

CONTEXTUALIZING 'CONTEMPORARY ART': PROPOSITIONS OF
CRITICAL ARTISTIC PRACTICE IN SENI RUPA KONTEMPORER IN
INDONESIA

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CONTEXTUALIZING 'CONTEMPORARY ART': PROPOSITIONS OF
CRITICAL ARTISTIC PRACTICE IN *SENI RUPA KONTEMPORER* IN
INDONESIA, 1973-1994

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This dissertation contends with the development of *seni rupa kontemporer* (contemporary art) between 1973 and 1993, with certain case studies extending to the late 1990s. I offer a history and genealogy of concepts of critical artistic practice, examining to what purpose strategies of a contemporary art have been put and from what conditions they emerged. I examine how these have been interpreted to possess criticality in Indonesia. Taking the controversial curatorial essay published for the 9th Jakarta Biennale of Art (1993) as a catalyst rather than as a point of reference, I rethink the possibility and value of a construct of an avant-garde and postmodern in *seni rupa kontemporer*. I propose a kind of avant-garde without modernism's tradition of transgressive poetics. The mode of marginality I have in mind is a critical position possible only on this side of the political sea change and depoliticization of the cultural field in Indonesia after 1965. This entails tracing shifting notions of art's and artistic autonomy, which were largely dependent upon the relation art had with politics and the spheres in which artistic practice was seen to reside. My argument for a kind of *pascamodernisme* (postmodernism) in contemporary art in Indonesia posits its position also as one of a critical marginality, whose experiences with modernity are specific and distinct from those of the Euro-North-American context. I argue that a *pascamodernisme* in contemporary art articulates critical artistic practice as a

postcolonial critique of modernity-as-development, and the mutilating forces of modernization. A key aspect in this discussion is those practices that sought to assume alternative traditions, realities, and futures within modernity. In this regard, an important subtext is notions of collaborative work and the artist as members of artists' collectives and collaborative type of work as a primary and critical artistic solution. I am interested in those artistic collaborative and collective projects that helped to establish installation and performance art into art-historical categories in Indonesia, and whose activities and projects have had a discernible impact on the development of *seni rupa kontemporer* and how it would be defined vis-à-vis the terms and concepts generated by them.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Amanda Katherine Rath obtained a dual Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Colorado University in The History of Art and Photography, respectively, in 1992. She was the Exhibition's Coordinator and writer for the Asian Art Coordinating Council from 1992 to 1995. Amanda gained her Masters degree in Asian Studies and Certificate in Southeast Asian Studies from the University of Hawaii, Manoa in 1997. She spent one year at the University of Victoria, Canada for doctorate studies, where she taught an introductory course in the art and architecture of South and Southeast Asia. She then went on to doctoral studies at the Department of the History of Art and Archaeology, and Visual Culture at Cornell University. Amanda received both the Fulbright and Fulbright Hays fellowships for dissertation research in Indonesia, where she spent 18 months researching contemporary art (2001-2003). Her teaching experience also includes assignments at the University of Hamburg, Germany and Cornell University, specializing in modern and contemporary art of Southeast Asia. She is currently a Fellow with the Department of Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Frankfurt.

To my partner and home, A.G.

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LIST OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Akademi Kesenian Jakarta (AKJ)	Jakarta Academy of the Arts
Akademi Seni Rupa Indonesia (ASRI)	Art Academy of Indonesia
Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta IX (BJIX)	9 th Jakarta Art Biennale
Departmen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan (DEPDIBUD)	Department of Education and Culture
Dewan Kesenian Jakarta (DKJ)	Jakarta Art Council
Fakultas Seni Rupa dan Desain-Institut Teknologi Bandung (FSRD-ITB)	Faculty of Fine Art and Design at the Institute of Technology Bandung
Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru (GSRB)	New Art Movement
Institut Kesenian Jakarta (IKJ)	Art Institute of Jakarta
Institut Seni Indonesia (ISI)	Art Institute of Indonesia, formerly ASRI
Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (Lekra)	Organization of People's Culture
Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI)	Indonesian Communist Party
Pembaruan	Renewal, connotations of innovation
Pusat Kebudayaan Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM)	Taman Ismail Marzuki Cultural Center
Seni Eksperimental	Experimental Art
Seni Modern	Modern Art
Seni Pertunjukan	Theatre Art
Seni Rupa Baru (SRB)	New Art
Seni Rupa Kontemporer	Contemporary Visual Art
Seni Rupa Modern	Modern Visual Art

INTRODUCTION

As those whose history has been destroyed or misrepresented, as those whose very history has been dispersed and diasporized rather than lovingly memorialized, as those whose history has never been told, danced, sung rather than written, oppressed people have been obliged to recreate history out of scraps and remnants and debris. In aesthetic terms, those hand-me down aesthetics and history-making embody an art of discontinuity -- the heterogeneous scraps ... incorporate diverse styles, time periods and materials -- whence their alignment with artistic modernism as an art of 'jazzy' breaking and discontinuity, and with postmodernism as an art of recycling and pastiche (Shohat and Stam 1998, 42).

Notions of ontologically referential identity metamorphose into a conjunctural play of identifications. Purity gives way to "contamination." Rigid paradigms collapse into sliding metonymies. Erect, militant postures give way to an orgy of "positionalities." ... A rhetoric of unsullied integrity gives way to miscegenated grammars and scrambled metaphors. A discourse of "media imperialism" gives way to reciprocity and "indigenization (Stam 1999, 69).

Shohat (1998) and Stam (1999) referred in the above passages particularly to what they have called a 'jijitsu aesthetic' of the postcolonial cultural worker (film makers, writers, visual artists, etc.) during the height of postcolonial debates during the 1990s. Their description of the conditions that gave rise to the jijitsu aesthetic, and its many operations remain timely, and prove quite apt in this dissertation. Fischer and Mosquera articulate such positions and critical operations of rewriting and instigating new relations slightly differently:

The increased mobility, both physical and virtual, of new global actors speaking from sites of production beyond the axes of power introduced a new vocabulary, one forged not only in the space of intertextuality but also too frequently in the traumatic sites of cultural mutilation, conflict, and violence. As a result, their productions are disturbed by the ripple of emotions...What has been reintroduced into artistic and critical discourse by the "locals" of the world, after being expelled from the postmodern, is a renewed concern with ethical and political agency... (Fischer and Mosquera 2004, 7-8).

The above passages help to situate momentarily what I consider a continued need to contextualize contemporary art, to account for the different locations, conditions, operations, positions and political implications of contemporary artistic practices in Indonesia aimed at establishing an ethically and morally driven role for art in effecting social and cultural change. The means by which this occurs depends on the conditions that have given rise to contemporary art or *seni rupa kontemporer* in Indonesia, and its conceptions of what constitutes a critical artistic practice.

This dissertation contends with the development of *seni rupa kontemporer* between 1973 and 1993, with certain case studies extending to the late 1990s. I offer a history and genealogy of concepts of critical artistic practice that began as a series of eruptions, experiments and experimental art collectives and groups, out of which came more sustainable approaches from the critical position of marginality. The projects under consideration in this study are those that, though not idealistic enough to suggest the possibility of an unproblematic outside position, did seek to go beyond the baser aspects of commodification and prevailing aesthetic expectations as necessary in order to construct a sustainable ethically and morally driven role for art in effecting social and cultural change. The artists whose works are discussed in this dissertation are “poised somewhere between worldly and homely interests, universal but by no means postnational in their artistic inspirations and motivations” (Antoinette 2007, 213).

While the term *seni rupa kontemporer* had been used in the critical discourse to refer to certain types of works, it was more common to use other, and often artist inspired, terms to situate the work.¹ The term *seni rupa kontemporer* really began to

¹ Gregorius Sidharta is reported to have coined the term *seni kontemporer* during his organizing of the First Exhibition of Indonesian Modern Sculpture at TIM in 1973 as an expedient measure of situating the works of sculpture. Trained painter and sculptor in the modernist tradition, Sidharta’s work during the 1950s and 1960s had been informed by Western Modernism and its quest for the purity of form. Around 1970, he, along with a group of like-minded fellow faculty members of the sculpture department in the Faculty of Fine Art and Design, Institute of Technologically Bandung began

take on cachet roughly at the moment international curators arrived in Indonesia beginning in the late 1980s and particularly in 1991 and 1992. The increasing popularity of the new terminology and hybrid code was further supported by an increased access to international art journals and mainly Western-centric books of contemporary art. The term ‘contemporary art’ came to retroactively lend a label to a diverse array of artistic projects that for the past two decades had been given a number of names in the Indonesian art world, some of which are highlighted throughout this dissertation. Yet, in his contribution to the Third Asia Pacific Triennial, Doug Hall asks pertinent questions regarding the contexts and contextualization of contemporary art in Indonesia, questions that remain pertinent throughout this dissertation:

What is contemporary art as applied to the conditions that exist in Indonesia? Might these artistic practices, so classified, also be marked by other cultural and political/ideological principles? Would contemporary art in Indonesia, like its Euro-North American counterpart, constitute a significant shift within the dominant institutional framework as to conceive a new language or paradigm? If so, what specific labels have been applied to this shift, and how were they received and discussed? Have these labels constituted a movement in which many artists participated” (Doug Hall 1996, 19)?

During the two decades in question, the deployment of the term *seni rupa kontemporer* had always had been with a sense of ambivalence and ambiguity as to what it meant. One of the underlying points of contention in these discussions was the intensified tension between one’s sense of sovereignty against and yet necessary

experimenting with combining the language or codes of modernist art with the materials, techniques and forms from traditional culture. Sidharta’s use of the term ‘contemporary’ was in response to criticisms from particularly the Modernists of the Bandung school, the academy most associated with Modernism in Indonesia, who questioned the appropriateness of the term ‘modern’ to encompass works that employed not-fine-art, traditional techniques and materials. The change was in name only in that the sculptures in the exhibition maintained the principles of modernism.

reliance on the Western discourse of contemporary art. This relationship and tension of inside-outside positions, relations of entanglement and disentanglement are integral to any understanding of *seni rupa kontemporer*. One landmark event, namely the *Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta IX* (hereafter, BJIX) (9th Jakarta Biennale of Art) brought such issues to a head. In many respects, the event, the works displayed therein, and the curatorial essay would affect the way contemporary artistic practice was or, perhaps more accurately, was *not* to be bracketed and defined thereafter. Because of which, it serves as both anchoring device and point of departure in the current discussion.

The BJIX opened to high anticipation as well as consternation on Dec. 17, 1993, at the Taman Ismail Marzuki national cultural center (hereafter, TIM). The exhibition, cramped into TIM's three art galleries and wide courtyards, displayed over 100 exhibited works, more than fifty of which were installations and performance-installations. On one level, the BJIX was something like a survey of recent trends in contemporary art. On another, it posited the question of what besides an *ad hoc* survey was the glue that bound together the extreme differences between some of the works. This difference can be illustrated by relating the works by artists such as Semsar Siahaan (1952-2005) (Figure 1.1 and 1.2), and Andar Manik (b.1959) (Figures 1.3 and 1.4), two of the three award winners in the BJIX for best works.²

For his politically charged and massive *Penggalian Kembali* or *To Dig Up Again* (1993), Siahaan appropriated the architectural space of one of the gallery rooms slated for demolition.³ Its state as a ruin becomes the very structure for his

² The third artist selected was Anusapati. The winners of the award were sent by the Ministry of Education and Culture to act as observers at the Havana Biennale in Sao Paulo, September, 1994.

³ Semsar Siahaan's work from the 1980s is aptly dealt with in Brita Miklouho-Maklai, *Exposing Societies Wounds: Some Aspects of Contemporary Indonesian Art Since 1966*, vol. 5, *Flinders University Asian Studies Monograph* (Australia: Flinders University Asian Studies Monograph No. 5, 1991). Astri Wright also provides a different and insightful perspective to his work in relation to other artists advocating "consciousness raising" art. See Astri Wright, *Soul, Spirit and Mountain: Preoccupations of Indonesian Contemporary Artists* (Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 219-23. In

commentary on what he had long felt was an out of touch art world to the realities of the world. Yet, more profound is how the ‘ruin’ provides the space and structure for his indictment of human rights abuses and lack of democratic processes in New Order Indonesia at the time. The architectural space provides a visual metaphor of hope in tatters, as well as a physical repository of a mock mass grave that the artist dug and filled with figures of corpses rendered from the debris. On the walls that had been left standing, he drew with thick, black painted line various images connoting New Order restraints on freedom of speech, labor and human rights abuses, as well as the faceless image of brute military force.



Figure 1.1 Semsar Siahaan, *Penggalian Kembali*, 1993, installation, 9th Jakarta Biennale of Art, 1993, Illus. in “Two Decades of Contemporary Art in Indonesia,” *Art Asia Pacific* 1, no. 3 (1994): 28-29.

her later, “Semsar Siahaan – Hero into Exile,” <http://www.insideindonesia.org/edit62/astris3.htm>, Wright deals specifically with the question of his reputation as a strong activist and the controversy surrounding his self-imposed exile in Victoria Canada during the *Reformasi* period of Indonesian politics (1998-2000).



Figure 1.2 Semsar Siahaan, view in 1997 of one of the remaining murals from the installation work, *Penggalian Kembali*, after the gallery had been torn down (Photograph by Amanda Rath).

Siahaan accepted the offer to participate in the BJIX under the condition that his installation work not be viewed until opening night,⁴ and that no one be allowed to watch him work or have prior knowledge of the piece (Klein 1995, 153). This would perhaps explain why although a quite blunt commentary on political events during the New Order, *Penggalian Kembali* was allowed to be exhibited and in such a prestigious national venue, which was attended by various high diplomats and city and government officials, including the Minister of Culture.⁵

⁴ Siahaan exhibited a total of four works in the BJIX. Besides his installation work discussed above, he showed three paintings completed in 1992: *Selendang Abang*, *Jeritan Biru Seorang Pelukis*, and *Di Antara Pabrik dan Penjara*.

⁵ It has also been suggested among the Indonesian art circles that this piece touches on the taboo subject of Marsinah. Marsinah was a young female laborer who on Labor Day (1 May) in 1993 led her fellow workers in a demonstration for a wage increase from a Swiss-Indonesian watch company in East Java where they worked. Marsinah was murdered three days later. See “The Tragedy of Marsinah: Industrialisation and workers’ rights,” *Inside Indonesia*, No. 36, September 1993. Public discussions of the incident and the facts behind her death were indirectly banned by the government. Not surprisingly, Marsinah soon became a type of martyr to the oppression of the New Order state and its development policies.

Siahaan's blatantly political work was exhibited alongside works by artists, such as Andar Manik, whose work suggests a somewhat different agenda or imperative. Manik's *Retakan* (Crackling) manifests, according to artist, a hidden force within nature and organic substances. It speaks of the passage of time and the incompleteness of vision and perception as the work continues to transform and change throughout the duration of the exhibition. The work is not complete until the entire surface layer of wet clay dries and has fallen away, revealing depth beneath surface. What lies beneath is never wholly revealed until the very last piece of clay falls to dust on the gallery floor. Revelation is mirrored by concealment, as the artist has created a similar cosmic map on the floor adjacent to the wall. As the thin layer of clay concealing the actual surface of the wall falls to the ground, it then serves to cover yet again. The piece implies temporal oscillation and flux between present, future and past in the continuous changing state of the piece as it dries and disintegrates. Here the artist delves into the past of traditional beliefs and brings them into play as the important work that the piece does.

Having staged the piece at least twice before,⁶ the artist recreated this work in conjunction with three other pieces for the BJIX. Singularly or in tandem, they refer beyond the artist's concern with medium to invoke spiritual connotations of cosmic forces made manifest, and ideas of transfiguration metaphorically suggested in the processes of transformation involved in working with natural materials.

⁶ It was one of three large scale installations that he produced in 1993 for his exit exam in the Fine Arts Department at the Institute of Technology in Bandung, and recreated at the Cemeti Art House in Yogyakarta shortly before BJIX.



Figure 1.3 Andar Manik, *Retakan*, 1993, installation, clay, ceramic, sand, pebbles, brick, string (Courtesy of the artist).

Manik and Siahaan seem intent on invoking different responses and experiences from their viewers. In fact, the two artists can be seen as representatives of two polar positions in contemporary art in Indonesia, namely art as a means of socio-political activism or political art, or art as a form of ritual and offering, with a tendency toward aesthetic concerns. Most Indonesian contemporary art falls between these two extremes and is irreducible to either pole.



Figure 1.4 Andar Manik, *Retakan*, detail (Courtesy of the artist).

While most Jakarta Biennales are accompanied by rancor, criticism, and bickering, usually expressed publicly as polemics in the press and spread through rumor, the BJIX proved particularly more problematic than usual. This was not just due to the unconventionality of many of the works. In fact, although some of the works did cause consternation for some critics and art enthusiasts as incomprehensible

or as demonstrations of aesthetic chaos, the few that were given attention in the press received favorable reviews.⁷ Much more problematic was the question of what bound all the works together other than what some artists and critics alike perceived as the desire of Chief Curator, Jim Supangkat, to impose his personal definition of *seni rupa kontemporer* as a kind of *pascamodern* (postmodern).⁸ In his controversial curatorial essay, “Seni Rupa Era '80 Pengantar untuk Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta IX” (Art of the 80's, Introduction to the 9th Jakarta Biennale of Art, hereafter *Pengantar*), Supangkat attempted to differentiate different projects and positions within the field of contemporary art by constructing a distinct difference between *seni pemberontakan* (rebellion art) of the 1970s and the unconventional, critical art of *seni era 80-an* (80's era art), the latter supposedly the precursor to the types of work exhibited in the BJIX. Supangkat argues the art rebellion or *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* (New Art Movement, GSRB) was an instance of a radical avant-garde as pretext to contending that the contemporary art of the 1980s was not only post-rebellion but also post-avant-garde. He concludes that the art of the 1980s, having moved beyond quarrels with modernism and concerns over the language of art or with innovation, was postmodern. Yet he then attaches the cachet of the postmodern to the form that such art takes: namely, installation, performance and video. He has since commented that his analysis was not

⁷ The exhibition received a lot of press, much of which centered on the medium of installation art and the question of postmodernism in Indonesian art. Agus Dermawan T., "Biennale IX Seni Rupa Jakarta: Dominasi Baru, Pascamodern [9th Jakarta Biennial of Art: Postmodern, the New Domination]," *Kompas*, 16 Jan. 1994; Herry Dim, "Biennale Seni Rupa dengan sebuah Ide Besar [Biennial of Art with a Big Idea]," *Kompas*, 13 Jan. 1994; Hardi, "Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta IX: Sebuah Cangkokan Barat yang Mentah [The 9th Jakarta Biennial: A Transplant that has not been Thought Through]"; Semsar Siahaan, "Dengan Tegas Menolak Postmodernisme dalam Seni Rupa [Adamantly Reject Postmodernism in Art]," *Media Indonesia*, 2 Jan. 1994; Drs. Yustiono, "Setelah 'Pembrontakan' Seni Rupa [Art After 'Rebellion]," *Kalam* 3 (1994): 110-22.

