

# A SOCIAL SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF TRI HITA KARANA REPRESENTATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY ILLUSTRATIONS OF AYU PITRIANI

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<sup>1</sup>Ni Putu Anggi Pramesti, <sup>2</sup>Sang Made Aditya Putra, <sup>3</sup>I Wayan Tenda Juniarta

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Jurusan Desain Komunikasi Visual, Universitas Hindu Negeri I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar

e-mail:

[anggipramesti110@gmail.com](mailto:anggipramesti110@gmail.com)

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## ABSTRACT

Popular illustration serves as an effective medium for conveying local cultural values to younger audiences. This study aims to explain how Ayu Pitriani's *Tri Hita Karana* illustration series represents the three relational pillars, including the connection between humans and the divine, the relationship among individuals, and the interaction between humans and the environment. The study also explores the ideologies embedded in the visual construction of the artworks. A qualitative and interpretative approach was applied using the social semiotic framework of Kress and van Leeuwen to analyze the visual grammar encompassing representational, interactive, and compositional meanings. This analysis was complemented by Barthes' semiotic theory, which examines three layers of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth. The data consist of five illustration panels analyzed through close reading. The analytical process included denotative description, visual element coding, mapping of Balinese cultural connotations, and identification of emerging myths. The findings reveal that simple visual strategies, such as the use of pastel colours, youthful characters, and vertical offering compositions, create layered meanings that connect sacredness with everyday life and harmony with conflict. The panel depicting a polluted river presents *Tri Hita Karana* as an ecological practice, while the land dispute scene highlights harmony as a result of social negotiation. These findings demonstrate the potential of contemporary illustration as a medium for cultural and environmental literacy and as a teaching resource in Visual Communication Design rooted in local wisdom.

**Keywords:** *Tri Hita Karana*, Social Semiotics, Kress and van Leeuwen, Barthes, Contemporary Illustration.

## INTRODUCTION

*Tri Hita Karana* (THK) is understood as a philosophical framework of balance that embraces three interrelated relationships: *Parahyangan*, which represents the connection between humans and the divine; *Pawongan*, which refers to the relationships among people; and *Palemahan*, which signifies the relationship between humans and the natural environment. Within this framework, social and spiritual harmony does not occur automatically but emerges from continuous ethical practice in daily life (Arsa et al., 2024; Sukarma, 2016). These values remain a central foundation for cultural and educational practices in contemporary Bali (Rasmini, 2022).

This article focuses on how the concept of *Tri Hita Karana* is represented through the medium of popular illustration. The study seeks to identify how visual signs reconstruct the ethical meaning of THK for younger audiences. Popular illustration is chosen for its broad accessibility, visual simplicity, and communicative strength in conveying moral and social messages.



The research applies a social semiotic approach that regards images as multimodal texts whose meanings are shaped through the interaction of form, context, and interpretation (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). Through the framework of visual grammar, this approach links formal choices such as composition, vector, social distance, salience, and modality with the meanings they produce. This framework is especially relevant for understanding visual materials intended for public education and cultural dissemination.

To explore the ideological dimension of imagery, the study also employs Barthes' semiotic theory, which distinguishes three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth (Barthes, 1982). Denotation refers to what is seen, connotation connects the image with cultural associations, and myth explains how ideologies become normalized and accepted within society. The integration of Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar with Barthes' semiotics makes it possible to understand not only how meaning is formed but also why it is socially accepted and culturally legitimized.

The object of this research is a series of illustrations by Ayu Pitriani that depict ritual scenes, social interactions, and environmental issues. The artist employs a light and accessible visual style with pastel colour palettes and simplified details to improve readability and direct viewers' attention. Compositional choices help to structure visual hierarchy and strengthen the communicative function of the image (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006).

This study aims to explain how the visual grammar in Ayu Pitriani's works represents the three core dimensions of *Tri Hita Karana*, namely the relationship between humans and the divine, the relationship among people, and the relationship between humans and the environment. It also seeks to identify the myths and ideologies that emerge through these visual constructions. The research examines how local values are reinterpreted through contemporary visual language and how the artwork serves as a medium of ethical reflection for younger audiences. With this focus, the study intends to demonstrate how popular illustration can function as an educational and reflective medium for cultural values.

In the *Parahyangan* dimension, the iconography of *gebogan* offerings and the *mapeed* procession depicts devotion as a lived practice of gratitude and order. Academic studies on *mapeed* and *banten gebogan* highlight their aesthetic and spiritual significance (Dewi and Yasa, 2025; Mahayanti et al., 2024). Contemporary variations in the composition of *gebogan* illustrate ongoing negotiations between tradition, modernity, and lifestyle.

