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Video Art as a Propaganda Medium of the Socio-Politics

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Abstract

Television is a popular medium that is used as a propaganda tool in spreading ideologies. As such, the continuous propagation of ideologies through television fiddles with the sentiment of the public over time. This is obvious through various media campaigns that was broadcasted through television during the 14th general election of Malaysia in 2018. These media campaigns propagate the idea of ‘change’ by presenting audio-visual information that instigates a euphoric reaction. ‘Beauty (fool) of destruction’ is an experimental video art prompted by such propagation and its effect on society. This essay discusses the creation of the video work and its adaptation of the Malay proverb ‘Indah Khabar dari Rupa’ as a reaction to the political campaigns of the 14th general election. Specifically, it examines video as an avenue for responding towards the wield of ideology on electronic media and as a medium of expression for new forms of art making.

Keywords Video art; Propaganda; Socio-politics

Subtle Cynicism of the Malay Proverb

‘Beauty (fool) of destruction’ is an experimental video art inspired by an old Malay proverb. The Malay dictionary or better known as ‘Kamus Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka’ defines Malay proverbs as a sentence or words arranged in a particular sequence to convey certain meaning. ‘Peribahasa’ (proverbs) for the Malay is meant to describe human behavior in a situation. The purpose of the proverb is to educate or reprimand people in a polite manner.

The video work that I submitted for Antara is inspired by the peribahasa ‘Indah Khabar dari Rupa’ - closely similar to the English proverb ‘All that glitter is not gold’. This proverb means things that appear

valuable or worthwhile might not actually be so. I created this work few months prior to the 14th general election of Malaysia which took place in 2018. This work is my reaction to the heaving campaigning that was taking place at that moment in time, just before the final voting exercise. The 14th General Election saw a fierce contest between three parties, namely Barisan Nasional (National Coalition) which has ruled the country since the first election which was held in 1959, PAS and Pakatan Harapan (The Alliance of Hope).

History of previous failures in defeating the ruling party has become a beacon of inspiration for the younger generation to rise and fight for their rights and the future of Malaysia. For the first time in 61 years of Independence, the country has witnessed a political tsunami that shifted the governance of the country from Barisan Nasional to Pakatan Harapan. Such transition created the opportunity for fresh and young cabinet members in the government. This is a crucial moment in the political history of this country, and is made possible through the practice of democracy.

Politics and Propaganda

Television is the main subject matter in this artwork. As a medium, it is an important apparatus that conveys information to the entire population of Malaysia – from the urban villages to the bustles of city living. The existence of moving images, especially the combination of image and sound was introduced with the invention of television in the 1920s. Specifically the production of the content for television in the form of video or film was famously known as a source of entertainment for the public. However, during the 2nd world war, audio visual was utilized as a propaganda tool by the countries at war to spread their ideologies.

Propaganda is a form of fabricated information intended to influence people's opinion or outlook towards a particular matter. Propaganda must not necessarily be seen as something negative or in the limelight of wrongness. There is also certain propaganda that aims to convey truth or facts. However, the usual tendency in propagandic effort is to achieve political gains by spreading ideologies that conceal shortcoming, or wrongdoings that might inherently be part of the party that is spreading the propaganda.

Considering the current, media saturated, political context of Malaysia – it is not easy for a propagandic message to attract people's attention in order to influence them. As such, a propaganda video or film must be approached in the form of cynicism, humour or narration of a shared, living experience. For example, the 1MDB issue and the Goods and Service Tax (GST) that was implemented by the Government was successfully exploited by the opposition for their political gain because it is easily relatable to the worries and concerns of the general public. It is possible to create a certain, skewed, negative impression on someone or something by continuously propagating a specific message to the public. In many ways propaganda toys with the sentiment

of the public and in doing so it is able to establish certain ideology and thought to the public over time. The key ingredient for change is to see and feel, and propaganda is able to stimulate public's opinion towards change by feeding on matters that is close to their hearts.

Media Manipulation

A video content is easier to manipulate compared to a written statement or article. Instigated by the speed and ability of digital technologies, tools to create videos have been simplified making it easily accessible to anyone without any technical knowledge. A video content could swiftly be edited to create fake news or slander, and this causes confusion among public. Because of this, various campaigns on 'disinformation and misinformation' is being initiated to supposedly stop the spreading of fake news. This also has strong influence on the local politics, as such manipulation of media is aimed to take advantage of peoples' sentiment and widen the existing division among people.