⁸ For a summary of these perspectives, see Herry Dim's "Biennale Seni Rupa dengan sebuah Ide Besar [Biennial of Art with a Big Idea]"; "Instalasi Postmodern"; "Mazhab Bandung Teresok-esok [Bandung School of Thought Left Behind]," in *Jawinul: Jalan-jalan di Rimba Kebudayaan [Jawinul: Wandering in the Culture Jungle. A Collection of Essays]* (Bandung: PT. Rekamedia Multiprakarsa, 1995).

deep enough but that he was merely “trying to analyze a variety of ideas and apply them to make better sense of developments in *seni rupa kontemporer*.”⁹

Few of Supangkat’s critics had much to say about his idea of an avant-garde in Indonesian art, suggesting perhaps that they agreed at least in principle with such a claim. His assumptions and deployment of certain frames of theories of postmodernism were less convincing. Many assumed that he had taken recourse in Western theoretical postmodernism to legitimate more than inspire alternative art practices. Other of his critics demonstrated a long tradition of distrust of (Western) theory and categories in general. BJIX participant Semsar Siahaan publicly rejected outright both the label of postmodern and the term installation to categorize his work.¹⁰ On opening night of the exhibition, viewers were greeted with a banner outside the entrance to his work *Penggalian Kembali* that read “Anda memasuki kawasan bebas gravitas pos modern” (You are entering a zone free from postmodern gravity). The banner articulates the concept of the postmodern as a kind of imposed, external force, an agent that gives weight to things, a measure of control aimed to rationalize an array of operations. Yet, he in turn proclaims that, while difficult to do,

⁹ Interview with Jim Supangkat, Feb. 1997, Jakarta.

¹⁰ The seminar that accompanied the exhibition apparently underscored the problem in contextualizing the term particularly among artists. Artists such as FX Harsono and Arahmaiani, two of Indonesia’s pioneering experimental artists were hard pressed to define what installation art was for themselves or the audience. Arahmaiani, for example, contended that the terms *seni rakitan* or *seni patung* (assembled object and sculpture) could be used in place of the word *instalasi*. The discussion became even more complex with the addition of ‘performance’ in and/or close proximity to installation. For discussions of the seminar and some of the issues involved in defining installation art in relation to the BJIX, see for example, Bujono, “Instalasi Gelap dan Instalasi Terang [Obscure Installation and Illumined Installation],” *Tempo*, 22 Jan. 1994; Hardi, “Seni Instalasi [Installation Art],” *Matra* 1993; Hardi, “Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta IX: Sebuah Cangkokan Barat yang Mentah [The 9th Jakarta Biennial: A Transplant that has not been Thought Through],” *Horison* 28, no. 2 (1994); Staff, “Agoes Jolly Tawarkan Instalasinya untuk TIM [Agoes Jolly Presents his Installation at TIM],” *Media Indonesia*, 15 Jan. 1994; Staff, “Biennale (sic) dan Perkembangan Seni Rupa Indonesia [Biennial and the Development of Indonesian Art],” *Kompas*, 8 Jan. 1994; Staff, “Biennale (sic) Seni Rupa Jakarta IX Ditutup Mendikbud [Ninth Jakarta Biennial of Art Closed by Minister of Education and Culture],” *Kompas*, 20 Jan. 1994.

it is possible to escape such a force. His rejection of certain terms and categories to 'capture' his work represents a shared opposition to Western theory to explain Indonesian cultural practices in general.

I pause at this juncture to formulate a metaphor to position Siahaan's work and response, as well as the other proposals of a critical art practice in contemporary art in Indonesia articulated in the dissertation: that of "double vision," a vision that works the contentious relationship and tension between entanglement and disentanglement. It is situated in the subject position and epistemology of the feminine, that which has been historically and systematically marginalized by a patriarchal symbolic order. "Double vision" is a politics of interpretation, translation, and the partly understood. It is the vision of the multiple subject, "a critical vision consequent upon a critical positioning in unhomogeneous gendered social space. Translation is always interpretive, critical and partial" (Haraway 2003, 398). Double vision is a means of interpreting the world through an epistemology of oppressed groups, a feminist epistemology of the postcolonial subject within the interwoven confines of gendered, ethnic, and class positions in Indonesia. One of the critical insights of "feminist epistemology" is, according to Uma Narayan, in "The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a NonWestern Feminist:"

The view that oppressed groups, whether women, the poor, or racial minorities, may derive an 'epistemic advantage' from having knowledge of practices of both their own contexts and those of their oppressors. The practices of the dominant groups (for instance, men) govern society; the dominated group (for instance, women) must acquire some fluency with these practices in order to survive in that society.

There is no similar pressure on members of the dominant group to acquire knowledge of the practices of the dominated groups... Thus, the oppressed are seen as having an 'epistemic advantage' because they can operate with two sets of practices and in two different contexts. This

advantage is thought to lead to critical insights because each framework provides a critical perspective on the other” (Narayan 2002, 315).

The above establishes ‘double vision’ as an interpretive process that I appropriate in theorizing the agency and politics behind what I am framing as the discourse of a critical artistic practice in *seni rupa kontemporer*. Yet, Narayan also cautions of the potential “dark side of double vision”, or the “disadvantages [] of being able to or having to inhabit two mutually incompatible frameworks that provide differing perspectives on social reality...[G]iven the complex and troublesome interrelationships between the contexts they must inhabit” the subjects in question might be “less likely to express unqualified enthusiasm about the benefits of straddling a multiplicity of contexts.” Yet, I would temper both aspects of the “double vision” in that contemporary art in Indonesia is marked with the constant tension between these two possibilities of “double vision”. In addition, Narayan’s conception of “double vision” implies that the two contexts are so different, so incompatible, that they lack any possibility of common ground or consensus.

The above double vision and blind vision are apt to my project, both to the artists and their projects and to my own position as author. However, my position as author is also complicated in that, having acquired a certain amount of knowledge of the practices of Indonesian art, I too must operate with two sets of practices and in two different contexts. Thus, establishing a constant process of entanglement and disentanglement. A similar tension and double vision is present in 1) the critical response to Supangkat’s assumptions, 2) Supangkat’s own position as one who transgresses between the “Indonesian context” and that of the “International art world”. One of the critically useful aspects of his essay is that it underscores the contentious project of reconciling contemporary works of art with theoretical frameworks drawn from a Euroamerican-centric discourse of art as referential discourses in interpreting

and contextualizing contemporary art in Indonesia. This has resonance for my own project. In the process of analysis, I simultaneously and continuously entangle and disentangle its discourse and practices with those of others.

A primary problem in Supangkat's initial deployment of the cachet of postmodernism is that he binds his rendition of *seni rupa kontemporer* too tightly to his source's (Charles Jencks) categorical boundaries of a Western historical trajectory that is not altogether relevant or applicable to an Indonesian context. Due to such criticisms, and the particularly rancorous atmosphere of the seminar that accompanied the BJIX, Supangkat publicly recanted his initial assertions: "The material in this Biennale is Indonesian contemporary art, not installation art, postmodernism, or experimental art" (Supangkat 1994a).¹¹ Some read this as a form of professional self-preservation and backsliding that brought the discussion of contemporary art and the question of postmodernism in Indonesia back to square one (Detik 1994).

While arguably, Supangkat relies too heavily on Western (Euroamerican-centric) categories and frames without recontextualization or revision, his project should not be abandoned altogether. I return to it as a historical object and point of departure that serves as catalyst more than point of reference. Certain of the issues raised in *Pengantar* lay the groundwork for larger questions in the remainder of the dissertation. In particular, I engage two aspects of his argument: 1) his assumption of a singular instance of an avant-garde impulse; 2) and that the form that the postmodern in art takes is in its form. In my study, I rethink these, what he contended were, still premature assumptions. Here I am interested in rethinking the possibility and value of a construct of an avant-garde and postmodern in *seni rupa kontemporer*.

¹¹ "Materi pameran biennale ini adalah seni rupa kontemporer Indonesia. Bukan seni rupa instalasi, bukan post-modernisme, juga bukan seni rupa eksperimental."

In his curatorial essay, Supangkat argues that in Indonesia, the art rebellion *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* (New Art Movement, *GSRB*) was the sole instance of an avant-garde in Indonesian art. Hence, anything that came after it is not only post-rebellion, but also post-avant-garde. He claims that in the contemporary art of the 1980s, artists were no longer interested in challenging the still dominant forms of painting and sculpture, or in calling their relevance into question but had somehow surpassed them altogether. In my case studies in Parts Two and Three, I argue against such assumptions. I assert that crucial to understanding contemporary art in Indonesia during the 1970s and 1980s is a further differentiating between impulses and functions of an avant-garde in an Indonesian context. I propose a kind of avant-garde without modernism's tradition of transgressive poetics that is understood here as something possible only on this side of the political sea change and depoliticization of the cultural field in Indonesia after 1965.

Theorizing and offering a history of a construct of the avant-garde in Asia, John Clark writes:

The use of such a Euroamerican and widely debated concept as 'avant-garde' to discuss art discourses, institutions, and the function of this notion for different artists in Asia will always be in danger of remaining a mere projection. This will be the case whether the concept is used by an outsider for description and interpretation or by an Asian artist to ideologically justify a given position within the art world. The danger may be avoided if we keep a firm empirical grasp on Asian art historical detail and theorise (sic) the avant-garde flexibly between the hermeneutic needs of various Asian contexts" (J. Clark 1998, 217).

Clark suggests that with a deep knowledge of the discourse and history of Asian art along with seeing how certain concepts have been interpreted and translated within different contexts, it is possible that such concepts and terminology may help to identify "a range of functions of criticism and discourse innovation that we may call avant-garde in art discourses. This could be on the level of the work, or interpretation,

or the agency of the artist or artist group.” In addition, it is also possible to identify a “range of types of avant-garde structure that mediate or carry out these functions...” He concludes that “rather than ask what is avant-garde, it may be better to inquire into where avant-garde functions take place.” The same might be said of the applicability and appropriateness of the concept and function of the postmodern as well.

It is also a risky and problematic proposition as my discussion and analysis necessarily attempts to traverse different and multiple contexts, which necessarily implies the truncation of important differences between the two. For example, although I maintain as much as possible the actual terms and concepts used by Indonesians themselves in defining their critical artistic practices, I too am reading them from this side of my understanding of the Western discourse. Yet, with each ‘supplement’ or deferred action in this regard, meaning is transmuted in both contexts.

Construct of an Avant-Garde

While acknowledging its possibility, in her dissertation on the relationship between “alternative art” in Indonesia of the 1990s and the domestic and international art world (galleries, curators, museums, foreign sponsor), Susan Ingham (2007) avoids the term avant-garde not because she denies the presence of similar operations and strategies in contemporary art. She concludes that an “Indonesian variation of an Avant-Garde” is conceivable, but its strategies must be contextualized to the specific conditions of that new context. Such a process must take into account the specific political, social and religious conditions that may or may not have given rise to such strategies and operations. For instance, any “claim to experiment outside constraints of society and break with social conventions was less important than resistance to the socio/political restraints of a dictatorship. A socially independent role for the artist was problematic and a novel concept in a culture dominated by Islamic/Javanese traditions, and

experimentation with unrestrained individualism never seemed acceptable, either to the public or to the art world” (Ingham 2007, 8). While Ingham does not refute the usefulness of the idea of an “Indonesian variation of an avant-garde,” she, along with other such as curators, critics and artists in Indonesia, prefer the term “alternative” to stress art’s operations as a form of cultural resistance over and against an artist’s drive for artistic innovation. Yet a problem arises in the concept of “alternative” in this sense of “resistance”. Her account of resistance in this instance assumes that it does not take on different contours and features over time. The idea of an “alternative” seems ahistorical in this sense.

It is my contention, nonetheless, that both the more culturally critical “alternative” artistic practice and an avant-garde impulse is in operation in *seni rupa kontemporer*. My construct of an Indonesian avant-garde is delineated throughout the chapters of the dissertation. Presently, I want only to provide what I feel are two of its possible key aspects. I argue a difference between *pemberontakan* and *pembaruan* as two concepts and constellations of strategies useful in articulating contemporary art as, in part, a construct of an avant-garde in Indonesia. Although both concepts possess a moral and ethical imperative, *pemberontakan* is more revolutionary in its connotations and aggressive in its operations, while *pembaruan* is associated with the ‘cultural’ (i.e. non-revolutionary) and geared toward redefining and reforming prevailing assumptions and building or constructing new structures in the work of art to initiate different kinds of social relations. Although associated with acts of rejection and defiance, *pemberontakan* also carries with it a demand for entry into the very system under attack while *pembaruan* seeks innovation and reform from within. The less aggressive *pembaruan* seeks to redefine, or to reform what artists view as a shortsighted and inaccurate conception of art and culture. *Pembaruan* is that energy or praxis that continues, while *pemberontakan* is short-lived. For in this respect, the latter

serves a temporary purpose. Supangkat seems to argue the end of both the impulse of agitation and operations of innovation. The combined gestures discussed above can be positioned as a viable construct of an avant-garde function and impulse in Indonesian contemporary art. Generally speaking, these can be found across the terrain of alternative art in Indonesia or *seni rupa era 80-an* and into the early 1990s various moments in which these aspects are again played out. Instances of open rebellion ended with the internationalization of Indonesian art in the early 1990s and the development of an alternative arts infrastructure within which artists could develop their critical art practices.

In Chapters Two and Three I further contextualize an avant-garde in Indonesia by way of tracing the shifting notions of art's and artistic autonomy, which were largely dependent upon the relation art had with politics and the spheres in which artistic practice was seen to reside. I contend that while one can suggest a tradition of sorts of an "alternative" mode of art dating back decades, and spanning both modern and contemporary art (a tradition that stresses resistance to a dominant system), the avant-garde practice I have in mind must be seen from this side of the political sea change in the mid-1960s that ushered in the so-called New Order (1965-1998), itself something initially promising of a new age of progress and renewal. In addition, the construct of an avant-garde I am arguing in these pages must also be seen from this side of the New Order economic expansion and its concomitant new middle class.

The majority of artists under examination in this dissertation, most of whom entered the academy between 1979 and 1982, were members of a new middle class that emerged in the first decade of the New Order (Raillon 1985). It benefited from the rapid economic growth and was dependent upon the state for its economic survival. It became more powerful and numerous over the next two decades. The New Order era middle class cut across ethnic and religious lines. According to Raillon, the ideology

of this middle class was closer to that of Western values than it was to those of the ruling class. Richard Robson (1992) suggests that this newly emerging rationality variously questioned and criticized the neo-patrimonial structure of the New Order Javanized state, as well as the incompetence of the power elite. This new generation increasingly became subversive against what it saw as a regime of ‘developmental authoritarianism’ hindering diversity, freedom of expression, and healthy economic development (Raillon, 1985, 218; Robson 1992, 342). Positions of resistance were weakened as the government moved increasingly towards the idea that state and society comprised an organic whole, in which individuals exist only in relation to the whole and, therefore, conflict between individual and whole could not be tolerated (Suryakusuma 1996, 93). In such a relation, the individual had little recourse to modern human rights. The state defined and controlled the structures of political and ideological activity via its “extremely efficient” process of institution-building which imposed a depoliticization of civil society (Robinson 1992, 343).

By the first decade of the New Order regime, art had been contained relatively to its own province. Understandably, this would make developing an artistic practice aligned with social activism a difficult if not a dangerous proposition. *Seni rupa kontemporer* and its strain of avant-garde procedures, strategies, and operations derive from this new middle class and weakened position of intervention and resistance.

Construct of a Postmodernism: Pascamodernisme as Critique of Modernity-as-Development

The above delineated in cursory fashion my contention of an avant-garde in Indonesian contemporary artistic practice. I suggested this as a means of rethinking one aspect in Supangkat’s essay that could help to further contextualize contemporary artistic practices in Indonesia aimed at establishing an ethically and morally driven

role for art in effecting social and cultural change. The means by which this occurs depends on the conditions that have given rise to *seni rupa kontemporer* in Indonesia, and its conceptions of what constitutes a critical artistic practice. In this regard, the second point in Supangkat's *Pengantar* that serves as a catalyst in this direction is not his assumption of postmodern associations in *seni kontemporer* but that he places it within the form that artworks take, in this case those that contaminate the categories of modernism, and blur the lines between disciplines and temporalities. The question of an artistic postmodern is more complex than a mere listing of the formal techniques and properties of particular works, the surface effects of a 'postmodern' style (Tico Escobar quoted in Yúdice 1992, 6). It is also not enough to suggest that postmodernism in the Western discourse pronounced the death of universalism and hence suddenly a space opened up for all those cultural formations otherwise left out, ignored, or disavowed by a colonial past and legacy of modernism. The question is to what purpose these are put and from what conditions they emerged and have been interpreted to possess criticality. What have been the conditions that have given rise to such modes of artistic resistance in the first place? In answering such questions, I wish to reevaluate the notion of the postmodern in Indonesian contemporary art to recast it in a more critical light. It will also provide a different aspect to the idea of an "alternative art" briefly suggested above as a kind of cultural resistance.