In the *Palemahan* dimension, Bali faces ecological challenges such as plastic pollution in rivers and coastal areas. Research identifies Indonesia as one of the major contributors to marine plastic waste and highlights gaps in research coordination (Vriend et al., 2021). Technical studies at the island scale investigate barrier design and collection strategies to reduce the flow of waste from rivers to the sea (Brooijmans et al., 2019). The depiction of a polluted river in Pitriani's work can therefore be understood as a form of ecological literacy rather than a decorative element.

In the *Pawongan* dimension, social changes such as the conversion of agricultural land into residential and tourism areas have created pressures on communal systems. Spatial policy research shows that land conversion occurs in almost all Balinese districts and affects agrarian relations and community cohesion (Suardi et al., 2022). Studies at the *subak* level also indicate growing land conflicts and emphasize the need for collaborative management (Widyarsana et al., 2020). The scenes of confrontation in the illustrations can thus be interpreted as visual reflections of these real social and spatial tensions.

Methodologically, this study combines the analysis of visual grammar, which includes representational, interactive, and compositional meanings, with Barthes' semiotic reading that covers denotation, connotation, and myth. The objective is to develop a replicable analytical model grounded in the Balinese cultural context while revealing how visual meaning operates through the interaction between sign and ideology.



Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar with Barthes' mythological framework to analyze *Tri Hita Karana* in digital illustration. The inclusion of an evidence-based ecological literacy perspective provides a distinctive contribution to this research. This study therefore offers new insight into the field of visual communication design by linking local cultural philosophy with sustainable visual education and by proposing a methodological approach that can be applied to other visual studies focused on cultural continuity and environmental awareness.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative and interpretative research method using semiotic analysis as its main strategy. Visual meaning was understood as a relational product formed by the interaction between signs, cultural contexts, and interpretive practice. To examine these relationships, the study applied the social semiotic framework of Kress and van Leeuwen, which was used to analyze the visual grammar covering composition, vector, social distance, perspective, salience, modality, framing, and information structure, such as left and right or top and bottom. This framework was complemented by Barthes' semiotic theory, which explores three levels of meaning, namely denotation, connotation, and myth. The combination of these two approaches enabled the researcher to map both the formal mechanisms of meaning and the ideological structures that shape audience interpretation.

The research focused on a digital illustration series created by Ayu Pitriani with the theme *Tri Hita Karana*. Each panel was treated as an independent unit of analysis. Visual elements such as figures, gestures, ritual objects (*gebogan*), spatial background, typography, colour, and rhythm of form were examined as micro units. Data were collected through documentation and directed visual observation that was conducted personally by the main researcher during the period of March to July 2024. The results of the observations were verified through peer discussions with colleagues in the Visual Communication Design program to ensure analytical coherence and intersubjective reliability.

All illustration panels were archived in their original resolution and systematically coded to ensure consistency and traceability. The process of close reading was carried out iteratively through several interpretative layers. The first layer consisted of a denotative description to prevent premature interpretation. The second involved coding of visual elements using Kress and van Leeuwen's categories of representational, interactive, and compositional meaning. The third layer connected the coded results with Balinese cultural contexts through connotative reading, focusing on cultural practices such as *mapeed*, communal ethics, and environmental relations. The fourth layer articulated mythological meaning according to Barthes' framework by identifying underlying ideologies such as harmony, devotion, conflict, and ecological awareness represented through the imagery.

A cross-panel analysis was then used to identify recurring visual strategies and patterns. For instance, vertical compositions and soft colour palettes in ritual panels emphasized sacredness, while frontal perspectives in conflict panels illustrated social tension. The depiction of polluted rivers highlighted ecological responsibility. These findings were synthesized into a broader interpretation that explains how visual strategies interconnect religious ethics, social cohesion, and environmental advocacy.

The validity of the findings was maintained through theoretical triangulation by comparing the consistency between the results of visual grammar analysis and Barthesian interpretation. Additional validation was ensured through peer debriefing with a colleague who was not part of the authorship but had expertise in visual design theory. To maintain transparency, the researcher employed thick description and kept an audit trail that included coding sheets, decision memos, and synthesis drafts.



Ethical considerations were strictly observed. The study acknowledged the original artist, avoided any modification of the artworks, and maintained cultural sensitivity to prevent overgeneralization. Since the research did not involve human participants or personal data, ethical risks were minimal. The limitations of this study lie in its focus on a single illustration series and the absence of audience reception analysis. Consequently, the conclusions emphasize design potential inferred from visual structures rather than empirical audience behavior. The analysis also identified value deviations, known as *contra-THK*, which served as pedagogical cues derived from visual grammar interpretation and mythic articulation.

The methodological process of this study can be visualized through the following analytical flowchart.



