Aesthetic Transformation of *Video4Change* Project Through Postmodernism Studies

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ABSTRACT

Related research on community videos commonly limited in the social domain. This may happen because making video community is not classified as work of art, but rather as a tool to convey messages on community organizing method. *Video4Change* (*v4c*) project here consist different organizations in four countries; Indonesia, India, America and Israel. The review of videos conducted in textual and visual ethnography. This method used to specify all the things captured in the sense, the visual, the voice (audio) and the symbol on each video. Video as a medium in the postmodernism era considered as an illusion and simulation, now has more authority. Video build new structures and functions that transformed from mere aesthetic imagery into practical media with particular meanings. The video made by common people has been taking control of society to understanding the images by interpret it. This research attempts to trace and shift the study of community video from the perspective of art, vice versa from what have done before. However, the video as a tool has particular rules and approach to effectively deliver 'text' or message in visual language. This study expected to be a reference in a cultural context that comes from the artistic perspective. The analysis will shift the meaning of aesthetic perspective that could be transforming into practical solution-based. Beyond that, this study is able to see how the perspective transforms as the co modification of art in society changes.

Keywords: Community Video, Postmodernism, Aesthetic Transformation, Society Changes

INTRODUCTION

The advanced technological era and critique of media domination brought many new forms of media in society. The filmmaker, photographer, activist and even researcher are trying to develop audio-visual media broadly. In 1985, Monica Frota, a young filmmaker and photographer from the United States was starting up a strange project at that time. She facilitates the Kayapo Indians in the Amazon jungle to make a video about their own lives. The project entitled *Mekaron Opoi D'jao* (Kayapo language: 'He who Create Pictures') produced a series of videos with different ideas and ways of presentation. The project has a unique breakthrough artistic and technique. Since the early 1990s, the Kayapo people successfully built a network of communication and their own information systems and produce the picture from their own perspective. Kremoro, a chieftain of Kayapo said that "Many photographers came and captured, but they never return the result and taught us anything about this (photograph). Now, we record our own images for our grandchildren someday" (Atmaja, *et al.*, 2007).

At this stage, the video was initially used not only as a conduit of information and entertainment but also as a tool to demonstrate the existence, voicing public opinion and even further as media advocacy to bring the rights of the forgotten.

It has never been an easier time to start using videos possible to make a better world. Video cameras have gotten ever cheaper—they're now integrated into cell phones—and editing software comes repackaged with many home computers. Since the early 1990s, the increasing availability and affordability of technology has fuelled the world of social justice video activism. The movement has also been strengthened by new method for online and offline distribution, by novel ways to get around the traditional gate-keepers of media, and by the proliferation of nongovernmental organizations and people's movements asserting their rights, voices and identities. Pioneer organizations like Appalshop in the US, the Chiapas Media Project in Mexico, CEFREC in Bolivia, the Drishti Media Collective in India, Undercurrents in the UK, Labor News Production in South Korea, INSIST in Indonesia, and innumerable others, have been made video as integral part of campaigns focused on human rights, environmentalism, corporate globalization, and indigenous rights (Gregory, *et al.*, 2005). With democratized access to production and distribution, many more people are now able to participate in the tradition of filmmaking with video, not only to documenting but also challenge prevailing social ills.

Video could elicit powerful emotional impact by connecting viewers to personal stories. The images on video for activism can illustrate stark visual contrasts and provide direct visual evidence of abuses. It can be a vehicle for building coalitions with other groups working on an issue. Motion pictures can reach a wide range of people since it does not require literacy to convey information. It can help counter stereotypes and assistance in reaching new, different and multiple audiences, particularly if broadcast is a possibility. Close into television impact, video can be used in segments of varying lengths for different contexts.

Video4Change (*v4c*) is the use of video to support social movements, document human rights violations, raise awareness on social issues, and influence social change. Video activism becomes an effective and necessary approach for social movement rapidly. *Video4Change* is initiatives that emphasize the use of video for creating change, whether a personal or individual changes. This focused on group, specific issue or broader social level. So far, it includes guerrilla video, participatory/community video and advocacy video (www.*v4c*.org).