It is the argument here that a kind of *pascamodernisme* in contemporary art in Indonesia has less to do with some form of emancipation offered by the discourse of postmodernism and more to do with a critical position of marginality, whose experiences with modernity are specific and distinct from those of the Euro-North-American context. The New Order (1965-1998) period of Indonesian history is marked by an anti-Communist vigilance, and pro-Western focus on *pembangunan* (development) and *modernisasi* (modernization). The ideal image of national

development was one in which different social groups worked together to ensure the better functioning of society that then better enabled the processes of development (Raillon 1985, 208). Additionally, while promoting modernization, in order to counterbalance what were deemed negative cultural and social influences from Western modernity, the New Order government adopted a kind of neo-traditionalism based on the traditions and hierarchical values of particularly the Javanese court. Culture was figured as both the *object* and the *instrument* of government. The New Order government allowed for the reproduction of identities from within an ideology that manipulated culture in such a way that it would not drastically compromise the goals of modernization.

Pascamodernisme in Indonesia articulates critical artistic practice in *seni rupa kontemporer* as a postcolonial critique of modernity-as-development, and the mutilating forces of modernization as envisioned and set in motion by the New Order state. Reading Yúdice, the kind of critical practice I am suggesting developed in the latter half of the 1980s and especially in the first half of the 1990s as a means of ethically and morally responding to modernity-as-development, and proposing practices that sought to assume alternative traditions, realities, and futures within modernity (Yúdice 1992, 23).

The case studies in Part Three critically engage how artists conceive of the marginal as both site and location of resistance. Arguably, a key aspect of postmodernist artistic practice in Indonesia during particularly the late 1980s and after was that artists sought ways of making the silences wrought by both the nation-state and national culture ‘speak’. Their politics is one of making public hitherto depoliticized needs. In this work, there is an assumption that the authority of the referent can be reconstructed, recouped, rewritten and in the interest of other groups, whose signs have been appropriated, mutilated, or nullified. This has particular

resonance in terms of the feminine as delineated in Chapter Seven, in which I discuss the work and ideas of Arahmaiani. Through her work, she attempts to rewrite the codes of a Java-centric patrimonial ideology of gender, as well as critically examine the connections between capitalism, modernization, neo-traditionalism, and the ideologies of Islam and their systematic marginalization of women.

Michael Bodden (2002), in his study of what he considers a postmodernist literature of the 1990s, observes that one difference between modernist and ‘postmodernist cultural production’ in Indonesia has been the position of the nation state and its ideology in the artist’s imaginary. While the modernists had faith in the nation state as a positive thing, as a force against colonialism and religious sectarianism, ‘postmodernist culture workers’ in the New Order era distrust the state as a totalizing, centralizing, dominant and oppressive power. Postmodernist cultural practices in an Indonesian context work the tension between “the need to resist a powerfully dominating unitary state, while at the same time attempting to reconfigure, in non-oppressive ways, notions of community and their authorizing ideologies, often encoded in the rhetoric of ‘universality’” (Bodden 2002, 295). Postmodernist artists, in this relation, tend to educate themselves beyond their professional elitism and narrowness of concern to attempt to actively intervene in the social fabric. As Chapter Five demonstrates, their work and artistic practices are deeply linked to the activism of other fields of society such as NGO’s, student movements, and grass roots organizations, all of which share a common concept of a universal basic human rights and justice of democracy.

The ethos of different proposals for a fairer modernity rests on an overriding commitment to the alleviation of human suffering due to the pathologies in certain aspects of modernity and processes of modernization. Anthony Kwame Appiah, in theorizing the operative strategies in the postcolonial African novel, contends such a

commitment is a kind of “ethical universal”. He associates this with the second phase of African postcoloniality, which is marked, he argues, by “a condition of pessimism” and a “kind of *postoptimism*” (Appiah 1992, 155). The postcolonial humanism in this relation is “not an ally of Western postmodernism but an agonist,” challenging the legitimating narratives of the nation and dominant culture upheld by a power elite. Appiah’s argues that taking into serious account the postcolonial “ethical; universal” or “a certain simple respect for human suffering, for the victims of the postcolonial state, makes it possible to “*recover within* [a Western anti-essentialist] *postmodernism* the postcolonial writers’ [and artists’] humanism...while still rejecting the master narratives of modernism” (Appiah 1992, 155). I borrow from Appiah’s conception of of this to argues a difference to the Western anti-essentialist discourse of postmodernism. Appiah concludes that it is in this anti-essentialist “*powerful engagement* with the concern to avoid cruelty and pain while nevertheless recognizing contingency of the concern” that “we can the artists and their projects articulated in the pages that follow The posHe injects the Western antiessentialist discourse of postmodernism with a postcolonial humanism; a humanism that is “provisional, historically contingent, anti-essentialist.”

Appiah contends that such operative strategies and ethic is not a postmodernism but rather postmodernization, “it is not an aesthetics but a politics”. Postmodernization straddles both modernity and its post. Therefore, to see art works as interventions with a possible political dimension is not to suggest a total break from existing systems.

Collaborative Processes and the Artist Collective as Additional Frame

In addition to serving as an anchoring device from which to move diachronically (historical) and synchronically (spatial) in articulating a critical artistic practice in *seni*

rupa kontemporer, and this in dialogue with Supangkat's text, the BJIX has a practical function in bracketing my primary selection of artists, whose works and positions within the larger discourse of contemporary art are discussed in case studies in Part III that articulate how artists and critics defined critical artistic practice aimed at establishing an ethically and morally driven role for art in effecting social and cultural change. However, even this arbitrary bracketing encompasses a large number of artists and artworks. As such, I have narrowed the scope even more by adding additional criteria. First, as with any Biennale in Indonesia, there is a large percentage of fairly young and inexperienced artists who remain active only for a brief period following graduation from academy. Hence, those artists who were already known for working as contemporary artists and who continued to work after graduation are included. Second, and most important for Part III, I am interested in those artists who were instrumental in initiating new types of work or in the Indonesian discourse who are considered pioneers or groundbreakers. While this includes only a handful, it does provide a broad enough spectrum for my present purposes. For, this same group of instigators was also part of what was a kind of 'anti-mainstream mainstream' by the time of the BJIX. During the decade of the 1990s, they were members of the main group of "alternative" artists in Indonesia, and the core artists from Indonesia to circulate and be traded in the circuit of international contemporary art exhibitions. There is a built in problem regarding the latter in that among this cadre of well-known artists, some have been overexposed either by their ubiquitous presence in the international world of exhibits or their projects have changed little over the course of time, and hence their work and readings of it have become repetitious. In such cases either I refer to certain works in relation to the curatorial essay in Part I but do not engage the artist's history or career in depth in the sustained case studies in Part III. Rather than a survey or a history based on the individual artist's careers, a series or

constellation of their works are discussed from within larger themes and questions regarding the ways in which contemporary art as a critical practice have been defined.

An important subtext in this dissertation is also questions of collaborative work, the artist as members of artist collectives and instigators of certain projects that helped to make the likes of installation and performance into art-historical categories in Indonesia. I am interested in those moments that link BJIX participants to some kind of collective or collaborative type of work as a primary and critical artistic solution. This is because, although contemporary art discourse in Indonesia privileges the individual artist, and the artists in the Biennale worked predominantly as individual artists, one tenet within contemporary art in its more critical guise has been varying degrees of degrading the position of the singular artist. Such collectives have been crucial vehicles for the production of critical art, which to varying degrees is aimed toward developing new ethical practices in the face of modernization, globalization, and authoritarianism. Their activities and projects have had a discernible impact on the development of *seni rupa kontemporer* and how it would be defined vis-à-vis the terms and concepts generated by them.

What concerns this analysis is first, concepts of art as these developed among short-lived groups or collectives (implying different kinds of artistic labor); secondly, artists who produce works both within and outside the paradigm of individual authorial production. Unlike their modernist, revolutionary forefathers who opened artist communal studios prior to the late 1960s, contemporary artists in the New Order who temporarily associate themselves with collaborative and collective, if not community-based projects, do so as a measure of autonomy in the guise of an anti-establishment stance; carving out of space from within which to experiment not for its own sake, but for the sake of ethically based practices capable of changing minds and effecting change outside the body of art.

In some cases, working collaboratively meant the artist working with groups outside the field of art in making a type of activist art meant to educate and change the larger social conscience. Such projects are arguably idealistic. Others have formed collectives to break away from the institutions and institutional assumption of what constitutes the work of art. Such collectives have not only instigated new structures in art, such as different modes of contemporary performance. They have also been a form of cultural resistance. In each case, the collaborative, collective, community-based propositions and projects demonstrate different degrees of projecting energies inward or projecting outward. The practice and collective or collaboration provide a position of autonomy not from society, which they inevitably argue as the site for which and within they work, but from institutional confines of the kinds of social work that art can and does do.

In his study of artist collectives in Senegal and Nigeria, Okwui Enwezor explains that collectives have historically emerged “during periods of crisis, in moments of social upheaval and political uncertainty within society. Such crises often force reappraisals of conditions of production, reevaluation of the nature of artistic work, and reconfigurations of the position of the artist in relation to economic, social, and political institutions” (Enwezor 2007, 225). He generalizes art collectives into two types (see also Sholette 2002; Stimson 2007). The first collective consists of a permanent fixed group of practitioners who work together on a project that is long in duration. The artists produce works not as individuals but as a group, and this often in conjunction with working with non-art groups and communities. Specifically outward oriented, they work with the community in expressing and dealing with the community’s urgently felt needs. The second type of collective that Enwezor considers is that which “tends to emphasize a flexible, nonpermanent course of affiliation” (223). Such collectives are project based, leaving space to question the

authenticity and authorship in the work of art, but also leaves it open for individual creative expression outside of the collective. Nonetheless, the second type of collective also “tends to lend collective work a social rather than artistic character.” Enwezor’s description of the conditions that give rise to art collectives and their operative strategies is quite apt to the present discussion of contemporary art and its discourse in an Indonesian context.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ROLE OF THE BIENNALE EVENT IN THE FORMATION OF THE *SENI RUPA KONTEMPORER* DISCOURSE

In this chapter, the Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta IX, or BJIX (Dec. 17, 1993 – Jan. 21, 1994), serves as an arbitrary anchoring device for my study of *seni kontemporer* or contemporary art, the types of works that in late 1993 and early 1994 were often referred to as '*seni alternatif*' or alternative art. The BJIX was the first occasion that the Biennale was not restricted to painting, and that installation, performance and video served as representatives of the nation's best recent art. In highlighting a myriad of artistic approaches and forms, it furthered artistic investigations in structurally changing what signified as a work of 'art' and the potential 'work' that art could do at the official, national levels of the discourse. The BJIX was also important because it was the first time in perhaps a decade that a major exhibition in Jakarta displayed so many critical statements of a social and political nature, demonstrating to a new generation of artists how an elitist form of aesthetic expression could play ideological and social roles. It stands as a kind of signpost between the 1980s, when the development of contemporary artwork was sporadic and received little institutional support, and the sudden increase of these types of work in the early to mid-1990s, with their main patron being the international art world. The curatorial platform was marked by recent theoretical developments and events in the postcolonial international art world of the time. Yet, the BJIX also carries within it the history of the nation and ideologies of the New Order government.

Hassan and Oguibe contend that massive exhibitions like biennales, hold immense significance in defining contemporary art practices and “much deeper issues of history and the realities of contemporary culture relations...Exhibitions are the building blocks of art history... and therefore are crucial in moving art from the private to the public domain” (Hassan and Oguibe 2001, 65). They further explain that “exhibitions and the curatorial practices behind them constitute the most enduring and perhaps most powerful means of selecting, staging, and ultimately, canonizing art.” Biennales and the curatorial platforms then provide an arbitrary frame through which to manage the vast diversity of the art world. While the national Biennale is not the only site “in the circulation of aesthetic practices,” such institutions give us a better understanding of “how artistic practices proliferate in our society” (Hall 2001, 14). The above observations by Hassan and Oguibe, and Hall of some of the key functions of exhibitions, particularly the Biennale, are useful in positioning the significance of the BJIX in the writing of the history of *seni rupa kontemporer* in Indonesia. This entails questions of the meaning and significance of the category of *seni kontemporer*, including the use and definition of its terms and concepts. The concept of what is contemporary art was the topic of debate at the time.

The chapter is divided into two parts. In the first, I provide the historical and ideological background of the Jakarta (national) Biennale in Indonesia. In the second part, I look specifically at the BJIX and some of the questions that it raised.

Historical, Political and Ideological Background

As suggested above, while the notion of a Biennale, in this case as a national exhibition, in Indonesia is an enacted global model of an institutionalized event, it is also historically specific. The importance of the Jakarta Biennale as a national institution cannot be grasped fully without also engaging its ideological and political

roots that, in turn, have produced different conditions for the formulation of a Biennale, and contemporary art in general, in Indonesia.

As an aspect of developing a viable art infrastructure, the implementation of a national Biennale requires political stability, funding, and the will of the state, which becomes a necessary patron of and, to varying degrees, a determining factor in artistic and cultural production. According to these criteria, the advent of a national Biennale in Indonesia would perhaps not have been possible any earlier than it was, twenty-five years after the revolution. For, after the war for independence from the Dutch (1945-49) *seni rupa* (visual or fine arts) ostensibly became, borrowing from Geeta Kapur (2000), “harnessed to the operations of the ideology and cultural policy of the national state” (207). As a consequence, *seni rupa* and its history were embedded in the overarching process of institutionalizing culture as part of what, in his analysis of postcolonial Indian discourse, Partha Chatterjee calls a “statist utopia” that engages in planned cultural development via a network of new institutions and their tools that would embody the state’s vision of modernity (Chatterjee 1986, 160; see also Chatterjee 1994). Many of these key institutions had emerged during Sukarno’s presidency from 1945 to 1965/6, such as the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture and Sport, as well as the art academies in Bandung and Yogyakarta¹² In all these cases the State as well as the major political parties acted as a main patron to the arts. In many aspects, art was conceived as an educational tool designed to produce new visual representations capable of instilling a sense of national unity, as well as to disseminate a certain official version of modern art and aesthetic expectations among

¹² For a mapping of the national and regional arts’ infrastructure and culture institutions in Indonesia, see Claire Holt’s *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967). She also provides an excellent discussion of the uses to which art was put in service of the State as the nation’s main patron at that time.

what was still a predominately rural population. In addition, art and cultural institutions, as Claire Holt (1967) has demonstrated, were tied to the ideological positions of the various political parties and factions during the turbulent years of the so-called “Old Order” (see also, Spanjaard 1990). Artists were increasingly expected to choose sides within this overdetermined arena.

A national Biennale, as a centralized index of national artistic production, was enabled by the kind of political stability that was enforced on the country during the rule of General Suharto that introduced itself as the “New Order” (1966/7-1998). Largely oriented towards a pro-Western capitalist model of development, the New Order years were accompanied by long-term economic growth (until the economic crisis in 1997) and the emergence of new Middle Classes. For the art world, this constituted to an unprecedented level an increasingly shifting balance of power between purchasers and artists. Right from the beginning of the New Order, the nation’s capital of Jakarta saw a shift from ‘revolutionary’ to ‘national’ artistic production with a strong agency of state institutions. In other words, again borrowing from Kapur (2000), institutions such as the national Biennale were not possible until “the national movement, as it ‘demobilizes’ itself, hands over the task of cultural transformation to the state, enjoining artists to cooperate with its new institutional structure” (207).

Locations of ‘Indonesian’ Art

The institution of the Jakarta Biennale began as the *Pameran Besar Seni Lukis Indonesia* (Grand Exhibition of Indonesian Paintings) in 1972, and officially became a ‘national’ Biennale in 1974. It was not until the fifth such exhibition in 1982 that the term ‘Biennale’ itself was used to designate it as such (Susanto 2001). The Biennale, like other national cultural institutions such as the art academies, was to serve national

interests, in this case the development and promotion of something called ‘Indonesian art’ (*seni rupa Indonesia*). However, in each case, the standard, breadth and geographic scope of what was considered ‘Indonesian’ was limited from the outset and changed little with each Biennale. For example, geographically what signified as national or Indonesian art in the Jakarta Biennale early on was somewhat limited as well – typically to those cities on Java and Bali with art academies. Until the late 1990s, the majority of the artists whose works were included in the Biennale lived and worked in the art centers of Bandung, Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Surabaya, on the island of Java, or in Ubud and Denpasar in Bali. In addition to the narrow geographic boundaries of ‘Indonesian art’, the rosters of Biennale participants are similarly limited. When comparing the participant lists of the different exhibitions, a perhaps unsurprising pattern emerges: the same, small group of senior, male painters becomes a perennial core for several successive Biennales, with newcomers coming and going; some becoming part of the core, others never to be heard from again. There is no evidence that women artists have been regular members of this semi-permanent group.

In response to protests by younger artists against the 1974 *Pameran Besar* for its jury of senior artists awarding ‘best painting’ to fellow senior artists whose styles had not changed in several years (see Chapter Four), another Biennale was implemented the following year. The *Pameran Seniman Muda Indonesia* (Young Indonesian Artists’ Exhibition), first organized in 1975, became a bi-annual tradition that allowed for a certain degree of experimentation and two-dimensional mixed media. It existed parallel to the national Biennale that continued to highlight painting in officially accepted styles (see below). On the one hand, the Young Artists’ Exhibition was a counter-measure against the potentially disruptive voices of protest among younger artists. On the other hand, it was also a means of creating and maintaining a hierarchy at the institutional level of the types of works deemed worthy

of representing the nation, as well as at the social level in that only artists over the age of thirty-six were allowed to exhibit in the *Pameran Besar/Biennale* (Susanto 2001).

Taman Ismail Marzuki Cultural Center (TIM)

Important to the historical context of the *Pameran Besar*, and particularly in placing it ideologically, is the role played by the *Pusat Kesenian Jakarta, Taman Ismail Marzuki* (The Jakarta Center of Art, at the Taman Ismail Marzuki Cultural Center; hereafter, TIM)¹³ that hosted the Biennale, and the government-approved council responsible for its organization and aesthetic guidelines.