Figure 1. Analytical Flow of the Research

The diagram above illustrates the sequential process of analysis, beginning with the collection of visual data through documentation and observation. The data were then described at the denotative level to establish an objective foundation. The analysis progressed through the examination of visual grammar based on Kress and van Leeuwen's framework, which focuses on how representational, interactive, and compositional elements shape meaning. These formal findings were subsequently interpreted within the cultural context of Bali to identify connotative associations that relate to the values of *Tri Hita Karana*.

At the next stage, Barthes' semiotic framework was applied to uncover mythological meanings and ideological layers embedded in the images. The results from both frameworks were synthesized and validated through theoretical triangulation and peer review. The convergence between Kress and van Leeuwen's structural reading and Barthes' interpretative reading provided a comprehensive understanding of how meaning operates visually and ideologically. This integrated process allowed the study to bridge formal visual analysis with cultural interpretation and to produce a methodological model that can be replicated in future visual communication research.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Framework Synthesis: Visual Grammar (Kress & van Leeuwen) and Three Levels of Signification (Barthes)

The illustration comic series presents the three dimensions of *Tri Hita Karana* through visual storytelling that integrates traditional ethics with modern aesthetics. Each panel combines symbolic imagery, narrative rhythm, and cultural references to express how spiritual, social, and ecological balance can be interpreted within contemporary visual culture.

This section establishes the theoretical foundation that underlies the interpretation of Ayu Pitriani's *Tri Hita Karana* illustration series. The study integrates the social semiotics of Kress



and van Leeuwen (2006) with the semiotic theory of Barthes (1982) to examine how visual structures generate and naturalize meaning. Within visual communication design, social semiotics regards meaning as a process constructed through interaction between the creator, the image, and its viewers rather than a fixed property of visual form. This view positions the artwork not merely as an object of aesthetic appreciation but as a communicative text shaped by cultural and ideological codes.



Figure 2. The Illustration Comic Series “Tri Hita Karana in the Contemporary Era” Created by Ayu Pitriani

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), visual communication functions through a system of grammar comparable to linguistic structure. Their framework identifies three key domains of meaning: representational, interactive, and compositional. The representational domain analyzes how participants and actions are depicted within an image. The interactive domain investigates the relationship between the image and the viewer, such as gaze, distance, and perspective. The compositional domain examines how visual elements are organized to create coherence, balance, and emphasis. These domains reveal how artists construct visual messages that reflect both form and intent.

Barthes (1982) complements this visual grammar by providing a triadic model of signification that connects form to ideology. His framework distinguishes between denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotation refers to what is literally shown; connotation relates to cultural and emotional associations; and myth reveals the ideological narratives that appear natural within society. Barthes’ model thus enables the reading of images as cultural texts that not only describe the world but also reinforce or challenge collective beliefs.

Integrating these two frameworks allows for a movement from visual structure to cultural ideology. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) explain how visual choices operate formally, while Barthes (1982) elucidates how these choices transform into ideologies through repetition and cultural normalization. Together, they form a dialogic system in which syntax and semantics converge. The grammar of visual design clarifies *how* meaning is formed, and Barthes’ theory clarifies *why* that meaning becomes socially accepted.

In the context of *Tri Hita Karana* (Sukarma, 2016), this combined framework allows the researcher to interpret how the three core dimensions *Parahyangan*, *Pawongan*, and *Palemahan*—are represented visually. The representational domain identifies how figures, gestures, and spatial arrangements convey these relationships. The interactive domain explores how visual distance, perspective, and gaze position the audience to engage emotionally with the image. The compositional domain shows how color harmony, contrast, and framing establish equilibrium, visually mirroring the moral balance at the center of *Tri Hita Karana* philosophy.

Barthes’ semiotics deepens the analysis by exposing the ideological meanings embedded within these visual structures. Religious devotion can become the myth of collective piety, social conflict can evolve into the myth of communal negotiation, and environmental awareness can represent the myth of ethical responsibility (Barthes, 1982). Through these layers of signification, the framework captures how illustrations not only depict but also reshape ethical understanding in a contemporary context.

In applying this framework, the study followed a layered analytical procedure. Each panel was read sequentially beginning with denotative description, followed by the identification of visual grammar elements composition, vector, and modality and then the mapping of cultural connotations. The final layer articulated the ideological or mythic meanings that emerge through repetition and visual association (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Barthes, 1982). This multistage process ensured that each interpretation was grounded in both formal observation and contextual reasoning.

By synthesizing Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design with Barthes' semiotic triad, the study constructs a coherent analytical foundation linking visual form, cultural meaning, and ideological expression. This integrated framework bridges methodological precision with cultural sensitivity. It serves as the conceptual base for the following subsections, which explore how Ayu Pitriani's *Tri Hita Karana* illustrations visualize religious devotion, social harmony, and environmental responsibility within the language of contemporary design (Arsa et al., 2024; Sukarma, 2016).