Research on the process and impact in video maker community has been studied several times, such as Mhando (2003), Ferreira (2006) & Lunch (2007). However, not many studies review this video activism as 'art' which have aesthetic values. The phenomena of hybrid media increase the bias on what so called 'art' nowadays. But since video itself has been influence with the elements of aesthetic, they could be seen as 'artwork'. *V4c* that studies here comes from different perspective and presentation. This differences drives into broader analysis of aesthetic element and how it is implied to society change.

Svasek on his book argue that art exist in all society, it constitutes a universal category that can be used not only to explain what art is, but also can be used as an analytical

tool to explore similar types of behaviour involved in the production, use, and consumption of objects and artefacts in different parts of the world. Roy Sieber still in Svasek book said that art proposed the definition by eight principal qualities, 1) namely that art is man-made, 2) exhibits skill, 3) exhibit order, 4) conveys meaning, 5) is the product of conscious intent, 6) is effective, 7) conveys a sense of unity and wholeness, 8) and evokes a response that is immediate (Svasek, 2007: 3-4).

Argumentation of what art was also defines by Jacob Sumardjo on his book 'Art Philosophy'; Artwork is an object or artefact that can be seen, heard, or seen once heard (visual, audio, and audio-visual), such as painting, music and theatre. But the so-called art it is outside of art, because art is a value. What is called beautiful by someone may not be beautiful to others. The values are subjective based on experience and knowledge (Sumardjo, 2000). With this understanding, the videos on *v4c* project suited on eight requirements that Sieber claimed as art as well as understanding the art by Sumardjo that based on the experience of audience and creator subjectivity. The videos here can be categorized as art. It is a real artefact and could not separate from the values of individualistic and collective understanding.

Therefore, this research attempts to trace and shift the study of *v4c* project from the perspective of art. Starting from this broad context of art, *v4c* can transform into a variety of instructional media, organizing and advocacy. However, the video as a tool has certain rules and approach to effectively deliver 'text' or message in visual language. This study is expected to be a reference in which a cultural context could be seen from the shifted artistic perspective. This shift resulted shift of meaning, where there is an aesthetic transformation into practical solution-based then expected to be solve the problems in the society.

The aims of this research are to trace and shift the study of *v4c* project from the perspective of art, to be a reference in which a cultural context could be seen from the shifted of artistic perspective, and also to know what *v4c* values and meanings in society with postmodernism view.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Object material from this research is the result of *Video4Change* project. *V4c* is the platform method involves 15 organization and institutions within 11 countries around the world using video to support social movement, human right violation, social issues awareness, and social change. The videos from *v4c* that I studies here were coming from Indonesia, America, India and Israel. This project has varied activities such as; provide toolkit for guideline strategies, planning and preparation the video, how to filming, saving and storing video, video editing, until distribution and mobile video. *V4c* has ongoing study on measuring the impact of video for change and held the annual meeting of *v4c* network. However, what I focus here is just the video result of *v4c* project, instead of other matter. I will preview and found every aesthetic detail on the videos, make interpretation and analyzed what is beyond the 'text' through postmodern paradigm.

I used postmodernism paradigm as formal object in this study. Art and aesthetics started studied during the postmodernism era. Since then, the collective interest

(industry) started to develop. We can see the industrialization process influence the problem in these video. This study will talk about the transformation of aesthetic and practical effect in the present context. I try to relate each video by their context. The aesthetic on videos must be seen to make a clear limitation to interpretation. Here, I try to look up how the element such as line, space, light, colour, sound, even words represent on the videos have the powerful impact beyond what visible through the context.

All the videos will be watch and review from the aesthetic matter and find the broader context to know how it's affects to social change. I will preview all the videos and looking for detailed element of aesthetics and analyze how the piece of shots produce the meanings that affect people for further changes. This is according of postmodern paradigm about how the video represent reality. Postmodernist believe that video camera have an ability to move variety events or activities and human action in the form of live image-voiced perfectly (vivid images). This paradigm I guess suited in reviewing the material objects of videos *v4c*.

Results

1. B'Tselem Case Study: How to Build a Fence in Hebron

This video was made in Israel and talk about Israeli security forces divided a road in the centre of Hebron, separating it into a paved road for Jews and a narrow, rough passage for Palestinians. Musa Abu Hashhash and Manal al-Ja'bri, B'Tselem field researchers, also tried to reach the wide, paved side of the street. However, because they are Palestinians, Border Policemen prevented them from doing so. The policemen told them explicitly that the paved side of the street is for Jews only.

