by Dhyani Widiyanti:

1. The video *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is made in a surrealist style, thereby trying to reveal the side of the unconscious mind. This can be seen from the existence of objects and events that are depicted unrealistically and tend to be dream-like as well as the presence of juxtapositions both in the relationship between objects and the relationship between scenes.
2. The video *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is a symbol of the artist's text that describes her problems as a woman who experiences stress during a pandemic, but still has to stand in balance between her duties in the family and society. This is shown through the symbolization of both objects and events. Objects such as umbrella, fort, and large tree symbolize strength and protection. Meanwhile, scenes that show the figures whose faces hidden show the role of women as subjects who are "unrecognized" despite their important and significant role in society; the shift from one scene to another that are in contrasts and is not narratively connected also shows a variety of problems which are different in nature which can be very contrasting but must be resolved one by one in a good and balanced manner; the scene of two shadows having a dialogue shows the inner dialectic of the artist who often finds it not easy to find a way out. The way out is not infrequently obtained through quarrels not only with others but starting with quarrels with oneself.

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