### **Parahyangan: Devotion as a Visual Grammar of Everyday Spirituality**



Figure 2. Panel from the *Parahyangan* Series (human relationship with God)

The *Parahyangan* panel portrays everyday devotion as an embodied act of faith. Through balanced composition and soft color tones, the illustration transforms ritual activity into a visual metaphor of spiritual discipline, demonstrating how sacred values are expressed through daily gestures and habitual care.

The *Parahyangan* dimension in Ayu Pitriani's illustration series represents spirituality as an inseparable aspect of everyday life. Instead of focusing on monumental worship, the artist conveys faith through subtle gestures and ordinary actions. This approach reflects the moral foundation of *Tri Hita Karana*, which emphasizes that balance between humans and the divine arises from consistent ethical practice rather than from grand ritual events (Sukarma, 2016; Arsa et al., 2024). Through this portrayal, the artwork transforms philosophical reflection into visible form, allowing sacred values to be expressed through familiar human activity.

At the denotative level, the panel depicts a woman walking toward a temple while carrying a *gebogan* on her head. This act symbolizes gratitude and discipline as part of daily devotion. The dynamic posture and rhythm of movement construct a narrative of humility and care. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) describe this form of meaning as representational, in which the arrangement of participants and actions creates a story that communicates purpose and intention.

The interactive dimension is achieved through an eye-level viewpoint and a medium social distance, both of which create a sense of empathy between viewer and subject. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) explain that such a configuration positions the audience as participants within the visual encounter rather than as distant spectators. The image therefore invites the viewer to

experience devotion as a shared and attainable human expression, presenting spirituality as inclusive rather than exclusive.

In its compositional structure, the *gebogan* occupies the upper area of the image while the walking motion of the woman dominates the lower field. This arrangement establishes a relationship between the ideal and the real, expressing how moral aspiration is grounded in everyday action. The upward movement conveys a visual rhythm of reverence, linking human labor with divine appreciation. Through this balance, the composition embodies the principle of harmony that is central to *Tri Hita Karana* (Sukarma, 2016).

Color and form reinforce this equilibrium. The pastel palette and clean contours generate an atmosphere of serenity and self-control. Barthes (1982) describes this as the connotative level of meaning, where aesthetic choices signify emotional and ethical qualities. The restraint of color and detail focuses attention on inner calm rather than spectacle, aligning visual tone with the modest integrity of genuine worship.

At the mythological level, the image transforms devotion into a social ethic of collective balance. The repetition of offerings and processions throughout Balinese visual culture constructs what Barthes (1982) terms a myth of harmony, in which piety becomes part of communal identity. Pitriani's adaptation continues this tradition but reframes it for a younger audience through simplified shapes and gentle gestures, thereby linking ritual continuity with cultural adaptation.

Modern variations within the *gebogan*, such as the use of packaged snacks or bottled drinks, introduce a layer of negotiation between traditional faith and contemporary consumer life. Similar tensions are discussed by Dewi and Yasa (2025) and Mahayanti et al. (2024), who note that modern materials increasingly appear in ritual contexts while maintaining symbolic legitimacy. In this sense, Pitriani's artwork reflects the coexistence of spirituality and modern consumption without moral opposition, acknowledging both as realities within contemporary Balinese society.

In summary, the *Parahyangan* panel demonstrates how visual grammar can translate spiritual ethics into tangible form through compositional clarity and cultural familiarity. The combination of representational structure, interactive empathy, and balanced composition reveals faith as an everyday practice rather than an extraordinary event. The integration of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) framework with Barthes' (1982) mythic reading shows that devotion in this artwork is humble, habitual, and collective, visualizing a continuous relationship between people, culture, and the divine.

### **Pawongan: Social Negotiation and the Ethics of Harmony**

The *Pawongan* panel depicts a moment of interpersonal tension that invites reflection on social harmony. The frontal composition and equal perspective position the viewer as an empathetic observer, emphasizing dialogue and mutual understanding as essential aspects of ethical coexistence in Balinese communal life.

The *Pawongan* dimension in Ayu Pitriani's illustration series visualizes social interaction as a dynamic process of negotiation rather than as static harmony. The panel depicts human relationships as an arena where ethical balance must be continuously renewed. This interpretation reflects the second principle of *Tri Hita Karana*, which defines the moral relationship among human beings as the foundation of communal well-being (Sukarma, 2016). In this view, social harmony is not a natural state but a product of sustained dialogue, empathy, and cooperation.