TIM was inaugurated on 10 November 1968, as a central forum for a diverse range of artistic activities; a space in which traditional, modern, national, regional, and international discourses and traditions were showcased. Reportedly, it was the brainchild of the then governor of Jakarta, (retired General) Ali Sadikin, who was aided in its implementation by artists, writers and intellectuals, many of whom had been *Angkatan 66* (Generation of '66) activists (Akhmad 1989; Budiman 1976; Mohamad and Kats 1969; Zakir 1989). Discussed in more detail in Chapters Two and Three, suffice it here that *Angkatan 66* consisted of a group of university students and intellectuals whose continuous demonstrations were instrumental in bringing down President Sukarno's regime in 1966, after the Communist party had been banned and several months of blood letting had subsided.¹⁴ Ideologically, they consisted of a

¹³ TIM sits on the site of the former Cikini Zoo, part of the former residence of the 19th century Javanese nobleman and salon painter, Raden Saleh Syarif Bustaman. TIM originally consisted of a cinema, planetarium, three large art galleries, two amphitheatres and the HB Jassin Archive. For an English-language history and analysis of TIM and its cold war counterpart in printed media, *Horison*, see David Hill, "The Two Leading Institutions: Taman Ismail Marzuki and Horison," in *Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia*, ed. Virginia Matheson Hooker (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1995). For a general, Indonesian-language, chronological history of TIM, see Abrar Yusra, *25 Tahun TIM* (Jakarta: Taman Ismail Marzuki, Pusat Seni, 1994). See also Ajip Rosidi, Ed Zulverdi, and Djaulham Hutasoit, *TIM: Taman Ismail Marzuki*, 1. ed. (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 1974).

¹⁴ For different perspectives on this period of political turmoil in Indonesia, see B.O.G. Anderson and Ruth McVey, *A Preliminary Analysis of the October 1 1965 Coup in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Modern Indonesia

mixture of anti-communist, anti-totalitarian, moderate, secular, socialist-democrat, liberal positions, demanding non-partisanship for the arts and intellectual production. They espoused a concept of art as separate from the political sphere, and art supposedly free from political interference. TIM was to be one of the first experiments in the direction of an ‘autonomous’ national arts institution under the New Order government (Hill 1995; Mohamad 1977).

The center was presented as a pinnacle of *kebebasan kesenian* (artistic freedom and autonomy) with the express mandate that after over a decade of “subordinating creative freedoms to political necessity,” art was to “return’ to its ‘aesthetic function’”. As Sadikin stated in his opening address for TIM’s inauguration, “art is for art; discard the old ways when art was used for political interests” (quoted in Dahlan 1979).¹⁵ Sadikin’s pronouncement reflects the sea change in the relationship between the aesthetic and political spheres. In this regard, so-called *kebebasan* was not extended to everyone. Anyone considered ideologically tainted would be barred from exhibiting at TIM, and particularly from its Jakarta Biennale and other prestigious exhibitions (Wright 1990 and 1991). On one level, then, the national Biennale can be seen as an example of anti-communist vigilance masquerading as artistic autonomy from the political machinations of State or otherwise.

The arts center at TIM was set up under a supposedly transparent governing body designed to ensure art’s ‘freedom’ from possible government interference and other interests (e.g. political, religious, and ethnic). It is overseen by the *Dewan*

Project, Cornell University, 1971); R.B. Cribb, ed., *The Indonesian Killings of 1965-1966: Studies from Java and Bali* (Clayton, Victoria: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1990); Helen-Louise Hunter, *Sukarno and the Indonesian Coup: The Untold Story* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007); John Roosa, *Pretext to Murder: The September 30th Movement and Suharto's Coup d'État in Indonesia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

¹⁵ His statement was apparently first recorded in *Harian Kami* in 1968.

Kesenian Jakarta (Jakarta Arts Council) or DKJ, comprising twenty-five governmentally screened artists from all disciplines who are of “superior standing” in their respective fields.¹⁶ Most of its original members were former *Angkatan 66*. Members for these three year posts are elected by the *Akademi Jakarta* (The Academy of Jakarta) or AJ. The latter consists of ten prominent senior artists and major cultural figures whose lifetime seats must be approved by the Jakarta Governor’s office as well. While the AJ is the liaison to government, the DKJ is responsible for carrying out artistic policy in the metropolis and serves as a form of artistic and cultural director.¹⁷ Prior to the economic collapse of 1997, it was also responsible for organizing the Jakarta Biennale, for judging the works of art, and for handing out the awards for best works.

By the late 1980s, TIM had lost much of its relevance except as a bureaucratic body and the embodiment of government policy. There are several reasons for this decline.

1) After Sadikin’s term in office as Governor of Jakarta,¹⁸ governmental support for TIM gradually declined, and funding became uneven.

¹⁶ The DKJ was officially formed on 19 June, 1968. It’s first membership consisted of: Trisno Sumardjo (first head of DKJ), Arief Budiman, Sardono, Zaini, Binsar, Sitompul, Teguh Karya, Gunawan Mohamad, Taufiq Ismail, Pramana Padmadarmaja, Ajip Rosidi, Darsyaf Rachman, Misbach Yusa Biran, Wahyu Sihombing, S.Brata, Rudy Laban, Nyai Irawati Sudyarso, Adidharmo, Dra Setyawati Sulaeman, Oesman Effendi, D. Djajakusuma, Asrul Sani, Gayus Siagian, Syuman Djaya, and D.A.Peransi. Taken from "Kronik: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta dibentuk (Culture News: The Jakarta Arts Council is Formed)," *Budaya Djaya* I (1968). For the mandate and issues at hand in the formation of the Art Council, see Trisno Sumardjo’s inauguration speech in Trisno Sumardjo, "Pidato Pelantikan Dewan Kesenian Djakarta TGL 7 Djuni '68 [Speech at the Inauguration of the Jakarta Arts Council, 7 June, 1968]," *Budaya Djaya* III (1968).

¹⁷ For the official definitions of these bodies and their respective tasks, see Rosidi, Zulverdi, and Hutasoit, *TIM: Taman Ismail Marzuki*.

¹⁸ He served as Governor of Jakarta from 1966 to 1977.

2) Government intervention and scrutiny of the arts increased during the 1980s (Haruadi 1980; Hill 1995), making it more difficult for artists to gain the necessary permits to exhibit.¹⁹ Artists wanting to make a counter-argument to official policy or to make social commentary had little choice but to work outside the institutions and to initiate more grass-roots projects. It is during the late 1980s that an alternative arts infrastructure began to develop to accommodate such outcasts.

3) During the 1970s, there had been little arts infrastructure beyond the national and regional institutions of the academy and cultural centers. The private gallery sector rapidly picked up in the economically expansive 1980s, which experienced two painting booms driven by a new interest in art as an investment among the new middle class (See Yuliman 1987, 1989, 1990).²⁰ With the growth in the private sector, national institutions like TIM no longer had such a large role to play in setting either the standards or agenda. Instead, market demands began to determine the direction of

¹⁹ During the New Order, in order for an artist or theatre group to perform at TIM, for example, permits had to be obtained from four police offices: the national police headquarters, the intelligence and security department (Intelpam) and the police office for community service (Pembangmas). Permits are issued by the police only after the management of the arts center obtains four references from four other institutions: the culture agency (DinBud) and directorate of social and political affairs (Dirsospol), both of which fall under the city government, the tourism office, and the Strategic Intelligence Agency (BAIS) under the command of the department of defense and security. Art centers that wanted to stage performances by high-profile and previously banned artists such as W.S. Rendra, singer Rhoma Irama, and choreographer Guruh Soekarno Putra, had to obtain an additional special permit (cf. Arief Hidayat, "Artist Lament Police Banning of Cultural Performances," *Jakarta Post* 1990).

²⁰ Sanento Yuliman wrote several texts regarding the relationship between artistic experimentation and innovation and the developing art market. See his, "Ke Mana Semangat Muda? [Where has the Spirit of Youth Gone?]," *Kompas* 1987; "Pemiskinan Seni Lukis [The Impoverishment of Painting]," *Tempo*, 11 Nov. 1989; "Mendung Pengiring Boom," *Dialog Seni Rupa* 2, no. 1 (1990). See also Sanento Yuliman, "Dua Seni Rupa [Two Arts]," in *Dua Seni Rupa: Sepilihan Tulisan Sanento Yuliman [Two Arts: A Selection of Writings by Sanento Yuliman]*, ed. Asikin Hasan (Jakarta: Yayasan Kalam with The Ford Foundation, 2001/1984). This work was originally presented in the *National Literary Symposium* (23-24 Juli 1984) held at Dewan Kesenian, Surabaya, later reproduced in *DKJ Jurnal*, No. 12 Oct. 1984. While there were numerous painting exhibitions, according to many critics, there was little development, only repetition of those styles that were 'laku' or 'easily sellable'. See, for instance, Rudi Isbandi, "Mosaik Seni Rupa Indonesia Dewasa Ini [Mosaic of Art in Indonesia of this Decade]," *Jurnal Seni* (1984); Amir Sidharta, "Pasar dan Penciptaan Seni Rupa Indonesia," (Yogyakarta: Obtained from Cemeti Art Foundation, 1997).

art. The drawing power of the art market was also another factor in the decline of alternative and oppositional works in the 1980s.

4) By the mid-1990s, subsidies for artists and art projects had all but dried up and facilities such as TIM had become little more than spaces for rent.²¹ TIM was all the more seemingly irrelevant as artists no longer needed to rely on such institutions for exposure as the international art world was becoming a more lucrative patron, and the rise of alternative works reflects this new international interest. Whereas the local commercial market favored painting, international curators preferred alternative types of art, namely installation, video and performance from the former colonies.

Nonetheless, TIM remained the site of the national Biennale, with the DKJ as its organizer.

Official Aesthetic Expectations

Though TIM as an exhibition space was somewhat supportive of experimental works, the *Pameran Besar*/Biennale was from the beginning strictly a painting exhibition, one that favored “perennial” styles of abstract and decorative painting that came to prominence in post-66 Indonesia. In *Soul, Spirit and Mountain: Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Artists*, Astri Wright observes that:

Official Indonesian definitions of modern art to a large degree cluster around the old Javanese philosophical values, *halus* and *kasar*...; *halus* refers to things of refinement and spirit, while *kasar* refers to things of matter and coarseness. This division of the world into complementary opposites is an old one ... What can be observed in modern Indonesian art world institutions ... is a ranking of subject-matters and styles into a hierarchy which places *halus* art at the top and *kasar* at the bottom.” In such a hierarchy, *halus* would represent *seni rupa* or 'fine art', while

²¹ Personal interviews with various artists and art critics between January and March of 1997, and between September, 2001 and November, 2002.

the “not-*halus* is 'not-fine-art'; at best, it is 'crafts', often it is 'immature', at worst it is subversive (Wright 1994, 249).

Notwithstanding the fact that in Javanese aesthetics, certain objects relegated to ‘craft’ can also fall under the aesthetic value of *halus*, Wright’s insight into the official aesthetic expectations of modern Indonesian art world institutions is important for the present discussion in that it underscores an underlying key element to all national Biennales prior to the BJIX: the expectation that art must be beautiful in a particular sense, building on traditional Javanese notions. However, these local concepts of a timeless beauty lend themselves also to a Universalist interpretation, as Wright further explains:

This aesthetic aims to speak of timeless truths, in forms which, albeit new, still reverberate with the sanction of traditional art. Art, according to the universalist aestheticists, is like a mask through which worldly phenomena are not perceived directly but are translated into a formula representing a higher truth. The truth itself is unchanging; the dynamic dimension lies in the individual artist's search for a form with which to depict it. This is the aesthetic adhered to by traditionalists and neo-traditionalists in Indonesia (Wright 1994, 250).

Seen from this angle, it is perhaps not surprising that what had typically won favor with the organizing committee of the Biennale and had dominated most national exhibitions in general was art in the form of ‘beautiful’ painting, in abstract or decorative styles. Art that stepped out of the accepted codes of modern painting and sculpture, or that incorporated objects and devices external to the codes of *seni halus* or refined art, was generally regarded as *kasar*. This would include works that, for instance, “refer to the ‘contextualist’ formulation of aesthetics, which seeks to reveal the mutable face behind the mask, claiming that here lays the truth which is only falsified by theatrical props” (Wright 1991, 250). The question is how, within such a powerful context of traditions and expectations in late 1993, the BJIX could

emphasize on forms of contemporary art that were hitherto not admitted to that prestigious national art event.

Controversial Curator and Curatorial Platform

As head of the Jakarta Arts Council in 1993, Astari Rasjid explained in a post-opening press conference that the intention of the BJIX was to provide a national spotlight to the newer forms of artistic production in Indonesian contemporary art, particularly *seni instalasi*, while also maintaining the importance of prevailing categories of art, namely painting. In order to accommodate and highlight the new work, the traditional criterion of the exhibition had to be changed from strictly painting to the more general category of *seni rupa* (visual art).²² Proposing the category of *seni rupa* or visual art was also a means of highlighting the development of an Indonesian contemporary art in difference to modern art. Accordingly, such a provocative move also “demonstrated the desire to get away from the problem of artistic hierarchy, if not dominance, of certain types of artistic practice” (Zaelani 2001).²³ Although Indonesian contemporary art had already been garnering attention in the international arena in the previous few years, these types of works up to that point had few supporters in country; the majority of critics and curators were drawn to supporting works viable for the market in paintings characterized as *laku* (paintings that sell well) in *kecantikan* (prettiness, sweetish) styles.

Interestingly, in BJIX the role of the organizing committee was replaced by the singular figure of ‘curator,’ who both selected the artworks as well as wrote the main

²² Perhaps because of the controversy surrounding the BJIX, the succeeding Biennial was once again restricted to two-dimensional works. However, it did see a shift in aesthetic expectations and tolerance on the part of the curatorial committee regarding style and mixed-media, allowing for social commentary, and the use of “comic book” styles.

²³ “menunjukkan kehendak untuk keluar dari masalah hirarki – jika bukan dominasi – jenis praktek seni rupa tertentu.”

text. Rasjid, who was in her last few months as head of the DKJ, invited Jim Supangkat to act as Guest Chief Curator and gave him a fairly open rein in determining the direction of the BJIX.²⁴ Jim Abiyasa Supangkat Silaen was born in Ujung Pandang, South Sulawesi in 1948 to educated parents of Chinese descent. Supangkat's early encounter with a Western discourse of art and theory in the early 1970s happened through various art periodicals and journals from America sent to him by his grandmother who had immigrated with her husband, a Protestant minister, to the United States. Supangkat, therefore, had access to ideas and information not available to most Indonesians. This early exposure also greatly affected the types of art that he made as a sculpture student at the Fakultas Seni Rupa dan Disain at the Institut Teknologi Bandung (Faculty of Fine Art and Design at the Institute of Technology, Bandung, FSRD-ITB) between 1970 and 1975. Being one of the founding members of the art rebellion group *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru (GSRB, New Art Movement)* 1975-1979, his knowledge of a particularly American Neo-Avant-Garde was greatly influential. In a word, he was a key 'conduit' of current developments in contemporary art coming from America and Europe. In addition, Supangkat is largely responsible for writing the history of *GSRB* and thus for ensuring that it functions as the primary recorded form of *seni pemberontakan* (rebellion art) in the visual arts.

After having stopped making art in the early 1980s, Supangkat became one of Indonesia's main art critics and influential public speakers on contemporary art practices. In this period, most of the Indonesian-language history of modern and contemporary art and its discourse had been formulated and recorded not in well-

²⁴ Interview with Supangkat, Feb. 1997, Jakarta. The other members of the selection committee were Tuti Herati, Mara Karma, Gregorius Sidharta, and Sri Warsa Wahono.

funded catalogues or art journals or textbooks, but in newspapers and magazines, as well as in the discussions that accompany most exhibitions. By participating in all these genres, Supangkat not only gained deeper first-hand knowledge about art practices, but also became a potent voice in formulating the discourse of *seni kontemporer* in Indonesia.

Another important factor for Supangkat's rise to national and international importance is that during the 1980s (and into the mid-1990s) Indonesians had only limited access to international books and other publications of relevance for the arts. Most Indonesian artists and critics had less command of other languages, and translations were few in number. Supangkat's knowledge of both English and Dutch languages enabled him to gain an authoritative voice as cultural broker in the arts arena. Through his writings and public presentations, as well as his position as lecturer at the interdisciplinary *Institut Kesenian Jakarta* (IKJ, Institute of Art Jakarta),²⁵ he became one of the leading and most influential translators and disseminators of Western art history and theory to an Indonesian audience.

Supangkat's role as a primary cultural broker took a major turn in 1989 when he joined the ranks of the newly emerging cadre of post-colonial independent curators circulating in the arena of international mega-exhibitions, notably in Japan and Australia.²⁶ Supangkat was the first Indonesian art critic to also claim the title of self-

²⁵ Founded in 1970, IKJ campus is on the grounds of TIM.

²⁶ Since the late 1980s and especially during the early 1990s, international exhibitions opened up to non-Euro-American contemporary art. Interregional exhibitions in the Asia Pacific were also emerging. Japanese curators, museums and cultural foundations began exhibiting artworks by artists from Southeast Asia largely with the aim to wrest the prevailing discourse and criteria of an international contemporary art from the domain of "the West" as part a prolonged attempt to locate and define a particularly "Asian" sensibility and aesthetic. Given its geographic proximity and its awkward attempt to identify itself culturally with the region of Southeast Asia, Australian curators and cultural foundations also embarked on an expanded engagement in cultural diplomacy to construct an alternative center of contemporary art for the regions of Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

styled independent curator. He became, as Sue Ingham has pointed out: “the most prominent Indonesian curator from Indonesia working with contemporary art in the international forum and a major gatekeeper. He effectively became the public face of Indonesian contemporary art in the 1990s” (Ingham 2007, 178). To demonstrate just how effective, we need only select a series of international and national contemporary art exhibitions that took place in close succession for which he curated/consulted between 1992 and late 1994. For example, he was consultant to the Indonesian selection for the *New Art from Southeast Asia 1992* organized by the Fukuoka Museum. As consultant to the first *Asia Pacific Triennial* (APT) in Brisbane (17 Sept. – 5 Dec. 1993), Supangkat again selected Dono and Dadang represented by different installation works, as well as paintings by Dede Eri Supria and installation works by Nyoman Erawan and FX Harsono. The BJIX opened on the heels of the APT’s closure and exhibited the same artists and some of the same pieces.²⁷ Supangkat was then invited to co-curate with Fadjar Sidik and Sudarmadji, Institut Seni Indonesia (ISI, Institute of Art) faculty members, the fourth Biennale of Art in Yogyakarta, which took place in Dec. 1994, one year after the BJIX. This Yogya Biennale was divided into three main sections and for the first time included three dimensional works, namely installations, as well as performances. From the above series of exhibitions in a three year span, it is clear that Supangkat played the role of major gate keeper at both the national and international levels, and was a primary champion of contemporary art from Indonesia in both arenas.