Figure 1. The prohibition crossing over the fence by police.

This is only two minute video but have a strong issue of discrimination and human right violation. The opening of this video is handheld recording during the

conversation with policeman. The chaos in Israel is showed by the first establish shot of the road by a patriarch. This shot will be a clue for other shot about fence building. The visualization of fence building becomes the main conflict of this video. After the fence build, many Arabs across the road difficulty, contrast to Jews road next to it. Again, Musa try to cross, but still prohibited by policeman.

This video has a key point of aesthetic. On the elements of design, line becomes the important aspect that draws the symbol of emotion. Line is the simplest medium as the most economical achievement compared with other medium (Kartika, 2007: 70). Line here translated with the fence. As the symbol of emotion, the fence building makes the clear distinguish of Jews and non Jews (especially Arabs). This makes a clear sign of emotional intervention between what shows in video and what the audience get. The line represent by fence become the main conflict. Musa has to be complained twice, before and after the fence building, but he got nothing to explain why Jews and others distinguished.

Figure 2. Line on the fence.

Figure 3. Crossing next to the fence difficulty.

Figure 4. Jews crossing while Musa prohibited.

In the case of this video, there was not an official investigation into the incident recorded, because the denial of access to the road for Palestinians was a part of the officially sanctioned policies of the government. "This was not about a proper investigation, but a policy issue," Yoav –Director of B'Tselem Video Department-notes. However, after this video was released, it raised questions how the army reacted by changing the policy around this specific checkpoint.'

The B'Tselem webpage featuring this video also notes, "Since the video footage was aired, Border Police officers at the checkpoint allow Palestinian pedestrians to walk on either side of the road." For B'Tselem, this video provides a successful example of impact, using the content of the video to leverage a particular behaviour change on the part of authorities that alleviated the discriminatory practices that were documented. However it draws the distinction between behaviour and broader policy change. As Yoav notes, 'the more classic (trajectory for a successful B'Tselem video) would be, for example, if a police officer beat up a kid, no one heard of it, then the video comes out, and he is sent to trial." While here there is no official legal / policy change (in this case, the broader policies of discriminatory access to roads in Hebron), the shift at this particular checkpoint signals a successful use of B'Tselem video and a moment of impact that is tangible or track able (Source: https://www.*v4c*.org).

On this video discussion, we can see clearly how the element of aesthetic, dominated by line represented the fence, could be a sign of discrimination. This video has a strong statement against discrimination. With this two minute video, we would not need any other elucidation but picture. The fence construction makes the video statement strong and no wonder that this video effective as advocacy tools.

2. Video Volunteers Case Studies: Indian Railway Blind to Disability

Amol Lalzare is one of 120 Video Volunteer Community Correspondents who works with the Indian NGO, Video Volunteers. In October 2012 he posted the above 5-minute

video to Video Volunteers, 'IndiaUnheard' video-sharing platform. The video tells the story of a community of 350 visually impaired residents of Vangani, a town located in the outlier districts of the city of Mumbai, who earn their living by selling wares to commuters in train compartments. Amol's video focuses on the tragic accidents and near-accidents that have taken place because there is no foot-bridge to allow the visually impaired community to safely access the train platform.

The video was embedded on IndiaUnheard with additional information and a call to action that provided instructions for people to call Central Railways to demand a bridge be built. A petition was also started on Change.org, which received more than 6000 signatures. Four months after the video and campaign were launched, and after multiple meetings, the Central Railways announced that they had allocated funds to construct the bridge. IndiaUnheard is a network of more than 100 Community Correspondents reporting from remote parts of India. It is also the name of Video Volunteer's video-sharing platform and is considered to be 'a community news service' by Video Volunteers. Launched in 2010 it supports Video Volunteer Community Correspondents to tell unique stories; stories about their own communities; stories which otherwise left untold. Since 2010, Amol has published 25 videos on the IndiaUnheard website. Amol is now a full-time correspondent for Video Volunteers, having given up his job as a taxi driver to focus on this role (Source: https://www.*v4c*.org).