At the denotative level, the illustration presents two figures standing face to face in the center of the frame. Their symmetrical positioning and opposing gestures convey a situation of tension or disagreement. However, the controlled expression of their posture and the stable spatial composition prevent the scene from escalating into hostility. Through this balanced



representation, the image captures what Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) describe as the representational function of visual grammar, where the arrangement of participants narrates a process of action and reaction that conveys moral or emotional equilibrium.



Figure 3. Panel from the *Pawongan* Series (human relations with other humans)

The interactive meaning is constructed through the use of a frontal angle and eye-level perspective, which place the viewer in an observational yet equal position. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) explain that such visual positioning creates involvement while maintaining distance sufficient for reflection. The viewer becomes a witness who is invited to evaluate rather than to judge, engaging cognitively with the scene's ethical implications. This perspective transforms the act of viewing into a moral reflection on how individuals relate to one another within shared social space.

Compositionally, the use of equal spacing between the two figures and the presence of negative space between them function as a visual metaphor for dialogue and mediation. The empty area becomes a symbolic zone of negotiation, where social tension can be transformed into mutual understanding. This arrangement resonates with Balinese philosophical concepts of *pawongan*, where harmony is sustained through conversation and respect within communal decision-making processes (Arsa et al., 2024). The image thus operates as both depiction and proposition, suggesting that coexistence requires continual rebalancing.

At the connotative level, the confrontation depicted in the panel reflects social changes associated with land use transformation and urban expansion in Bali. The replacement of agricultural land by residential and tourism facilities has been identified as a major cause of community conflict (Suardi et al., 2022). Studies at the subak level further reveal that these structural pressures intensify disputes among landholders and demand new forms of collaborative management (Widyarsana et al., 2020). Within this context, Pitriani's illustration does not merely document conflict but visualizes the ethical challenge of sustaining harmony amid modernization.

Barthes' (1982) notion of myth helps to interpret this social scenario beyond its literal depiction. The image transforms conflict into a cultural narrative about negotiation and restoration. By naturalizing the idea that disagreement is an inevitable part of social life, the artwork conveys a myth of reconciliation grounded in collective ethics. In doing so, the artist visualizes harmony not as the absence of conflict but as the continuous ability to respond ethically to difference. This ideological transformation aligns with the adaptive nature of Balinese communal philosophy, which values debate as a path to consensus.

The restrained color scheme and compositional symmetry contribute to the reflective tone of the scene. Instead of emphasizing division, the artist emphasizes balance through proportion and repetition. The subtle parallel between the two figures suggests equivalence and mutual dependence. In the visual grammar of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), this use of symmetry is understood as a compositional device that conveys equality of power and ethical reciprocity.

The panel therefore functions as an allegory of justice and mutual respect, reminding viewers that equilibrium requires fairness as much as compassion.

Overall, the *Pawongan* panel expresses the ethical core of *Tri Hita Karana* through a visual narrative of negotiation and empathy. By merging the analytical categories of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) with Barthes' (1982) framework of myth, the study reveals that harmony within human relationships is represented as a dialogic and procedural achievement. The illustration teaches that social balance is not inherited but cultivated through listening, mutual recognition, and shared responsibility. In this way, Pitriani's work becomes both an artistic expression and an ethical reminder of how communities sustain harmony in an evolving social landscape.

### **Palemahan: Ecological Consciousness and Collective Responsibility**

The *Palemahan* panel visualizes ecological awareness through the depiction of a polluted river. The muted colors and still composition evoke both melancholy and responsibility, transforming environmental decay into a moral reminder that caring for nature is a daily act of devotion within the *Tri Hita Karana* philosophy.



Figure 4. Panel from the *Palemahan* Series (human relationship with nature)

The *Palemahan* dimension in Ayu Pitriani's illustration series visualizes the human relationship with nature as an ethical and spiritual responsibility. The artwork translates the environmental pillar of *Tri Hita Karana* into an image of awareness and care. Rather than portraying an idealized natural landscape, Pitriani presents a scene that exposes the ecological challenges faced by modern Bali. This depiction reflects the understanding that harmony between humans and the environment depends on sustained stewardship, not on passive admiration (Sukarma, 2016; Arsa et al., 2024).

At the denotative level, the panel presents a polluted river filled with waste materials. Piles of discarded objects and stagnant water occupy the composition, forming a somber and realistic visual tone. The muted color palette and horizontal composition create a still atmosphere that mirrors the stagnant condition of the river. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) explain that such compositional choices direct the viewer's focus and emotional distance, shaping perception through visual form. The lack of dramatic movement encourages contemplation, guiding the audience to recognize environmental decay as a shared moral problem.

The interactive meaning emerges from the use of an eye-level perspective that positions the viewer at the same ground as the scene. This vantage point transforms the act of viewing into participation, implying that environmental issues are collective experiences rather than distant phenomena. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), such perspective fosters identification by aligning visual point of view with human empathy. The audience becomes a witness within the ecosystem, compelled to acknowledge its interconnectedness with nature.