It was mainly through his brief texts in catalogues and English-language art magazines, as well as his selection of the same few artists that something of a ‘canon’

²⁷ Other artists from Indonesia selected for the APT were senior painters A.D. Pirous, Srihadi Soedarsono, Sudjana Kerton, and surrealist Ivan Sagito. The first three painters were selected for the APT as representatives of Indonesian modernist art. They were not included in the BJIX, but Ivan Sagito was.

of Indonesian contemporary art was able to be constructed for an international art audience. Yet, in as much as Supangkat had been building an image of Indonesian contemporary art for the international community, that same arena was also influencing his selection of certain kinds of works, namely installations, video, and performance art for the BJIX and other exhibitions, as well as the way he attempted to theoretically frame them (Supangkat 1993a, 13-14).

The curator's apparent choice of binding theme for the many installation and performance works as a kind of *seni postmodern* for the BJIX sparked a heated debate about the selection process and the influence of Western theoretical concepts. In general, it was widely perceived that, via the curatorial practice of the local cultural broker between the Indonesian and the international community, the West still determined the standards of *seni kontemporer* in Indonesia. In their criticism of the BJIX and its curatorial platform, participating artists such as Semsar (see Introduction) and FX Harsono, for instance, felt that the theoretical frames of postmodernism determined not only the curator's selection process but also served as the very theme of the BJIX. The international framing was also evidenced by the fact that many of the same works that had been exhibited in international and interregional exhibitions in Australia and Japan in the previous two years were restaged at the BJIX, some of which for the first time in Indonesia.

A related criticism of the exhibition and the curatorial selection process suggested that Supangkat's alleged desire to push an international agenda had led him to manipulate the Indonesian context, particularly in requesting new works in modes that specifically fell under his classification of postmodern art.²⁸ One of the main local

²⁸ Personal communication with artists in Feb., 1997 and between Sept., 2001 and Nov., 2002 in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung.

sources for the curator's selection of unconventional works was the art academy. Hence, it is not surprising that new ITB graduates such as Andar Manik and Isa Perkasa (see Chapter Seven) were selected for the BJIX. In some cases, installation works were requested from artists who had up to that point made only passing nods in this direction and instead had reputations as painters.²⁹ This included artists, such as Krisna Murti and Nindityo Adipurnomo, who used the BJIX as a forum to experiment with what for them was a new mode of expression, whose works for the exhibition are discussed below.

The debate over the BJIX continued after these initial reactions and developed into a critical discussion about the curator's use of postmodernism in general to frame and to define works of *seni kontemporer* until the debate ended abruptly after approximately six weeks.³⁰ Since then, the association of Indonesian contemporary art with postmodernism has not been an active topic in the Indonesian art world. Nonetheless, the BJIX – the exhibited works, curatorial platform and essay, as well as the debate – left an indelible mark on the discourse of contemporary art in Indonesia. Not only did it reinvigorate an ongoing debate over the meaning of *seni rupa kontemporer* in difference to *seni rupa modern*, it also revealed the ambivalent relationship the art world(s) and its various players had to the Western discourse in defining contemporary art in Indonesia. The aspect of the international discourse that caused the most consternation at this particular juncture in the Indonesian artworld

²⁹ Personal communication with participants of the BJIX, Jan. – Aug. 2002, Jakarta and Bandung. Equally problematic is Supangkat's selection of artists whose careers were made by their participation in the New Art Movement and whose practice of art had changed little from their initial explorations in the 1970s, which by 1993 had become their stock and trade. Such is the case with photorealist painter Dede Eri Supria. The latter pioneered photorealist painting in Indonesia during the late 1970s, and has continued his style of realism for the last three decades.

³⁰ Typically, it is the section editor of a newspaper that puts an end to a debate in the press. The criteria for ending a published debate is if the discussion reaps no new ground or if it becomes too personal in its criticism.

was not the concept, the medium, or the term *seni instalasi*, but rather the curator's bringing recent developments and *seni rupa kontemporer* under the force and weight of the discourse of postmodernism. For this reason, I critically trace the curatorial essay and Supangkat's engagement with the international discourse on postmodernism in Chapter Two.

CHAPTER TWO

READING A READING OF THE AVANT-GARDE AND POSTMODERNISM

The present chapter deals with issues of installation, video and performance art, as well as the debate and discourse surrounding the meaning and temporal and spatial significance of contemporary art, as they are specifically articulated and framed in Supangkat's curatorial essay "Seni Rupa Era '80-an: Pengantar untuk Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta IX, 1993" (The Art of the 80s: Introduction to the Art Biennale of Jakarta IX), hereafter *Pengantar*. The significance of the essay lies less with its historical contents than with the way these are theoretically framed and the debate that this sparked. In particular, it functioned as a catalyst to further advance the ongoing and contentious discussion regarding the categorical and theoretical meaning of *seni rupa kontemporer* (contemporary visual art). The deployment of the term *seni rupa kontemporer* since the early 1970s had been with a sense of ambivalence and ambiguity as to what it meant. The various positions that debated the term and its significance highlights the tension between one's sense of sovereignty and yet necessary reliance on the Western discourse of contemporary art. This relationship and tension are integral to any understanding of *seni rupa kontemporer*. It is in the context of renewed interest in defining and contextualizing contemporary art in Indonesia that the *Pengantar* takes on its particular significance.

Supangkat's *Pengantar* is not about the works of art in the BJIX, but rather serves as a space within which he attempts to rethink the category *seni rupa kontemporer*, particularly the form that it takes and its basic imperative of socio-political works, by constructing a distinct and verifiable difference between *seni pemberontakan* (rebellion art) of the 1970s and the alternative or 'unofficial' art of

seni era 80-an or 80's era art. In distinguishing between the two 'periods', Supangkat reconceptualizes a fairly standard image of *seni pemberontakan* through his reading of a radical mode of Western avant-garde, and deploys the cachet and certain concepts of artistic postmodernism within which to theorize the unconventional, critical art of the 1980s and beyond. Reflecting back on the BJIX and his essay, in interview, Supangkat later suggested that he assumed that the discussion of postmodernism that was being hotly debated at the time could provide an opportunity for artists participating in the world of contemporary art – and whose works were exhibited in the BJIX– to clarify their thinking and understanding about contemporary art in Indonesia (see also, Supangkat 1996).

It was this assumption and presumption on Supangkat's part more than anything that met with the most critical responses from his peers and certain artists who participated in the BJIX. Many had assumed that he took recourse in theoretical postmodernism to legitimate more than inspire alternative art practices. As mentioned in the Introduction, Semsar Siahaan rejected outright both the label of postmodern and the term installation to categorize his work, wrapping his work, as it were, with an anti-postmodernism-gravity shield.

Supangkat's version of postmodernism and how he mobilizes it to situate *seni rupa 80-an* and the art in the BJIX cannot be understood without first attending to his account of an Indonesian avant-garde and this in relation to his understanding of the Western tradition of the avant-garde within modernism. These two interrelated notions ultimately inform his conception of postmodern art. My reading of his reading of these concepts begins with a summary of what can be said to be his standard rendition of a particular 'Indonesian art history'. The second part of this chapter traces the above mentioned two narrative streams of his argument in greater detail. The third part of this chapter deals with the 'phases' of his engagement with different constructions and

versions of postmodernism, which finally then will lead him to reject the project altogether.

Rather than being concerned over the truth claims of his interpretation and conclusions, more interesting and relevant for my project is to analyze one of the ways in which alternative, unconventional works of *seni rupa kontemporer* have been discussed and framed, and how a discourse came to form around them. It is of course understood that my reading of Supangkat's essay is necessarily embedded within and across two culturally specific yet overlapping and interrelated discourses. Proficiency in both the Indonesian and Western discourses is possible only by assuming and abandoning certain associations within and between them (Eco 2001).

Standard Narratives

Pengantar is geared toward an Indonesian or Indonesian-reading audience.¹ More specifically, the text is intended to reiterate commonly held 'facts' and to educate an Indonesian audience in Western theory. Much of *Pengantar* is a repetition of Supangkat's standard account of Western modernism, Indonesian *seni rupa modern* (modern art) and the emergence of *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* (The New Art Movement, *GSRB*) that can be found across most of his writings during the 1990s.² In

¹ This marks a fundamental difference between this Biennial and those previous and thereafter. Usually, the catalogue text is a general one written by the 'curatorial team' and is published in both Indonesian and English. Theory does not play a role in these essays. Instead, the bulk of the text explains the recent trends, shortcomings of development, and hopes for further international integration as well as local advancements in typically painting.

² See for instance his "A Brief History of Indonesian Modern Art," in *Tradition and Change, Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Caroline Turner (Queensland, AU: University of Queensland Press, 1993); Jim Supangkat, "A Different Modern Art," "Introduction to Indonesian Contemporary Art," (Jakarta: Jakarta International Fine Art Exhibition, Shangri-La Hotel, 1994); "Two Decades of Indonesian Art," *Art and Asia Pacific* 1, no. 3 (1994); "Knowing and Understanding the Differences," in *Orientation* (Jakarta and Leiden: The Gate Foundation, the Cemeti Art Foundation, and the Stedelijk Museum, 1995); "What, When, Where" (paper presented at the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Brisbane, Australia, 1996); *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond* (Jakarta: Yayasan Seni Rupa Indonesia, 1997).

what follows are the main points he makes in his standard account of Indonesian art history as expressed in *Pengantar*.

Since at least the late 1930s (the period of early anti-colonial, nationalist painting), *seni rupa modern* had always maintained a connection to society through representations of everyday life. During this period, the issue of ‘East and West’ was not a primary concern. This changed with the attempted de-politicization of art after the purge of the PKI (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, Indonesian Communist Party) that began in 1965. With this, there was a “shift away from social commentary and local concerns toward an uncertain adaptation of internationalism” (read Western Modernism) (21). After which, “art academies, as the official formal institutions, became the centers of artistic activity. An official aesthetic emerged out of these institutions, gaining its legitimation from the government.” It was against this institutionalization of art, as well as its de-politicization and uncertain use of ‘isms’ that *seni pemberontakan* (art rebellion/s) emerged.

Further, what is known as *seni pemberontakan* or art of rebellion began with the so-called *Gerakan Desember Hitam* (Black December Movement) on the occasion of the 1974 Grand Painting Exhibition. This group protested against the awarding of ‘best painting’ to senior artists whose works were in the prevailing decorative and lyrical styles. It was also a voicing of grievances against the lack of socio-political themes in post-65 art. The protest was met with hostility by the jury of senior artists. The ASRI (*Akademi Seni Rupa Indonesia*, Art Academy of Indonesia, in Yogyakarta) students involved in the protest then joined other like-minded ITB students in Bandung (*Fakultas Seni Rupa dan Desain, Institut Teknologi Bandung*, or the Faculty of Fine Art and Design at the Institute of Technology Bandung) to form *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru*. Their first exhibition in 1975 sparked a ‘polemic’ between senior painter and art critic Kusnadi and (younger art critic, curator and ASRI graduate) Sudarmadji.

Kusnadi claimed that the New Art was neither serious nor art. Sudarmadji argued that such criticism was based on outdated modernist assumptions. Members of the group staged other exhibitions and events outside of the main group.

At this point in his narrative, Supangkat lists events and exhibitions without mention of but a few artists' names. Similarly, although various materials and mediums or types of works are listed, i.e., collage, happenings, mixed media, and photorealist painting, no works are discussed. In other words, none of these details and their immediate context are as important as what *GSRB* and the idea of *seni rupa baru* or new art supposedly stood for: an ideological affiliation with socially engaged pre-65 art, a rejection of post-65 adaptations of Western 'isms', and a decisive redefinition of art through the inclusion of so-called non-art materials and non-fine-art (vernacular) traditions. With little attention paid to the larger context in which it developed, *seni pemberontakan*, according to Supangkat's narrative, is solely in the guise of *GSRB*; its impulses and imperatives supposedly evaporating when the group disbanded in 1979.

The above account remains generally consistent and relatively unchanged across his writings. The same is the case regarding his conception of a homogeneous and hegemonic Western Modernism and the avant-garde, which is discussed below.

Before moving onto Supangkat's conception and version of Western Modernism, I want to turn to certain patterns in the way in which he constructs a historical narrative that are important at this juncture to unravel, if only in brief. By this, I mean his summary mode of writing, which in Indonesian is called *secara singkat*, a form of writing that is not uncommon to his and previous generations of art writers. This mode of writing is useful if it is kept in mind that much of the art history and the discourse of art in Indonesia have been formulated through the national and regional newspapers, and public presentations. As such, a more elaborated, lengthy argument would be difficult to achieve. Writing *secara singkat* or summary writing as

a major mode of writing the history of art condenses it into a relatively set constellation of chronological lists of events, artist's names and groups, establishing relational networks of a decontextualized past. Although such narratives might be useful for their specific venues, they are not especially conducive to a more complex critical analysis.

In addition, although surveys on the histories of Indonesian and Western art are taught in the art academies, there are no university departments for the study and methodology of art history. Within this context, as I suggested in the previous chapter, Supangkat has been one of the most influential former artists to write about Indonesian contemporary art for both Indonesian- and English-reading audiences.

Supangkat's mode of writing art history is one familiar to most Indonesians through the teaching of general history in the national education system. It largely consists of what Niels Mulder (2000) and Kartodirdjo (2001) have separately described as discontinuous and decontextualized chronological lists of people, dates, places and events, which were suited to the official New Order version of history.

Furthermore, Henk Maier and Amin Sweeney have suggested that such modes of writing history in the Malay speaking world contain residual modes of an oral culture. In *We are Playing Relatives* (2004), Maier observes that in Malay literary traditions, both in Malaysia and Indonesia, the same story can be told by the retelling of the 'beads' along an episodic chain. Each 'bead' can be read in succession or alone as self-contained (see also, Keeler 1987). What is important in the retelling of the 'beads' is that the content stays the same; it is the *how* it is retold or transmitted that often counts more than the information inscribed onto the 'bead'. Amin Sweeney, in *A Full Hearing: Orality and Literacy in the Malay World* (1987), suggests that what distinguishes modes of history is the conception of it and how it works as a social construct. The necessary processes of forgetting and condensing inherent in all forms

of history serve ideological purposes and cultural psychological needs beyond the actual event itself. However, in traditions of orality, neither individual histories nor detail is important to such recitations. Orality makes extensive use of episodic narrative that joins a number of ‘floating topoi’, or ‘beads’, which require no further additions in terms of their content. They also do not invite critical rethinking regarding their relational position to other events along the episodic chain. Oral-based histories are not intent on analyzing events but instead on limiting content as to what is acceptable to the community as a whole; thus also reaffirming community as well as the common ground shared between audience and “teller” of history (6).

Although Sweeney and Maier mainly concern themselves with pre-modern and colonial-era literature of the Malay-speaking world, their ideas of the episodic chain and style or manner of expression and perception can be extended to my purpose in situating Supangkat’s mode of repeating the same ‘beads’ as a brief account of history. In particular, the above discussion is meant to suggest that the use of formulaic patterns is not an individual trait of Supangkat, whose methodology is otherwise largely self-taught, but rather can be seen also as part of a wider cultural practice in narrating or constructing history. While across both Supangkat’s English- and Indonesian-language texts, the same facts, names, and dates, or ‘beads’ of history, are retold, the narrative does not change, nor is it added to, as much as its contents are renamed each time through the authoritative aegis that he gives to a similarly decontextualized collection of theoretical terms, Supangkat’s series or constellation of generalized historical content and/or theoretical frames tell us much about how he perceives specific differences between the Indonesian context and that of the Western discourse, and these in-turn then set the stage for the ways in which he reads, generalizes, and universalizes postmodernism to temporarily capture the vast diversity

of artistic practices and individuated approaches to art in post-rebellion *seni rupa kontemporer*.

Along with the above narrative of Indonesian art history, across many of his Indonesian-language writings of the 1990s, Supangkat recounts his rendition of the Western tradition of the avant-garde. He sets this against what he positions as a morally superior Indonesian *seni rupa modern*. As such, he typically renders the history of Western avant-garde as a homogeneous entity, essentialized as an art-for-art's-sake proposition.³ An example of this is taken from his “Seni Rupa Kontemporer: Sebuah Risiko” (Contemporary Art: A Risk, 1993e) written shortly before *Pengantar*:

In modern art, modernism showed itself mainly through principles of the avant-garde characterized by the prizing of individual freedom and a suspicion of communal norms, which are thought to be the cause of establishment (*kemapanan*) and a hindrance to progress... Avant-garde art always deviates from the norm. Even the criterion of the new becomes a convention, thus reflecting modern society's awareness of just how important individual freedom is for progress.

This tendency of the avant-garde is reflected throughout the history of modern art (the main stream). ‘Art is no longer in service to anyone,’ said Vasily (sic) Kandinsky at the beginning of the development of modern art. From this it is clear that art is an autonomous activity – ‘art for art’ (47-48).⁴

³ His explanation of the Avant-Garde stream in modernism is usually informed by the American art critic, Hilton Kramer, particularly his book *The Age of the Avant-Garde: and Art Chronicle of 1956-1972* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1973). Kramer perceived of one stream of avant-garde in modernism and argues that the avant-garde ended with its absorption into the culture industry, thus reducing its impulses to mere avant-gardism.