This video opening with Amol statement, "Here is no guarantee of blind people coming back after work in Vangani. It caused by lack of bridge facility for blind". Then it is cut to the statement from disabilities point of view. All the stories told with background of the railway. From the scenes, we can clearly hear the train crossing sound or see blind people crossing the railway. This film dominated with the interview and statement that have strong argument about limited accessibility and facility especially for blind. The most interesting scene on this video is when a blind couple waiting for the train stop. Without proper guidance and crowded situation, blind couple does not have special space and facility on the crowded and people jostle, even it was a sign for disabilities. Many accidents happened and there is no such attention so far.

Figure 5. Blind jostle entering the train even there is the sign to take disabilities on advance.

The study of aesthetic that could be found in this video is the elements of space and sound. We clearly see that space here is about the background setting of railway. From this railway, viewer can construct their illusion into a real space form. The railway that shows here is located in Mumbai, India that might be does not have direct correlation with the viewer, but the space, situation, colour and sphere will connect the viewers experienced into the common real railway on their own perspective. The similarity of perspective from space here takes the viewers on the dramatic situation as told by the blind experience. Viewers can imagine how the condition faced by the blind while crossing the railway everyday without facility that caused risky accident.

Figure 6. Risk of blind crossing the railway.

The sound that I studied here is about how commentary, statement and interview with the blind and other people can construct the way of viewers thinking. It has been raised the empathy of humanity with involving viewers on their feeling. The strong story of train accident victim engaged audience in emotional condition. From here, it might be raised the question "how comes it happened to them?". This feeling bother the sense and encourage desire of action. The video tell the real story of life with sound has dominant impact of narrative point for the viewers. It s not surprising that this video has a powerful effect after distribute.

Figure 7. The actual voice and activity take an audience into 'their reality'.

3. Witness Case Studies: TRUST Colorado Climate Change

Xiuhtezcatl Martinez is an 11 year-old boy from Boulder, Colorado. In this video, Xiuhtezcatl shares his story about why he joined youth from across the country to ask the courts to hear their lawsuit, Alec L., *et al.*, v. Lisa P. Jackson, *et al.*, which is based on one of the most fundamental principles of civilized society: TRUST.

Xiuhtezcatl is asking that our atmosphere be protected, because he loves playing in Colorado's mountains, forests, lakes and streams. He afraid that the resources he enjoy will not be there for next generation if we continue emitting carbon at current rates. Xiuhtezcatl shares, "The proof of climate change is everywhere, I look. In my lifetime, the amount of forest killed by pine beetles has expanded. The number of acres burned has intensified. My generation is losing our forests. We are losing our homes. It's not too late to ensure my generation has a livable future. But we need to listen to the science and act now."

Over a century ago, the U.S. Supreme Court recognized that their federal government has an absolute legal duty to protect essential common natural resources, such as air and water, for present and future generations of Americans. The American youth are simply asking their third branch of government to compel legislative and executive branches to do their jobs (Source: http://www.youtube.com).

This video is opening with the text of US Supreme Court on 1907 about the state has a sovereign obligation over "all the earth and air within its domain, and it is called public trust." The word of 'trust' is becoming bigger and makes another sentence that shows the aim of this video. The opening scene is showing the activity of Xiuhtezcatl with his dad in the forest and the snow. He expresses how he likes the forest as his play and learns ground. The images in this scene are very sharp with good natural lighting arrangements. Landscape scenes with vibrant colors dominate this video.
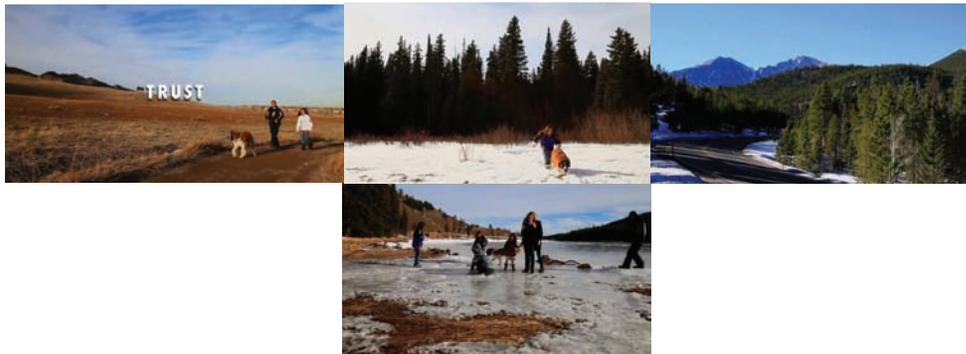

Figure 8. Xiuhtezcatl enjoy the beautiful scenery of Colorado Forest.