At the connotative level, the image relates closely to the real ecological conditions of Bali. Research identifies Indonesia as one of the main contributors to marine plastic waste, with

rivers serving as the primary channels of pollution (Vriend et al., 2021). Technical studies on river systems in Bali also emphasize the importance of waste interception structures and community participation in maintaining waterways (Brooijmans et al., 2019). Within this context, Pitriani's depiction of a polluted river functions not merely as artistic expression but as a visual record of an ongoing environmental crisis.

Barthes' (1982) concept of myth provides insight into how this image constructs environmental ideology. The polluted river is not presented as tragedy but as a call for ethical reflection. The myth embedded within the image transforms ecological degradation into a collective narrative about responsibility. By naturalizing the idea that caring for the environment is an inseparable part of spiritual duty, the artwork links environmental awareness to moral and religious consciousness. The result is an ecological ethics that integrates scientific fact with cultural value.

Color, texture, and spatial rhythm reinforce this moral message. The subdued hues evoke both melancholy and accountability. The artist avoids sentimental dramatization, opting instead for simplicity that demands introspection. This restraint aligns with Barthes' (1982) argument that myth operates most effectively when it appears natural and unforced. Through visual economy, the illustration communicates urgency without excess, showing that ecological responsibility is most persuasive when presented as a familiar moral truth.

The visual narrative also connects to recent environmental events that have deeply affected Bali. The floods that occurred in 2025 left physical and emotional traces within the collective memory of local communities (BPBD Bali, 2025; Harmayani et al., 2025). By referencing these experiences implicitly through visual symbols, Pitriani transforms memory into motivation. The river scene becomes a site of reflection where viewers are reminded that disaster prevention begins with daily environmental discipline. This transformation of factual evidence into symbolic awareness demonstrates the power of illustration as environmental communication.

In summary, the *Palemahan* panel illustrates how ecological awareness can be articulated through visual grammar and cultural semiotics. By combining the structural insights of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) with the ideological reading of Barthes (1982), the study reveals that environmental harmony in *Tri Hita Karana* is not represented as a distant ideal but as an achievable moral practice. The artwork transforms observation into obligation, inviting audiences to view nature not as a backdrop to human life but as a moral partner that demands protection, empathy, and care.

### Counter THK Representation as a Pedagogical Strategy

This subchapter synthesizes the findings across panels and explains that certain visual behaviors in Ayu Pitriani's illustrations deliberately diverge from the values of *Tri Hita Karana* (THK). Rather than contradicting the philosophy, these depictions function as pedagogical counterexamples that invite ethical reflection. Within a multimodal framework, images do not simply reproduce reality; they guide the viewer's attention and moral interpretation through compositional structure, social distance, and perspective (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). Through Barthes' (1982) theoretical lens, such deviations can be understood as rhetorical strategies. Denotations of behavior perceived as wrong, including conflict, waste, or commodification, are transformed into connotative critique and finally into corrective myths that remind the audience that harmony must be built and cannot be taken for granted.

In the *Parahyangan* dimension, the presence of modern *gebogan* filled with packaged products introduces a subtle tension between religiosity and consumption. From the perspective of visual grammar, the prominence of branded packaging in the upper area of the composition merges commercial and sacred symbols, creating a visual hybrid that invites reflection on sincerity and intention (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). Interpreted through Barthes' (1982)



semiotics, this visual choice generates a hybrid myth that places spirituality and market culture within the same moral frame. Studies on contemporary *gebogan* practice confirm that this blending of sacred and modern materials has sparked public debate regarding the distinction between devotion and decoration (Dewi and Yasa, 2025; Mahayanti et al., 2024). The counter THK representation in this panel therefore operates as a reflective mirror for the current transformation of ritual values.

In the *Pawongan* panel, the image of two individuals facing each other represents an intentional departure from the ideal of social harmony. However, the use of an eye level perspective and medium social distance positions the viewer as an equal witness, encouraging focus on the process of negotiation rather than the victory of one party (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). The composition invites the audience to view disagreement as an opportunity for mutual understanding. Structurally, this depiction corresponds to the real situation in Bali, where the conversion of agricultural land into residential and tourism areas has caused social tension and communal disputes (Suardi et al., 2022; Martha et al., 2020). The artwork therefore aligns visual form with the ethical urgency of collaborative social mediation.

At the institutional level, traditional mechanisms such as *awig awig* and *paruman adat* function as restorative systems for resolving social and environmental disputes. These local frameworks promote reconciliation and direct citizens back to the equilibrium of *Pawongan* (Widyantara et al., 2018). Seen through Barthes' (1982) perspective, the representation of conflict denaturalizes the belief in automatic harmony and constructs a new myth in which harmony is achieved through ethical procedure and communal dialogue. Thus, a counter THK moment at the surface level transforms into a reaffirmation of THK as a procedural ethic at the level of myth.