⁴ “Dalam seni rupa modern, modernisme menampakkan diri terutama melalui prinsip avant-garde yang menandakan pemujaan pada kebebasan individu dan kecurigaan pada standar-standar komunal yang dianggap penyebab kemapanan dan penghambat kemajuan... Seni rupa avant-garde, yang selalu menyebel dari ukuran-ukuran umum, bahkan ukuran-ukuran baru yang menjadi umum, mencerminkan kesadaran masyarakat modern pada betapa pentingnya kebebasan individual bagi kemajuan.

Seluruh perkembangan sejarah seni rupa modern (di arus utama) mencerminkan kecenderungan avant-garde itu. ‘Seni rupa tidak lagi untuk melayani siapa-siapa,’ kata Vasily Kandinsky di masa awal perkembangan seni rupa modern. Dan di sini ditegaskan, seni rupa adalah aktivitas yang otonom – ‘seni untuk seni.’ Maka perubahan-perubahan aliran seni rupa yang terjadi memperlihatkan semangat eksplorasi yang terus menerus meinggalkan ukuran-ukuran yang akhirnya selalu menjadi umum.”

The quoted passage provides a general working definition of a Western avant-garde that not only is recounted in most of Supangkat's Indonesian-language writings, but also resonates with a general understanding of the avant-garde among various Indonesian art circles. According to such an image, the avant-garde might be transgressive but seems never to have been endowed with political or social potential in regards to activism or promises of social progress.

Supangkat goes on to imply that the Western avant-garde artist is morally and ethically suspect as an anti-social individualist who fails to uphold the values and norms of the majority. His conception of an avant-garde rejection of the tastes and standards of society arguably can be seen through the lens of his idea of an Indonesian society, which appears fairly collective, wherein artistic subjectivity is relational rather than individuated. Following Supangkat's rendition, it can be argued that it is not the dominant tastes of bourgeois society that the avant-garde artist is said to reject, but rather those of society writ large and without specific class interests. It might be wondered whether such an understanding of 'society' is inspired by an undifferentiated concept of the *rakyat* (common people). The alleged 'corrupt' nature of Western avant-garde is situated in direct opposition to the assumption that *seni rupa modern* always had a direct link to and function in 'society' (*masyarakat*) prior to the major shift in the political landscape in 1965.⁵ In other words, according to Supangkat, in Indonesian modern art there had not been the same level of fixation on individual

⁵ It seems that Supangkat brackets such art as an early nationalist, revolutionary period of modern art in Indonesia (early 1940s and into the 1950s). His discussion would also encompass only a certain number of nationalist artists whose work might be explained in this way. If extended to the whole of pre-1965 Indonesian modern art, his suggestion becomes problematic in its breadth and generalization. Claire Holt's chapter "The Great Debate" in *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), as well as many articles from the journals *Seni* (1955) and *Budajaja Djaja* (particularly between 1954 and 1957) provide a variety of perspectives regarding the artist's ambivalent relationship to modern art and the question of social engagement in relation to art's social function.

powers to create as in Western modernism and its tradition of avant-garde that supposedly suppresses the social.

Categories of the Avant-Garde and Reconceptualizing Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru

In *Pengantar*, Supangkat seems poised to disrupt his previous notion of the avant-garde articulated above by taking recourse in Charles Jencks' brief "The Post-avant-garde" (1987, 1992).⁶ In this article, Jencks divides the avant-garde into different ideological imperatives: the heroic, purist, radical and post and summarizes their intentions and inherent short-comings as seen from the side of an anti-modernism perspective.⁷ Jencks reads the tradition of the avant-garde and its end mainly through the lens of architectural history of modernism. Unlike Hilton Kramer (from whom Supangkat borrows above), whose theory of the Avant-Garde laments the loss of an art-for-art's sake core of the avant-garde tradition, Jencks is explicitly hostile to the Avant-Garde in all but its hopeful Saint-Simonian beginnings in the early 19th century.⁸ This provides the foundations for a Heroic avant-garde, which initially was a positive as well as progressive program based on the values of humanism. By the early 20th century it had become a putative force, devoid of humanity and purged of sensuous life. He further explains that the avant-garde in art splits off from its social and political pretexts to focus on transforming the visual code. Jencks quickly

⁶ The quotes taken are from the 1992 version in *The Post-Modern Reader*, ed. Charles Jencks (London and New York: Academy Editions and St. Martin's Press, 1992). "The Post-Avant-Garde" is a highly condensed version of his *What is Postmodernism?* (London: 1986).

⁷ Unwittingly, Supangkat combines an anti-postmodern, pro-modernism approach (Kramer) with one that is anti-modernism, pro-postmodern (Jencks) regarding the history and fate of the avant-garde. Both Kramer and Jencks agree that Modernism is the natural style of the bourgeoisie.

⁸ Jencks argues that the avant-garde shifted from an earlier version of an activist view of art to one of depoliticized aestheticism. In this regard, he emphasizes the ideological moorings underlying Saint Simone's project: "The common drive and general idea" of this Heroic form of the avant-garde, "was of course social progress; the march towards socialism which gave the avant-garde its direction and purpose. It also gave the artist and architect an important function as the harbingers of change *avant* the mainstream of society" (216).

dismisses this Purist avant-garde as merely Modernism's drive toward its inevitable demise as "innovation for its own sake" (217).

Supangkat's position finds a sympathetic alliance with Jencks' own anti-Modernism. Yet, while Jencks offers, if only very briefly, a conception of the avant-garde as one of different streams within and against Modernism, Supangkat's reading of the avant-garde tradition remains relatively unchanged. Regarding the two modes, the heroic and the purist, he is not interested in their ideological differences or histories as much as in their ultimate demise and degradation into nothing more than isolated self-indulgence. He chooses to ignore Jencks' emphasis on the driving force of social progress that entailed the partnership between artists, scientists and industrialists. Instead, he concludes that behind the avant-garde was the "fantasy of capitalist industry" (Supangkat 1993a, 17). For Supangkat, this means the artist is (knowingly) a champion of capitalism, not of social progress. This, then, supports his earlier assumptions that the avant-garde is an anti-communal, anti-social, art of pure individualism, lacking in social value (18).

Supangkat's summary of the avant-garde in *Pengantar* again conflates the degrees of Western progressive and transgressive avant-garde in his concept of *avant-gardisme*, an art-for-art's-sake/innovation for its own sake; an entity that in its imported form in post-65 Indonesia resulted in a more than ambivalent artistic development. Such lack of clarity in terms of artistic identity among Indonesian artists and in the academies lead to the emergence of what he argues, borrowing from Jencks' fourth category of the avant-garde, a 'radical' stream of avant-garde in Indonesia as a response to this state of affairs.

As Supangkat paraphrases Jencks regarding European and later American modernism, the "challenges against modernism were not born of postmodern thought that surfaced in the 1960s, but were the result of a mechanism of challenges that

occurred through a series of waves of a radical avant-garde between 1920 and 1960” (21).⁹ Jencks’ somewhat a-historical discussion of a radical stream of the avant-garde in the 20th century suggests a shared impetus among movements such as Dadaism, Futurism, Constructivism, and Pop Art.¹⁰

Jencks’ definition of the radical avant-garde functions paradigmatically for Supangkat’s re-conceptualization of the *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* or *GSRB* and its role as *pemberontakan* or rebellion. Important to Supangkat’s project is the shared imperative among the radicals’ alleged breach of the boundaries between the art context and the life world (20-21). Key to Supangkat’s agenda is that the radical avant-garde was specifically posed against those modes of modernism that promote individualism and that remain tethered to ‘high culture.’ In incorporating the concrete objects from everyday life as materials in making art, the Indonesian art rebellions also redefined the parameters of art away from the category of ‘high art’. As such, in applying the label ‘radical avant-garde’ to the *GSRB*, Supangkat manages to situate it *outside* the rituals of expressive *seni rupa modern* and its post-65 ambivalent adoption of an international Modernism. Extending this line of argumentation even further, his use of the category of ‘radical avant-garde’ would also remove or at least redeem the *GSRB* from its paradoxical existence in national institutions. As I discuss at length in

⁹ “penentangan terhadap modernisme lahir bukan akibat pemikiran-pemikiran post-modernisme yang muncul pada decade 1960, tapi akibat mekanisme penentangan yang terjadi melalui rentetan *avant-garde* radikal dari 1920 sampai 1960.”

¹⁰ Jencks explains the radical avant-garde impetus as a critique of art-as-institution and a drive to bridge art and life. His discussion and understanding of the avant-garde is at base informed by Peter Bürger’s *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984). Bürger’s opposes what he perceives as avant-garde iconoclastic attacks on bourgeois institutions and the institution of art to modernism’s tendency to preserve tradition, especially the traditional notion of the autonomous art work. His model and theory of the avant-garde allowed for the differentiation and simultaneity of modernism and avant-garde, the latter functioning as the driving force of the former.

Chapter Four, *GSRB* had the support of a key national institution in Jakarta, as well as art academy faculty in Bandung.

Supangkat does not extend the above attributes of the radical avant-garde to any work of art emerging from *GSRB*. However, in order to better ground his rendition of a radical avant-garde in the Indonesian context, I want to briefly introduce certain of these works, including one by Supangkat himself, and set them in dialogue with his assumptions mapped above.

In most of his work exhibited as a core member of the *GSRB*, Supangkat did not escape the codes of sculpture in that his works remain self-sustainable, singular forms in space, replete with the convention of pedestal. Yet, he also parodies these conventions, and prevailing distinctions made between high and low traditions, materials, and forms in his iconic work *Ken Dedes* (1975) (Figure 2.1). Discussed in more depth in Chapter Four,¹¹ suffice here to suggest that in this work, Supangkat attempts to bring into question dominant notions of *halus* and *kasar* as well as presumptions of ‘fine’ and ‘popular’. He defames the representation of sublime tranquility and quietude of a legendary Queen with that of open sexuality combining presumptions of the classical, supposed refined and exalted, sensual language of 14th Century Javanese Hindu-Buddhist sculptural form with the supposed low aesthetic of pop art and simple line of the comic book.

¹¹ See Chapter 3 for my analysis of this piece regarding its suggested relationship between modernity and women in a rapidly changing society.

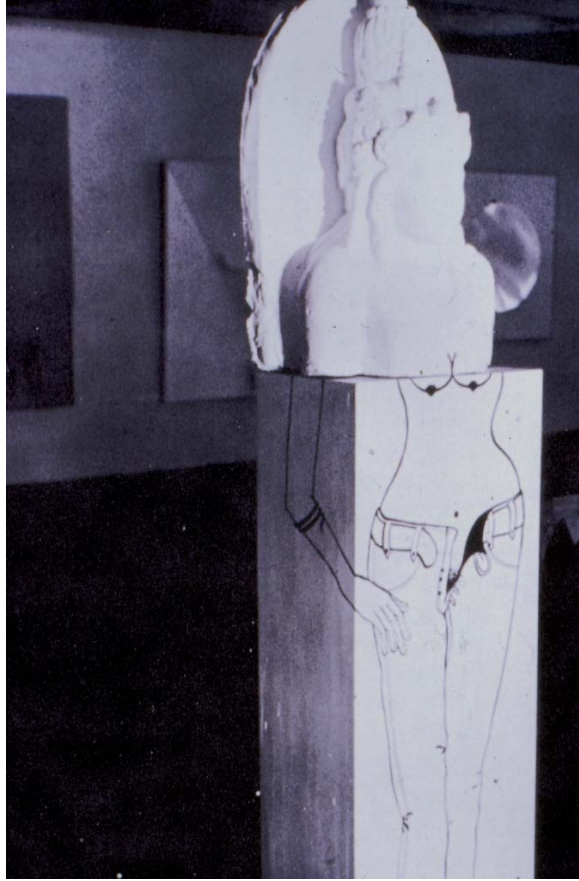


Figure 2.1 Jim Supangkat, *Ken Dedes*, 1975, mixed media (Courtesy of FX Harsono).

Similarly, in *Monumen Revolusi Diresmikan oleh Pak Bejo Tukang Becak* (Revolutionary Monument Inaugurated by Pak Bejo, *Becak* Driver) (1977), fellow *GSRB* founding member, Bonyong Munni Ardhie, blurs the boundaries between national monument and conventional sculpture. Here, the artist not only defies modern sculptural conventions. He also bluntly points to the contentious question of the construction and officialdom of national history and those who participate in its making. Other *GSRB* members, such as Dede Eri Supria, recuperated realism for painting as a form of social commentary (see Supria 1979). His realism was based on what he considered an anti-expressionist photo-realism in which he combined a series of different found images into one large-scale work that typically spoke of the negative impact of development and modernization on urban experience.

As the above suggests, some if not most of the *GSRB* works still maintained the basic codes of sculpture and painting. They also challenged such conventions, as well as the official aesthetic of lyricism and decorative motifs by including the everyday, the absurd, and the grotesqueries of lived reality as themes in art. Yet, in arguing such works were akin to a radical avant-garde according to Jencks' definition, while Jencks views the radical avant-garde as the eventual end of Modernism in that Pop Art dissolves the line between art and life on the level of mass production (Jencks 1992, 220),¹² Supangkat sees art's 'incorporation' to mean the possible re-incorporation of the social and political as themes in art and art's social function through its ingestion of the everyday object (Supangkat 1993a, 23). As will be shown in Chapter Four, one of the main problems facing the efficacy of the art rebellions was precisely the question of art's incorporation of the social and the everyday into the gallery as opposed to art being absorbed into the social and the everyday. Nonetheless, in *Pengantar*, Supangkat implies that by reincorporating the socio-political into art as its subject matter and popular culture as its material, *seni pemberontakan* in the guise of the *GSRB* was able to restore, if briefly, art's social function.

The above twofold process – trying to confound the codes of painting and sculpture, and those that bound conceptions of *halus* and *kasar*, as well as the reintroduction of social themes and class issues in art, both by incorporating the actual object from the 'everyday' – serve as Supangkat's main premises of a 'radical avant-garde' in Indonesian art. It signaled the shift from modern modes of art to something that no longer fit such assumptions and categories. According to Supangkat, "like all

¹² Jencks further explains that Pop art marks the end of avant-garde as it "[overcame] the final boundary, that is the dividing line between art and life." A distinction between the field of cultural production and its commodification no longer exists. Having adjusted itself to and appropriating the apparatus of mass culture, art is finally re-absorbed as mass culture.

avant-garde art, the art rebellion was short lived. It announced its death when the *GSRB* disbanded” four years after their debut in 1975 (16). In other words, according to Supangkat’s argument, there has been only one type of an avant-garde impulse in an Indonesian context; it surfaced only once, and in the guise of the ‘radical’ New Art group between 1975 and 1979.¹³

As the beginning and end of the avant-garde in Indonesia was in the form of the *GSRB*, Supangkat contends that the unconventional works of art that followed in the next decade, or what he calls *seni rupa era 80-an* or 80s era art, are post-*pemberontakan*, post-radical, and therefore, again borrowing from Jencks’, are post-avant-garde.

Before moving on to Supangkat’s reading of *seni rupa era 80-an* as post-avant-garde according to a particular Western position toward the postmodern, it is prudent at this juncture to first also attend to the stark line Supangkat draws between the two decades (1970s and 1980s). The above discussion underscores a particular mode of historicizing; something Supangkat criticizes Western art historical methods of perpetrating. Yet, his historicizing or more accurately periodization is one that, in my opinion, is partially rooted in the Indonesian concept of *angkatan*.

Angkatan as a Mode of Periodization

According to the *Kamus Indonesia Inggris/Indonesian-English Dictionary*, the term ‘*angkatan*’ literally means ‘generation’, ‘age group’ and ‘class’ (Echols and Shadily 1982). Conceptually, in terms of artistic and literary production, similar (but not identical) to a sort of historicism that would divide art history into a linear succession

¹³ As Herry Dim, among others, has observed, there has always been a stream in Indonesian modern art and literature that took from the avant-garde in Europe as part of a stand against traditionalism for the sake of progress or for the sake of something new. See Herry Dim, "Mencari Avant-Garde di Indonesia: sebuah catatan kecil untuk Sarah E. Murray [Searching for an Avant-Garde in Indonesia: A Short Note for Sarah E. Murray]," *Kolong Budaya* 1 (1997).

of periods and movements, *angkatan* connotes patterns of literary/artistic innovations that are closely associated with specific ideological positions of a particular age group or generation.¹⁴ The concept of *angkatan* marks qualitative shifts in the consciousness and constructions of modern artistic subjectivities. It also involves politically charged questions of inclusion and exclusion as to the actual contents (i.e. works and authors) of each *angkatan*, as well as the locus of authority over such decisions. This is particularly important regarding nationalist revolutionary conceptions of agency in relation to the writer's/artist's role in the nation building process. Poet, playwright and literary historian and critic, Afrizal Malna (1989), explains that in Indonesia the term *angkatan* carries connotations specific to the role they have played in national history. Mention of the term typically refers to group political action and is affiliated with *pemuda* (male youth).¹⁵ Even prior to the revolution (*revolusi*) (1945-1949), *pemuda* had been the agents of political change. To a certain extent, one *angkatan* displaces another in a similar vein to the avant-garde cycle of displacement and discontinuity.

¹⁴ The conceptual and categorical parameters of *angkatan* are also used in broader terms of political affiliations, as well as more specific in terms of cohorts, e.g., in educational settings or in the military. However, my discussion of *angkatan* refers specifically to its use primarily in the arts. Compare Keith Foulcher, "Perceptions of Modernity and the Sense of the Past: Indonesian poetry in the 1920's," *Indonesia* 23, no. April (1977); Keith Foulcher, "*Pujangga Baru*": *Literature and Nationalism in Indonesia 1933-42*, vol. 2 (Flinders University Asian Studies, 1980); H. B. Jassin, "Angkatan 45 [Generation of 45]," in *Kesusastraan Indonesia Modern dalam Kritik dan Seni [Indonesian Modern Literature in Criticism and Essay]* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1985); Henk Maier, "We are Playing Relatives (Introductory chapter)," in *We are Playing Relatives: a Survey of Malay Literature* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2004); Afrizal Malna, *Sesuatu Indonesia: Personifikasi Pembaca yang Tak Bersih [A Certain Indonesia: The Personification of the Unclean Reader]* (Yogyakarta: Bentang, 2000); A. Teeuw, *Modern Indonesian Literature*, First ed., vol. 10, *Koninklijk Instituut van Land-en Volkenkunde* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967); Martina Heinschke, *Angkatan 45. Literaturkonzeptionen im gesellschaftspolitischen Kontext. Zur Funktionsbestimmung von Literatur im postkolonialen Indonesien (Angkatan 45: Literary Concepts in Socio-Political Context. On Determining the Function of Literature in Postcolonial Indonesia)*, vol. 18, *Veröffentlichungen des Seminars für Indonesische und Südseesprachen der Universität Hamburg (Published Thesis)* (Berlin and Hamburg: Reimer, 1993); Ajip Rosidi, *Masalah Angkatan dan Periodisasi Sastra Indonesia [The Problem of Generation and Periodization in the History of Indonesian Literature]* (1970). For a concept of *angkatan* in visual art, see Claire Holt, "The Great Debate" (1967).