In the Malaysian context, the state has an advantage in propagating its ideology due to its control over the official, broadcast media. However in the era of globalisation, those who have control over telecommunication technologies have the political advantage. Media has great influence because it can shape the thinking of individuals and influence a group of people so as it can change the political stance of the country.

The various function of the mass media have been fully utilized as the disseminator of information and knowledge, the driving force for change, instilling new values and becoming an educational element.

Video Art as Artist's Propaganda Tool

Video Art is a video produced by visual artists. It dates back to the mid-1960s, especially in 1965 when Fluxus artist Nam Jun Paik made his first video work using Sony's portable camera and later played the video he made at Café 'a Go Go in Greenwich Village, New York. In art video is treated as a medium for communication and not merely for the purpose of style. As such, artists have used video technology in many interesting ways of communication. The video recorder itself was born in 1926 in London. It was created by a scientist named John Logie Baird. Television only emerged thirty years later after the invention of the video recorder (Irvine, 1987).

The term 'Video Art' is used to refer works by artists that use video as a medium for making art. It is not new for artists to adapt technologies designed for other purposes for their aesthetic experiments. However, during the early years, video was considered to be very technical in its production process and as such many

artists shy away from it. Only a small number of really interested and committed artists were willing to explore video as a medium for art. Crucially this was instigated by the spirit of experimentation in art practice.

In Malaysia, video art is not as popular as painting, but the younger generation of artists has begun to approach video as a medium for the creation of works. Such adaptation indicates the emergence of new art forms which involves not only three but four dimensions. However, the discourse on video as a medium for art still abides by the language and grammar of conventional art practices such as painting. It is only by adhering to such discourse that electronic art practice is able to gain recognition as an art form. What distinguishes Electronic Art and conventional art is its techniques and styles of expression and presentation.

With the rapid development of media and electronic technologies in Malaysia, artists are becoming bold in producing new art form. Such practices divert from the conventional approach in art making and ventures into art of provocative, creative, and radical practices via experimental approaches of new media and electronic devices.

In conclusion, with the rapid development of technology today it is no wonder video has become one of the most frequently used medium in communicating ideology and propaganda. With the creation of simple and easy-to-use software and applications, video art has become a medium of expression for today's multimedia generation in responding to its surroundings.

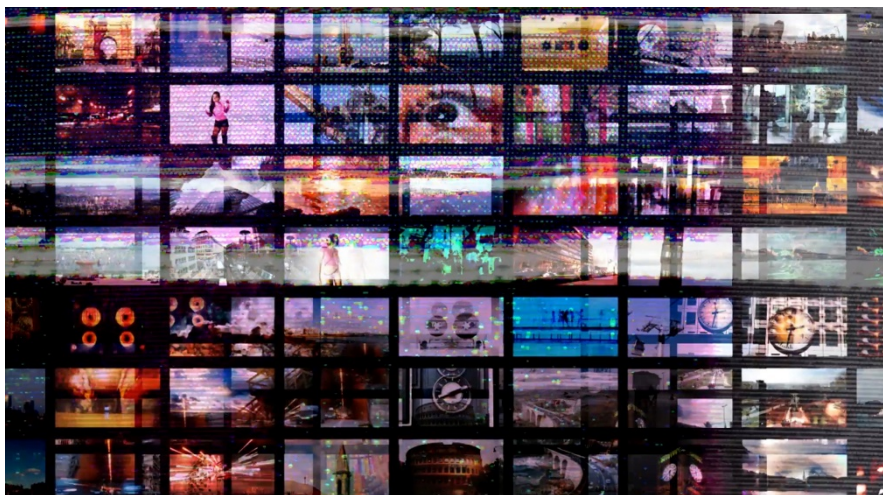


Figure 1 Still Excerpt 01 from “Beauty (fool) of Destruction” Video



Figure 2 Still Excerpt 02 from “Beauty (fool) of Destruction” Video



Figure 3 Still Excerpt 03 from “Beauty (fool) of Destruction” Video



Figure 4 Still Excerpt 04 from “Beauty (fool) of Destruction” Video



Figure 5 Still Excerpt 05 from “Beauty (fool) of Destruction” Video



Figure 6 Still Excerpt 05 from “Beauty (fool) of Destruction” Video



Figure 7 Still Excerpt 06 from “Beauty (fool) of Destruction” Video

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