Within the *Palemahan* dimension, the illustration of a polluted river similarly presents behavior contrary to THK principles on the surface, yet serves as an appeal for ecological literacy and responsibility. Empirical research confirms that rivers are the main channels through which plastic waste enters Indonesia's oceans, and studies in Bali have identified microplastics in the water and sediments of Tukad Badung in Denpasar (Vriend et al., 2021; Harmayani et al., 2025). Because the illustration was produced soon after the major flood in Denpasar in 2025, the image of accumulated waste functions as both ecological evidence and collective memory. It invites viewers to associate visual observation with the need for watershed rehabilitation and better environmental management.

From an educational standpoint, the inclusion of deviation as part of visual learning aligns with principles of critical media literacy. Kellner and Share (2007) emphasize that education in media and visual communication should train learners to examine the power relations and value systems embedded in representation. Similarly, UNESCO's (2013) *Media and Information Literacy Guidelines* stress that the ability to access, analyze, and produce messages is essential to active citizenship. By engaging with counter THK images, audiences are encouraged to develop these competencies, transforming viewing into critical reflection and ethical awareness.

The combination of visual grammar for mapping formal mechanisms and Barthes' model of signification for tracing the transformation from denotation to connotation to myth enables counterexamples within the three THK pillars to be used as a structured learning process. The process includes identifying deviation such as conflict, waste, or commodification, analyzing relational contexts to understand who is affected and how relationships are framed, and reestablishing ethical norms through cultural or ecological restoration (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006; Vriend et al., 2021). This sequence aligns with visual literacy practices used in design education and public awareness campaigns, turning observation into a foundation for responsible action.



Practically, this pedagogical approach can be implemented in several ways. In *Parahyangan*, the case of the modern *gebogan* may be used to foster reflection on ritual intention. In *Pawongan*, the conflict panel can be combined with data on land conversion and examples of mediation through *awig awig*. In *Palemahan*, the polluted river scene can be linked to maps of plastic emission sources and local waste interception projects. Within visual communication design curricula, this approach can be developed as an analytical framework that integrates Kress and Barthes' theories with empirical design proposals. At the level of myth, the illustration series closes its moral cycle: counter THK at the level of denotation becomes reinforcement of THK as ethical practice at the level of connotation and myth (Harmayani et al., 2025; Suardi et al., 2022; Widyatara et al., 2018).

Table 1. Mapping of Counter THK as a Pedagogical Strategy (Sign to Value)

Panel or Scene	Key Signs (Visual Grammar)	Denotation	Connotation	Myth (THK) Produced	Ethical Position	Key References
<b>Parahyangan: Classic Gebogan</b>	Ideal and real structure, eye level, offering gesture, salience on <i>gebogan</i> (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006)	A woman carrying a <i>gebogan</i> toward the temple	Order, devotion, ritual care	Devotion as an ethic of lived ritual care (Parahyangan)	Aligned with THK	Kress and van Leeuwen (2006); Sukarma (2016)
<b>Parahyangan: Modern Gebogan</b>	Salience of brand and packaging in the ideal area, material contrast (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006)	<i>Gebogan</i> containing boxed food and canned drinks	The hybridization of religiosity and consumption as lifestyle expression	Hybrid myth where sacredness coexists with market symbols, prompting reflection on intention	Partial counterexample used as a reflective tool	Barthes (1977/1964); Kress and van Leeuwen (2006); contemporary <i>gebogan</i> studies
<b>Pawongan: Community Dispute</b>	Opposing vectors, eye level, framing of a conflict arena (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006)	Two figures facing each other	Territorial tension, claims of ownership, negotiation	Harmony as procedural work through communal dialogue and <i>awig awig</i>	Counterexample representing a social problem to be resolved	Kress and van Leeuwen (2006); Widyatara et al. (2018)
<b>Pawongan: Spatial Context</b>	Data on land conversion indicating socio economic friction	The conversion of rice fields into housing and tourism areas	Market pressure and the erosion of communal values	Spatial justice as a prerequisite for harmony	Contextual factor functioning as a conflict trigger	Suardi et al. (2022); Martha et al. (2020)
<b>Palemahan: Polluted River</b>	Salience of garbage piles in the real area, eye level, compressed background (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006)	Floating and accumulated waste in an urban river	Health and ecological threat, collective negligence	Caring for rivers as a daily ethical responsibility (Palemahan)	Counterexample functioning as a moral warning	Vriend et al. (2021); Harmayani et al. (2025)



## Theoretical Synthesis: The Kress and Barthes Model for Reading *Tri Hita Karana*

Following the pedagogical interpretation of counter THK representations, this section reexamines how the integration of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar and Barthes' (1982) semiotic theory can be formulated as a unified analytical framework. This synthesis explains how both theories converge in describing the relationship between visual structure, cultural value, and ethical reflection. The theoretical model that emerges from this study, referred to here as the Kress and Barthes Model, demonstrates how form and ideology interact to construct meaning within visual communication design, particularly in the representation of *Tri Hita Karana*.