¹⁵ It should not be surprising that women do not typically have a place in such connotations of *Angkatan*. *Angkatan* exist as part of the public sphere and are often seen as articulations of aggression and transgression, symbolic and physical. These are not roles and positions historically open to women.

By the early 1960s visual art and literary circles had become dominated by a clash of ideologies between an increasingly dogmatic reading of cultural production within the Indonesian Communist party and those who advocated a nationalist, and not Communist, artistic development. The impasse came to an abrupt end with the failed coup of uncertain origins and the subsequent violent purge of the Left (1965-66). With the loss of the Left so too were aspects of a viable counter argument that had historically been associated with *angkatan*.

Those who initially called for the de-politicization of art as a separate sphere, on equal ground with the political sphere, came to be known as *Angkatan 66*. This *angkatan* represented not only a traumatic shift in national politics and consciousness. It also signaled the beginning of the “New Order” era inscribed by an anti-Communist vigilance and an overall ‘de-ideologization’ of the cultural sphere (Malna 2000, 475-76; see also Mohamad 1980). Hence, it is perhaps not surprising that the construction of literary and artistic *angkatan* declined after 1966 (Malna 1989). At first, *Angkatan 66* was seen to have ushered in a new sense of artistic *kebebasan* (freedom), a euphoric turn toward artistic experimentation, or what Supangkat, among others, refers to as *avant-gardisme* as a response to years of art forced into the service of political factions. After the initial euphoria had been exhausted, many artists and critics alike felt that the role of art and artist had been reduced to mirrors of the new patron class’s aesthetic tastes. This presented what by the mid-1970s would become something of a crisis of relevance and identity in art. If the *GSRB* that followed in reaction to this situation in the visual arts can be seen as marking a new *angkatan*, it is not one that displaced dominant “New Order” views of art and culture.

By the 1980s, as Malna observes, *angkatan* in its discernable group orientation had all but disappeared in terms of aesthetic programs and ideological positions save that of an opposition to the government. It can be argued that this *angkatan* of

opposition encompasses *seni rupa 80-an*. Yet even the efficacy of this position was incredibly diminished because of New Order attempts to stifle activism in or outside the arts. It was increasingly difficult to suggest a binding *semangat* or spirit among artists making contemporary art that would suggest a discernable *angkatan*. In addition to artistic activism being marginalized from the discourse at the national level, one problem facing the alternative, innovating artist of the 1980s was how to reconcile his or her concern over the social with the increasing drawing power of a booming art market.

Finally, to suggest a binding frame such as *angkatan* lost whatever relevance it may have had by the mid-1990s with Indonesia's rapidly increasing participation in the international arena of exhibitions, artist in residency programs, and transnational networks.

From the discussion above, it can be argued that the stark line Supangkat draws between the two decades of *seni rupa kontemporer*, between the art rebellions of the 1970s and the post-rebellion era of the 1980s, demonstrates the mode of historicizing inherent in concepts of *angkatan* a particularly modern Indonesian concept that includes processes of historical displacement.

Yet, he also binds his text too closely to the categories and historical trajectory articulated in his source texts (Jencks and Foster) that are about particular streams in the Western discourse. As the following analysis suggests, application of categorical terms proves untenable to the Indonesian context if said terms are not revised to suit that context. While certain discernable differences between the two decades arguably can be established, it is doubtful that they were as clear-cut, particularly in the artists' attempts to bridge the "gap between the art and life" worlds.

Reading the Postmodern

In the above, I introduced and analyzed some of Supangkat's standard narratives of Western and Indonesian modern art in general and the avant-garde in particular. I then discussed his re-conceptualizing of *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* through the frame of a 'radical avant-garde', which also rewrites, to a limited extent, his previous assumptions of the avant-garde. In *Pengantar*, this set the stage for his main agenda, which was to theorize and situate the alternative, unconventional works of *seni rupa era 80-an*; types of work that were fairly unknown in an Indonesian context, namely installation, video-installation, and performance.

Following Jencks' description of a post-avant-garde, Supangkat argues that *seni rupa era 80-an*:

[N]o longer attempted to create a new artistic space. In fact, it exited the area of art and its specific codes (painting and sculpture). All traditions that signaled artistic exploration in modernism were no longer important. The search for originality, new techniques, the essence of expression, the exploration of media, the construction of visual elements, were no longer problematized in this work (24).¹⁶

For Jencks, the post-avant-garde meant the impossibility of the avant-garde's return as anything but pastiche, a positive eruption over and against the repressive nature of Modernism, its 'post' constituting a non-confrontational reshuffling and/or reinvention of history and its aesthetic and stylistic categories. For Supangkat, the post-avant-garde meant the making of art *as* cultural practice and concerns over social engagement as opposed to worrying over the form of art, over the art object. In this

¹⁶ "...ciri kelompok ini tidak lagi berusaha menaklukkan wilayah artistik baru. Malah keluar dari wilayah artistik dengan code khusus (seni patung, seni lukis). Semua tradisi yang menandakan eksplorasi artistik yang menjadi ciri modernisme, tidak lagi utama. Pencarian orisinalitas, pembaruan teknik baru, pencarian esensi ekspresi, eksplorasi media, konstruksi elemen-elemen rupa, tidak lagi dipersoalkan pada karya-karya ini."

regard, Indonesian 'post-avant-garde' differs from the radical avant-garde of the previous decade in that it had left the codes of modernism completely behind. He then contends that such art in the international context is associated with postmodern art. In the last part of his essay, Supangkat not only attempts to define postmodernism for his Indonesian readers, he also then takes a series of attributes of postmodern theory to situate two general patterns in *seni rupa era 80-an* as postmodern.

Arguably, in *Pengantar* Supangkat's initial point of entry into postmodernism comes from two specific, simultaneous sites. First, his participation in the international circuit of exhibitions and symposiums apparently influenced his claim that the mediums of installation, video, and performance are inherently postmodern. Here, he underscores that such modes of artistic practice have traveled the globe, and are "widely practiced in this [Indonesian] art arena" (Supangkat 1993a, 14). In fact, it can be held that the increased popularity of these types of work in Indonesia is partly due to their ubiquity in the international art arena. By the early 1990s, the international exhibition and curator had become the major patron of such forms of art from around the world as part of its new 'global' focus on 'local' formations. This included events such as the Asia Pacific Triennial (APT) (Queensland Gallery, Brisbane Australia). For the 1993 Second APT, Supangkat acted as consultant to the curatorial board in selecting the participants from Indonesia. He also presented a paper at the conference for the APT. Among the issues debated at the conference was whether or not postmodernism as a constellation of theoretical frames was applicable to the region of Southeast Asia. Cornell Graduate and the main curator from and for Southeast Asia at the time, Apinan Poshynanda (1993), was critical of Western academia and art discourse for its alleged assumptions of ownership of postmodernism and its expectation for regions such as Southeast Asia to 'go through the eye of Western

postmodernism' or be seen as lagging behind.¹⁷ It cannot be denied that this and similar international events were influential in Supangkat's approach to both the selection of art works as well as the theoretical model(s) he deployed to situate *seni rupa era 80-an* and legitimate the work in the BJIX, which took place just shortly after the Second APT.

This is not to suggest that Supangkat's use of postmodernism as a means to categorize *seni rupa era 80-an* is directly due to events such as the above conference and associations with participants like Poshyananda. Nonetheless, it was after the Second APT event that the term 'postmodernism' in association with the above types of art in Indonesia began to surface in Supangkat's writing. It can also, then, be posited that such international encounters also influenced his selection of the primary source for this section of his curatorial essay, namely Hal Foster's "Re:Post" in *Art after Modernism* (1984).

In addition to the above context, Supangkat's rethinking of the category of *seni kontemporer*, or more precisely post-*pemberontakan seni rupa era 80-an*, through the use of postmodern frames, needs to be seen in relation to the postmodernism already in translation and being debated among other interpretive communities in Indonesia, namely among intellectuals often associated with the leading universities.¹⁸

The year of 1993 is said to have been the apex of 'postmodern fever' in Indonesia.¹⁹ Yet, interest in and concerns over postmodernism and its applicability to

¹⁷ Other participants in the symposium included Homi Bhabha, Mary Ann Jacobs, and Caroline Turner.

¹⁸ For different positions and interpretations on Postmodernism from within the various academic disciplines among the National, Islamic and Cathoic universities, see for example the collective volume, Suyoto et al., eds., *Postmodernisme dan Masa Depan Peradaban [Postmodernism in Future Civilization]* (Jakarta: Aditya Media, 1994); and various articles on the topic in the journal *Ulumul Qu'ran* between 1991 and 1993.

¹⁹ For its first edition of 1994, editors of the academic journal *Kalam*, including literary critic Nirwan Dewanto, produced a special edition devoted to the "postmo fever". It contained lengthy explications of

an Indonesian context began in earnest around 1991 among the field of literary criticism, departments of philosophy, sociological culture studies, and Islamic studies.²⁰ The postmodernism these circles were translating and discussing was primarily that of both Fredric Jameson and English-language translations of Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard. These were most often deployed in relation to questions of centralization of power structures within Indonesia and an increasingly fragmented Indonesian society. For example, Nirwan Dewanto (1991/1996) employed certain concepts of postmodernism in an attempt to displace the overarching notion of an enforced national unity or *azas tunggal* (unifying principle) which elides cultural, class, religious and ethnic heterogeneity in the Indonesian public and social discourse, and to call into question the authoritarian state (66-68; see also Bodden 2002). It can be argued that in this discourse, the complexity of postmodernism was frequently reduced to ‘pluralism’, and in relation to the concept of society. Although apparently increasingly fragmented from without, the Indonesian ‘plural’ society never dissolved into relativism. Postmodernism in Indonesia retained the concept of *kita* or inclusive ‘we’ as a nation. The retention of the ‘we’ implies a possible multivocality while also refusing the poststructuralist-deconstructionist impulse toward proliferation of the particular into a suggested political liberalism and ideological ambiguity.

The Indonesian discussion over postmodernism was undeniably an urban, metropolitan one, which quickly encompassed the larger intellectual circles associated with State, Islamic, and Catholic universities and their respective journals, study groups in the cities of Bandung, Salatiga, Jakarta, and Yogyakarta. Some observers

ideas of key thinkers such as Derrida and Foucault, and a brief history of the discussions and debates which took place over the previous three years.

²⁰ There are reports of seminars on postmodernism given by visiting foreign artists and professors of architecture and design as early as 1989. Yet these talks seem isolated to those specific disciplines, and apparently were peppered heavily with the texts of Charles Jencks already discussed above.

and participants claim that it ended with no useful conclusions (Dewanto 1994; Heryanto 1993; Hujatnikajennong 2000; Malna 2000).

The Indonesian art world, especially in Bandung, began discussing postmodernism in the early 1990s. It cannot be denied that the brief discussion over postmodernism in the art world in Indonesia was both informed and influenced by the larger discourse among other interpretive communities in Indonesia. Asmudjo Irianto, faculty member of the Fine Arts Department at ITB, artist, curator, and writer on the arts, has observed that concepts of postmodernism penetrated the art circles primarily in de-contextualized fragments that circulated in the art world ‘like rumors’; its dispersal took place largely through the exhibition discussions and via cultural gatekeepers such as Supangkat who were more knowledgeable of the international art discourse.²¹ A few general assumptions quickly took shape: that the paradigm of modernism and aesthetic universalism was dead along with its codes; that postmodernism meant the combining of a number of mediums, techniques, and materials; and that the forms of postmodernism in art are, above all, any form of assemblage, object, and installation art. Some took postmodernism to mean artistic production beholden to no rules or traditions, and that anything could be art in a new arena of aesthetic pluralism (Dermawan T. 1993, Dermawan T 1994a; Karma 1994). This was viewed both positively and negatively, depending upon one’s perspective. Supangkat, for instance, perceived aesthetic pluralism framed within the discourse of postmodernism as emancipatory, as well as recuperative in that it allowed for the inclusion of a seemingly endless number of cultural traditions into a ‘new’ field of cultural production.

²¹ Interview with Asmudjo Irianto, 24 April 2002, Yogyakarta.

Responding to the above two interrelated discussions – the international art arena and postmodernism in translation in Indonesia – it is perhaps not surprising that Supangkat selects Hal Foster’s “Re:Post” (1984/1995) as his main source in defining postmodernism to his Indonesian audience. In reading his source, whether deliberate or not, Supangkat translates only certain layers of Foster’s historically laden, discursively specific and highly metaphorical language. For instance, Supangkat is not interested in Foster’s critique and criticism of poststructuralist-based definitions of postmodernism as employed in Crimp et al.’s version of postmodernism.²² Instead, “Re:Post” serves as a secondary source from which to cull a patchwork of attributes that are then mapped onto the artistic practices of artists in the BJIX. In *Pengantar*, at base such attributes for Supangkat posit postmodernism as the dissolution of Modernism’s ‘pure’ forms.

Keeping in mind that modernism for Supangkat was one of foreign imposition without a clear program for its adaptation in Indonesia, it is not surprising that he does not read for criticisms of certain definitions of postmodernism but rather for those passages which, for him, spell the end of modernism and universalism utterly. In *Pengantar*, Supangkat produces a version of postmodernism that associates his selected key terms, so important to the theoretical models from which he borrows, with other ideas and modes of practice that are not necessarily to be found in his ‘source text’. Hence, except in specific instances it serves little purpose to read his

²² In “Re:Post,” in *Art After Modernism*, ed. Brian Wallis, (New York and Boston: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984/1995), Foster takes issue with the poststructuralist formulations of postmodernism by art critics Douglas Crimp, Rosalind Krauss, and Craig Owens (Crimp et al.), whose theories of a new postmodern impulse in American art during the late 1970s were published in *October* in 1979 and 1980. He particularly questions their assumptions of an epistemological rupture with modernism, as well as that certain forms of art can be taken as inherently ‘postmodern’ without attending to the conditions that made such works possible in the first place. See Douglas Crimp, “Pictures,” *October* 8, no. Spring (1979); Rosalind Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” *October* 8, no. Spring (1979); Craig Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Post Modernism I and II,” *October* 12 and 13, no. Spring and Summer (1980).

conception of postmodernism or postmodern art alongside and across that of his source text. Such commentary and Western discourse will be kept mainly to the footnotes. Rather, more constructive is to articulate these terms in their new context, how they are made to function.

General Patterns of the *Pascamodern* in *Seni Rupa Era 80-an* and in BJIX

At base, Supangkat creates two general and overarching kinds of postmodern art or *pascamodern(isme)* in Indonesia to encompass the patterns he perceives in *seni rupa era 80-an*, and supposedly represented in the selected works in the BJIX: 1) an open category of art that transgresses but still maintains the codes of painting and sculpture; 2) those works that in combining installation and performance or other types of media construct a postmodern mystical, ritualized space.

An overarching and determining idea that informs Supangkat's version of the *pascamodern* in visual art is that the postmodern work makes no pretense toward the integrity of 'pure' form, which he associates with Modernism. Hence, first in his categories of *pascamodern* works are those that, while not having abandoned the conventions of painting and sculpture altogether, no longer have "a connection to the tradition of exploration of these as pure form" (Supangkat 1993a, 21). Leaving aside that this too could be said of that which he labels 'radical avant-garde', Supangkat contends that art that has left such questions of pure form behind deals with issues outside the field of art itself. In other words, it engages in the social:

[T]he largest portion of *Seni Rupa Era '80* works view problems of society in a wider environment: in the cultural context. In these works, the principles of postmodernism can be observed more clearly. In general, this group no longer attempts to conquer a new artistic territory. Instead, they have exited the artistic field with its specific codes (of painting and sculpture)...

With exiting the artistic field, the meaning of these works is not located in the context of artistic development but in the context of culture. This is the basis in the practice of postmodernism (22).²³

Such works of art, according to Supangkat's argument, combine the artistic with the non-artistic, or with traditions from non-art domains of culture. In this category, the forms of painting and sculpture are combined with techniques and materials from popular and low culture, for instance. As illustrations of this in *seni rupa era 80-an*, Supangkat provides a list of names of artists (e.g., Anusapati, Agus Suwage, Hedi Heryanto, Edie Hara, Heri Dono) who participated in the BJIX and whose work demonstrates just such an open category of the work of art. Yet we are not privy to any of their works. Nonetheless, and at the risk of putting words in his mouth, a brief discussion of a few works might prove useful in discussing what Supangkat may have had in mind in grouping these particular artists and their practices together under his general idea of an open category of art, a work that defies the 'purity of form'.

Trained in sculpture and ceramics at the Institut Seni Indonesia or Indonesia Art Institute (ISI, formerly ASRI) in Yogyakarta,²⁴ during the 1990s Hedi Haryanto (b. 1962) worked with a variety of raw materials associated with 'traditional' yet 'low' culture such as unfinished wood, terracotta, and the like. Working with such 'low grade' materials and emphasizing natural, rough textures went against notions of modern art's finished, painted and polished surfaces. However, structurally these

²³ "[B]agian terbesar karya-karya Seni Rupa Era '80 melihat masalah masyarakat dalam lingkup lebih luas: konteks budaya. Pada karya-karya ini prinsip-prinsip pasca-modernisme bias dikaji lebih jelas. Dalam garis besar, ciri kelompok ini tidak lagi berusaha menaklukkan wilayah artistik baru. Malah keluar dari wilayah artistik dengan code khusus (seni patung, seni lukis)... Dengan keluar dari wilayah artistik, makna karya-karya itu tidak terletak pada konteks perkembangan seni rupa [] tapi pada konteks budaya. Ini hal mendasar dalam praktek post-modernisme."