Here, light and color as the element of aesthetics has been studied. The combination between light that fall under the object produced a good color of images. Our eyes pampered with the rich of beautiful Colorado forest. With the images, viewers can feel the same feeling while Xiuhtezcatl playing on the snow or when the sun shines. The problem begins when the beautiful scenery of Colorado forest jumped cut into the brown color of degraded forest. The color of forest was contrast with the blue of the sky.

Figure 9. Burned house and deforestation.

We clearly see that the visual shows beyond the video itself. In reality, Xiuhtezcatl action begins far before the video comes. But, this video with powerful light and color construct the idea of deforestation process on Colorado. It was not shot by real time but continuous to makes narrative structure. Narrative and strong shots with the light and color decoration makes video able to tell the true feeling of a child. More than that, this brings the 'virus' to impress many other people to do the same action as Xiuhtezcatl.

Figure 10. Xiuhtezcatl action against global warming footage.

4. Engage Media Case Studies: Love Letter a Soldier

Love Letter to the Soldier is a 7-minute video that tells the story of Maria 'Eti' Goreti, who was still a student in 2008 when she was courted by Samsul Bacharudin, an Indonesian soldier from Java who was stationed at her village in Bupul, near the border of West Papua and Papua New Guinea. Samsul left Bupul when Eti was five months pregnant and promised to return; but Eti never heard from him again, even after the birth of their daughter, Yani. This video was made by Wenda, a West Papuan activist who had made just one video prior to this.

The 'Love Letter' video was one of more than forty that was made as part of the Papuan Voices project, led by EngageMedia in partnership with Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. Papuan Voices is a video for change initiative that worked with Papuan activists for one year, starting in 2011, to support them to more effectively tell their stories to the world in order to raise awareness about the everyday realities for West Papuans who have endured decades of hostility and violence.

The film is also embedded within the Papuan Voices project website and it comes with a 'Study Guide' which summarizes the video and asks questions to the audience. The video has been screened all over the world, including in Indigenous communities

in the US and Bolivia and at a number of film festivals. The video also won South to South Documentary Film Festival in Jakarta, which included prize-money of 7 million Rupiah (around US$720) (Source: https://www.*v4c*.org).

The film presents the Eti's story with narrative technique. The narrative comes from a letter she wrote to Samsul, In her letter, Eti telling her daily life, her daughter and her objection in the cost of living. Eti remember Samsul promises to return, but she just can wait. She intend to deliver the letter to Samsul from the nearest Indonesian soldier office from her home. It takes several times public transportation change and the video closed by the fact of sexual abuse and neglected Papuan woman caused by Indonesian soldier in border area of Indonesia.

Figure 11. Eti and her son with Indonesian Soldier.

Words are the medium to bring the contents or extrinsic elements in some kind of art. The words are called intrinsic just because of the word choice, processing and structure have a direct sentence with a wonderful favor to be heard or to be read (Djelantik, 1999). This video shows the descriptive and lyrical about the situation explanation and feeling expression. The visual aspect here was used to give clearly representation from what Eti says in her letter. The visual does not 'says' many thing but the words from her letter.

Figure 12. Eti keep waiting Samsul come.

Here I found another element of aesthetic that can be defined from words. Words have a strong position to influence the thought. Without tendencies of other elements in this video, Eti's voices and her choice of words have a strong and clear statement of Papuan minority woman who found the justice. This video has special impact to the viewers, especially on how Eti engage the audience feeling through her point of view, in this context by words.

DISCUSSION

The term 'aestheticsation' describes the process by which objects are perceived and the ensuing sensory experience used to provide a basis for description of 'aesthetic experience', which in turn are used to reinforce abstract ideas or beliefs. Aesthetic experience is likely being conveyed to others in a verbal discourse that draws on vocabulary from artistic discourse to articulate and give meaning to it. The type of discourse used might depend on the viewer's own knowledge and background, or how publicly well known and well regarded the work is (Svasek, 2007: 3-4).

With the above explanation, the concept of aesthetics focus on process which object and sensory experience has been used to aesthetic experience. This aesthetic experience used to reinforce abstract ideas or beliefs at the end of process. Aesthetic experience will be delivering to others by oral and artistic discourse to giving meaning. This meaning is highly dependent on the knowledge and background of art lovers. Aesthetic concepts in the audio-visual medium are not only departed from the final result, but it is a whole process in creating the work.