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar provides a structural foundation that explains how images communicate through patterns of representation, interaction, and composition. These categories define how visual elements form relationships among depicted participants and between the artwork and its audience. Barthes' (1982) semiotics complements this structure by illuminating how these visual relationships acquire cultural and ideological significance through processes of connotation and myth-making. Together, the two frameworks allow the researcher to trace meaning as it evolves from formal construction to ethical interpretation.

Within the context of *Tri Hita Karana*, this integration clarifies how moral principles are visually represented and culturally reinforced. The representational domain identifies how human, spiritual, and environmental relationships are portrayed. The interactive domain explains how the viewer is positioned in relation to these moral interactions. The compositional domain reveals how equilibrium, hierarchy, and emphasis are organized to embody the notion of harmony. Barthes' framework adds a deeper dimension by showing how these visual choices are normalized as social ideologies of devotion, cooperation, and environmental care.

This synthesis operates as a layered interpretive model that begins with formal description and ends with ideological interpretation. The first stage focuses on denotation by identifying visible structures and elements. The second stage explores connotation by connecting visual features to cultural associations and social meanings. The third stage examines myth, the level at which these cultural meanings are institutionalized as shared ethical values. Through this triadic movement, the Kress and Barthes Model transforms visual analysis into a holistic process that unites observation, interpretation, and reflection.

The integration of the two frameworks also demonstrates how illustration can serve as an ethical medium. In Ayu Pitriani's works, visual grammar translates moral concepts into spatial organization, while Barthesian interpretation discloses the ideological depth behind these visual strategies. This combination positions illustration not merely as an artistic product but as a communicative act that shapes ethical perception. The model therefore extends semiotic theory into a domain of moral education, confirming that meaning in design is both aesthetic and normative.

From a methodological perspective, this synthesis establishes a framework that is both replicable and adaptable across disciplines. It shows that visual analysis must account for both structural precision and cultural context. As Halliday (1994) argues, meaning is always multimodal, and every communicative act involves interaction between form, function, and environment. The Kress and Barthes Model applies this principle to visual design by showing that structure and ideology are inseparable within processes of meaning-making and reception.

The theoretical implications of this synthesis extend to the study of cultural sustainability in design. By revealing how traditional wisdom such as *Tri Hita Karana* can be rearticulated through modern visual language, the framework contributes to sustainable design thinking rooted in cultural heritage. It aligns with emerging perspectives in design anthropology and ethics that emphasize contextual understanding as a foundation for responsible creativity.



(Findeli, 2019; Margolin, 2018). Through this framework, visual communication becomes a tool for maintaining dialogue between innovation and tradition.

In conclusion, the Kress and Barthes Model provides a coherent analytical and pedagogical bridge between formal visual analysis and cultural interpretation. It demonstrates that meaning in design arises from the interaction of structure, context, and ideology. Applied to Ayu Pitriani's *Tri Hita Karana* illustrations, the model reveals how visual art can operate simultaneously as cultural preservation, ethical education, and critical reflection. Beyond this case, the model offers a foundation for future research that seeks to connect semiotic theory, moral philosophy, and the practice of visual communication design in diverse cultural contexts.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the philosophical values of *Tri Hita Karana* can be effectively represented through contemporary illustration by integrating Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotics with Barthes' cultural semiotics. The three dimensions of *Parahyangan*, *Pawongan*, and *Palemahan* reveal the interconnectedness of visual form and ethical meaning embedded in Balinese social practice. Devotion in *Parahyangan* emerges as a lived expression of daily spirituality, negotiation in *Pawongan* reflects dialogue and social justice, and ecological awareness in *Palemahan* affirms moral responsibility toward nature. The counter representations function pedagogically as reflective tools that cultivate critical literacy and ethical sensitivity, consistent with UNESCO's media literacy framework and Kellner and Share's concept of ideological reading in visual culture. The theoretical synthesis of Kress, van Leeuwen, and Barthes generates an analytical model that bridges visual form and ideology, offering a methodological framework for research and design education grounded in cultural awareness. In conclusion, this study affirms the potential of contemporary illustration as a medium of *Tri Hita Karana* value literacy that remains adaptive to the social and ecological realities of modern Bali.

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