Postmodernism was debate largely around the issue of art. Some central aspects associated with postmodernism in the arts include; elimination of the boundary between art and everyday life; collapse hierarchy distinction between popular culture and elite culture, stylistic eclectics and code mixing. The collapse of artistic creator's that having special intelligence view has been replaced the assumption that art is nothing more than repetition (Sarup, 2011: 205-206).

Postmodernist acknowledge art as an information system and a commodity shaped by the electronic media, its messages and its modes of communication. The postmodernism is pluralistic, that is it suggest that meaning is many facered and fleeting, rather than absolute and fixed; and that the indivisual has numerous (and often contradictory) identities (Fiero, 2011: 130).

Baudrillard says we are in the universe of more information with less meaning. We are bombarded with images with detail in every moment of life. The only way to overcome this is the overflow of information to take control of our lives by understanding the images merely as a marker, just as the appearance, refused the meaning of signified (Fiero, 2011: 259).

Audio-visual medium is known as the type of media that has huge persuasive effect on the audience. This media has the ability to imitate (mimetic) from video cameras to transfer variety of events or activities of human action in the form of image-voiced in almost perfect ways (vivid images). According to postmodernism, this character represents reality.

Hegemonic system, all anomalies media and art perspective in the view of postmodernism are creates criticism and resistance. Criticism and resistance to the domination of the media by blocking the response of postmodernist thought, privatize individual, putting the audience in a visual bias and reject meaning, marked by the lowest class of society which became maker, creator, determining the meaning and messages of their own. They can build their own public space with a variety of advanced media such as broadcast television stations and even their own video.

Video as a medium in the era of postmodernism is considered as an illusion and simulation now has more authority. Video build new structures and functions that have transformed from mere aesthetic imagery into practical media with specific meanings. Out of the notion of postmodernism, a video made by common people, especially the lower middle class can actually take control of our lives by understanding the images not just as a signified, but also interpret it.

CONCLUSION

Aesthetic means thing that can be absorbed by the senses. Therefore, aesthetics is often interpreted as a sensory perception (sense of perception). The experience of art could be uses as the perfection of sentient knowledge. There are various kinds of division and differentiation of the concept of aesthetics. This is a philosophies question with different answer. One of that is looking for common traits in an object that considered beautiful and then equate the characteristics to aesthetic understanding. It means that aesthetics contains an amount of particular principal quality in something.

There are no standard rational-universal assessment criteria to determine what art is. In fact, the artists and writers must constantly seek and formulate art own rules. As I studied here, various video from *v4c* project has their own aesthetic values, such us; line, space and sound, light and color, include words. Here, we can conclude that the videos made by *v4c* project are categorized as art. *V4c* projects were just focused on the process and the impact of the videos before. But, from this research, the result of the whole process could be studied separately as an art work. I found the 'beauty' in the four videos. This beauty from the artwork; How to Build the Fence in Hebron, Indian Railway Blind to Disability, TRUST Colorado, and Love Letter A Soldier could be found by the aesthetical studies. Each artwork has their own elements and specification apart from their function as tools of change.

In addition from that, I try to look up how the *v4c* artwork uses in the society by the postmodernism paradigm. This paradigm believed that there is no distinction of art and everyday life. What we called art now is integrated and has specified messages with several mode of communication. The media has mixed with reality. This condition supports the developing of new media that handled by personal or community. Postmodernist does not believe the public media because it makes boundaries of self statement. Through this paradigm, the videos on *v4c* project could be understood as the representation of community/organization/institution art work with the aesthetic elements that have the aims for society development apart from mainstream media.

Four videos from this discussion show us more than the sensory experience but power to engage, invoke, provoke, even action. Texts become not so important than its impact. Video uses just as the medium to telling what happened. Here we found the society that does not enough to see beauty on art. Art itself, melting into another perspective. What so called art is not about the form in aesthetic, but the complexity of their context and content. Viewing these videos make the postmodern society ignored the unperfected shots, jumping cut, short duration, and break the conventional video

form. They do not need art as expressing nor premature appreciation, but how arts can tell more that it shows. This discussion brings us to paradigm transformation that I found from traditional aesthetic of art into the meaning and function of art.

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