²⁴ ASRI's name was changed in 1988.

works remained within the codes of conventions of modern sculpture as a self-contained object, one separated from its space via a pedestal of some kind. Roughly between 1992 and 1996 he also experimented with large-scale installations and environments dealing with the bombardment of the individual by a ‘terror of products’ as he calls it (see Chapter Eight). Such installations consisted entirely of recycled food packaging and paper.

His piece for the BJIX titled *Tata Niaga* (1992) (Figures 2.2 and 2.3) is a series of nearly identical forms placed on a bed of sand in the shape of a triangle on the floor. Here he uses earthen water jugs, the lower halves of which have been glazed a dark hue, the texture of which resembling ripples of water. From the neck of each jug emerges what looks like a human femur bone. The jugs containing bones have been speared into place by a triangular piece of metal on a wooden spike. Like much assemblage work among Javanese artists, the overall form of the piece is triangular. The triangle, although perhaps not consciously intended, has historical, religious and cultural connotations of the peg of the earth and sacred mountain. It also suggests a perfect and harmonious form when combined with its female aspect of water. Arguably, such a cosmically perfect sign also reveals its ambiguous nature as also the fragmented, dismembered body.

Tata Niaga presents what had already become one of the defining characteristics or patterns in installation art in Indonesian, namely the singular sculptural form created out of ‘low’ materials, replicated numerous times and placed in an assemblage-like manner. The singular figure is rendered as multiple fragments that combine into another kind of form. Yet, each identical object remains within the conventions and codes of sculpture. An artistic operation, repetition and seriality also play on the ambiguity between the one ‘original’ and ‘originating’ object and its ‘supplement’ multiplied and spatially expanding. Unlike the Minimalism of the

Western discourse, such repetition is not derived mechanically but, similar to the former, Indonesian sculptural or installation works discussed here also place emphasis on the spectator's experience of the piece in its durational, spatially expanding aspect. Yet replication in Indonesian contemporary art also has associations with traditions of weaving and carving that repeat the same non-narrative motif as a means of 'wrapping' the usually functional object thus decorated with certain hidden powers of protection or other powerful associations. According to many artists interviewed, the use of the multiplied identical form serves as a crucial visual mechanism that places emphasis on, or that is intended to emphasize, the intended message.



Figure 2.2 Hedi Haryanto, *Tata Niaga*, installation, 1992 (Courtesy of the artist).



Figure 2.3 Exhibition view of Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta IX, *Tata Niaga* by Hedi Heryanto in the background. In the foreground, Arahmaiani, *Four Faces*, performance, 1993, (video still taken from VCD courtesy of Arahmaiani).

What might have been particularly attractive for Supangkat in the work of the work of academically trained sculptor, Anusapati (b. 1957), is that many of his works also can be seen as both singular sculptural form, replete with a pedestal, and as an installation; the singular form extending into space (Figure 2.4). During the 1990s and into the early 21st century, Anusapati sought out the discarded fragment, in this case discarded pieces of wood to make his roughly hewn works. In using base woods, he also broke with the codes of what in Indonesia had been considered proper materials of modern and high traditional sculpture, namely the highly polished surfaces of stone and high quality woods.²⁵ Attempting to break out of such expectations and class positions, Anusapati works with whatever wood is locally available. According to the artist, his work of this time reflects the Javanese belief that all of nature is animated by

²⁵ He has recently been working in more 'collectible' editions in bronze and stone.

unseen forces. Hence, even the lowest quality of wood found around his neighborhood contains a spiritual presence, one that demands to be treated with respect in the process of its transformation into a work of art (C. Clark 1994, 74; Kuss 2003, 86; Anusapati 1996). In choosing the forms and materials he does, instead of appropriating court traditions and aesthetic patterns of so-called ‘classical’ Javanese culture, he incorporates the still living and functional forms and traditions of ‘low’ or everyday ‘folk’ culture from his own Javanese background, such as the *kentongan* (wooden gong) and *lesung* (rice pounding mortar). In addition, if all natural substances, in this case wood, have a sanctity inherent in their very existence, it is no surprise, then, that the artist would extend such ideas to ecological issues as a main theme in his work, an example of which is his *Preserve vs. Exploit*.



Figure 2.4 Anusapati, *Preserve vs. Exploit*, 1994, wood, wax, light bulbs (Courtesy of Cemeti Art Foundation, Yogyakarta, Indonesia).

In a similar vein, Heri Dono's painting and assemblage works, according to Supangkat's criteria, can be considered postmodern for his incorporation into the codes or conventions of modern art a plethora of cultural references and materials and techniques associated with both 'high' and 'low' cultural production and imagery



Figure 2.5 Heri Dono, *The Suppressor*, 1989, 46 x 59 cm, acrylic on paper (Collection of Dr. Oie Hong Djien).

(Supangkat 1993a, 24).²⁶ Thematically, Heri's work in general consists of non-linear, densely layered narratives that speak of socio-political issues in a way that combines humor and violence: (Figure 2.5). Stylistically:

Heri's paintings are done in a zany, densely overlapping cartoonish style that does not suggest the subject directly, thereby demanding

²⁶ His use of the terms High and Low culture, as well as mass culture is borrowed from the late Sanento Yuliman's sociologically inspired "Dua Seni Rupa" (1987). See Chapter Six in this dissertation.

closer scrutiny. Indeed, the titles are frequently necessary to enable a reading out of chaos; this view posits that the artist, indeed, has the right to direct the viewer's mind in a certain direction through the employment of words. Often what looks funny at first glance has a nightmarish quality when studied more closely (Wright 1994, 236).

Wright's analysis quoted above can also apply to one of the works he submitted to the BJIX. In *Watching the Marginal People* (1992).²⁷ Dono combines the simple motorized mechanism with carved figures of 'monster' heads hung on the wall in a row like hunting trophies (Figure 2.6).

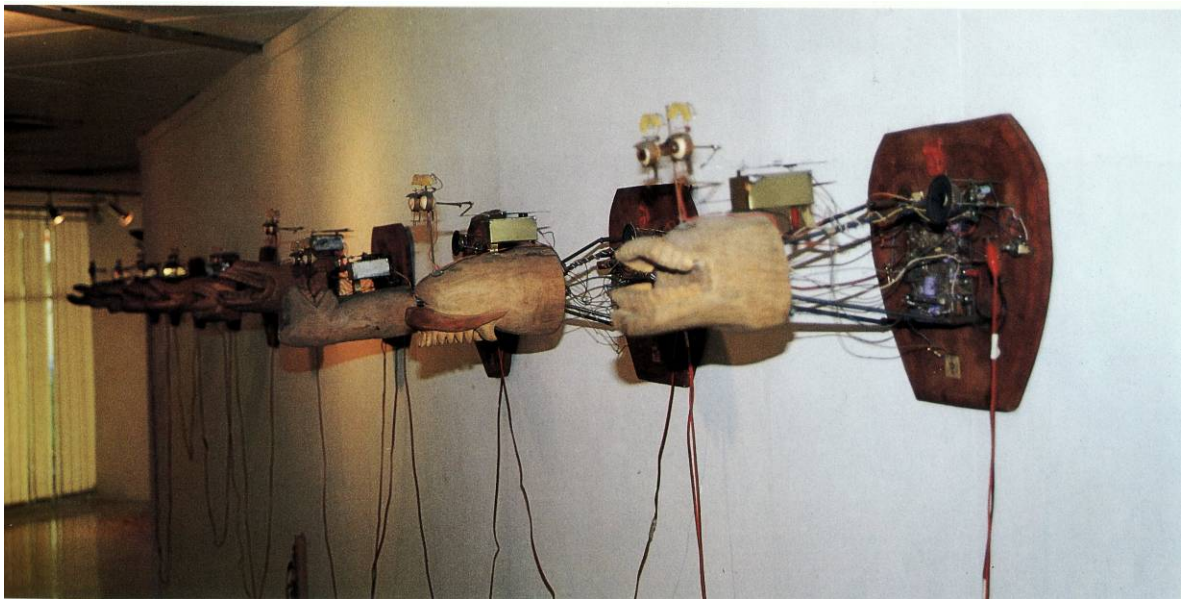


Figure 2.6 Heri Dono, *Menonton Orang-Orang Marginal* (Watching the Marginal People), 1992-93 (Courtesy of the artist).

For the features of the 'monsters', Dono takes inspiration from the *raksasa* or 'giant' characters of the traditional Javanese *wayang kulit*. Yet, he has no pretense at appropriating the court aesthetic. Instead, he taps into the level of the folk traditions that lack the refined ornamentation associated with 'high' tradition. Mechanized by

²⁷ This piece was exhibited previously in the 1993 Asia Pacific Triennial, Queensland Gallery, Brisbane, Australia, and later in the Fukuoka Museum's Fourth Asian Art Show, "Realism as an Attitude", in 1994.

simple motors, the eyes of Heri's *raksasa* move to and fro as if watching passers by; this while strange, unintelligible sounds emit from small transistor radio speakers nestled within the creatures' mouths. In the following, Dono describes the concept behind this work as:

[B]ased on a phenomenon contained in Javanese animistic religion. It concerns a belief that all things in the world have a soul, they [Javanese people] believe that the electricity stream also has a soul. Because of this, the soul of the electricity comes through to the mechanical system and looks at the human being who is to become marginalized in the World... The stream of electricity, sounds, plates of iron, electronic circuits, the environment, the atmosphere of the inner and outer worlds and so on are the constellation between the human being and the supernatural (Dono 1994).²⁸

Dono's statement suggests that, in a similar vein as Anusapati's approach to sculpture, concepts of modernity and the rational are shot through with the non-rational, the mundane with the supernatural, that behind even the seemingly lowliest or mundane of objects lies the mystical. His work also points to the fragmentation of Indonesian horizons and the ways in which different points of reference and orientations are constantly negotiated.

The above works extend the structure of the work beyond the strict categorical boundaries of painting and sculpture. Such works are, according to Supangkat in *Pengantar*, a form of postmodern *impuls alegoris* or allegorical impulse, borrowing the term as used by Craig Owens (1980).²⁹ Whereas art historians such as Wright emphasize the allegorical in that the work builds new structures of meaning in the act of its being 'read', Supangkat implies that the allegorical is in the form that art takes

²⁸ Dono, "Artist's Statement," Fourth Asian Art Show, "Realism as an Attitude," 1994.

²⁹ Although Supangkat cites Owens' "The Allegorical Impulse" (1980), it seems likely that Supangkat's appropriation of the term is from Foster's "Re:Post". This is substantiated by the way in which he summarizes Owens' notion of the allegorical that corresponds more to specific passages in Foster's own summary than to Owens' article.

(Supangkat 1993a, 26). Yet, according to Owens' model, the allegorical exists in the very structure of the work of art and is itself highly ideological in its stress on blurring stylistic norms and to breeching the categories of artistic practices and aesthetic fields through the accumulation or sedimentation of icons and cultural metaphors. This was a means of appropriating and displacing the authority of the already existing social and cultural significance of the icon. According to Supangkat, as the layers of mediums and codes such as painting with graphics, image with text, sculpture in its spatial extension, and use of 'low' materials can accumulate and in any combination, the allegorical work ruptures through the 'principles of pure form' of modernism (22 and 26).³⁰ In this way, unlike modernism, the postmodern work of art creates a kind of open category, one conducive to a more 'authentically' Indonesian practice than the principles or modes of modernism.

The dissolution of the 'pure form', for Supangkat, means that art is now *about* something outside of itself. In this, he argues that art about something other than itself is to make art part of the social and hence the dissolution of the 'high' form of art. Yet, as Irianto has observed, this space of combined registers does not necessarily destroy

³⁰ In his prime objective of demonstrating the destruction of Modernism's pure form, his understanding of postmodernism unknowingly reconfigures Foster's summary of Craig Owens assumption of an allegorical impulse in postmodern art to be the contamination of painting and sculpture as codes with non-art languages. Owens, on the other hand, was more concerned with the notion of intertextuality or web of references and manifold meaning created when two mediums and the discourses behind them collide, an endless process of revealing and concealing. Early on in his "Allegorical Impulse," Owens argues that the artist as allegorist does not reaffirm or reinstigate "original meaning" that may have been lost, but rather supplements or adds meaning to the image. In so doing, postmodern *allegorisis* (interpretation) posits art's divestiture of the false unity between signifier and what it signifies. Foster's paraphrase of Owens' reconception of the "allegorical impulse" to theorize postmodern art is quite brief, and aimed ultimately to underscore an inherent 'trap' in its deconstructive critique: "Contingent, this art exists in (or as) a web of references, not necessarily located in any one form, medium, or site. As the object is destructured, so is the subject (viewer) dislocated, and the modernist order of the arts decentered. Such art is thus 'allegorical' in nature. Temporal and spatial at once, it dissolves the old order, so too, it opposes the 'pure sign' of late modernist art and plays, instead on the 'distance which separates signifier from signified from meaning'" (Owens quoted in Foster, "Re: Post," 196).

Foster then points to the vulnerability of such an argument regarding the supposed new agency in such work: "...to what does such allegorical art finally tend if not to a dispersal of the subject and a melancholic resignation in the face of a fragmented and reified history?"

the ideological boundaries between what is considered ‘high’ and ‘low’; these ideological barriers are potentially still maintained within the supposed ‘postmodern’ work of art.³¹

In constructing his second general category of postmodern art represented in the BJIX, Supangkat finds a direct correspondence between the Indonesian context of installation and performance art and Douglas Crimp’s (as read through Foster) assumption of a return to ‘theatricality’ in the postmodern work in America in the late 1970s.³² The idea of the ‘theatrical’ is possibly attractive to Supangkat because, like his reading of the ‘allegorical’, it implies a direct challenge to modernism’s ‘pure’ codes. Supangkat translates the concept of a postmodern return of the ‘theatrical’ to mean “incorporating the aesthetic frame of theater into the idioms of art,” namely in the merging of installation and performance. And like the ‘allegorical’ work of art, this “opening up of the boundaries of art in [artistic] expression will then undo aesthetic limitations. This makes expression in a work [of art] enter the field of culture” (Supangkat 1993a, 25).³³ In other words, the theatrical in art is, like the allegorical

³¹ Interview with Asmudjo Irianto, 24 April, 2002, Yogyakarta.

³² Here, Supangkat alights on Foster’s reference to Crimp’s emphasis on “a return to ‘theater’ (tabooed by modernism)”, that which “exists between the arts”, particularly in the work of performance and video, that, for Crimp, served as a “signal of postmodernism” (quoted in Foster, “Re:Post,” 191). Crimp’s theory of the postmodern ‘return’ to theatricality, to narrative, to duration and experience, was intended as a challenge to Michael Fried’s (1967) insistence that ‘good art’ exists within bounded fields and refers to no ‘outside’ discourse. Foster writes: “these critics [Crimp included] pose postmodernism against late modernism whose classic text is seen as the essay “Art and Objecthood” by Michael Fried. Therein, Fried objects to the implicit ‘theater’ of minimalist sculpture: ‘*art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theater*,’ runs the often quoted line, with ‘theater’ defined as ‘*what lies between the arts*.’ To Crimp, this intuition signals modernism’s demise: the important work of the seventies exists precisely between the arts; moreover, such work – especially video and performance – exploits the very ‘theater’ ... that Fried deemed degenerate” (“Re:Post”, 193). The notion of theatricality is too complex for the present discussion except to suggest that Crimp wants to theorize the ways in which performance art and certain photographic installations reintegrated a Kantian separation of cognition and affect such that it denied disinterested aesthetic experience.

³³ “...menyusupnya bingkai estetik teater ke dalam idion seni rupa adalah tanda penting post-modernisme... [T]erbukanya batas-batas kesenian dalam berekspresi, akan membuka pula limit-limit estetik. Ini membuat ungkapan dalam sesuatu karya memasuki wilayah budaya.”

work, the dissolution of the pure form, and is no longer something separate from other forms of cultural production. In this sense, art has the potential of direct intervention in the world.

Taking the above as his initial use of the notion of ‘theatrical’, arguably Supangkat does not deploy the term in the same theoretical way as it has been in much of the Western discourse. For, while the notion of the ‘theatrical’ is a specific theme in influential Western theories of modernism and postmodernism in relation to how modernism had been defined and bracketed, it is necessary to underscore here the very *absence* of such a concern in an Indonesian context: the aesthetic notion of ‘theatricality’, and certain critical positions against it as a supposed detriment to ‘good art’ and absorption of the viewer have not had much of an impact on Indonesian art discourse. Neither has there been such a widespread concern over the purity of artistic language within the realm of ‘high’ or ‘fine’ art, as in the attempt to eradicate the literary or discursive elements from the language of painting, for instance. Hence, one finds references to and associations with modern and traditional (high and folk) forms of poetry, mythology, legends, dance, theater, calligraphy and other forms of text. in modernist works of art in Indonesia.

In fact, the idea of the influence of other discourses or of the so-called theatrical on *seni rupa modern* can be extended to the continued influence of different modes of performance in Indonesia and the idea of artist as creative subject who takes on various roles. As Holt (1967) and Wright (1994a) have separately observed, artistic specialization has not been as rigid in Indonesia as in the West. Modern and contemporary artists in Indonesia generally have been interdisciplinary in their training, such that, to paraphrase Wright, it is quite acceptable if not expected of even academically trained artists to enact many roles, to have studied and to be knowledgeable in a variety of arts such as sculpture, painting, dance, poetry,

traditional music and theater (106 fnnt 11).³⁴ As Soedarso contends, an interdisciplinary arts education was not considered as something in addition to the person, but part of becoming a person (Soedarso 1990, 17). I argue that one of the main differences between the practices of modern art and contemporary art resides in the sense that while trained in a variety of traditions and conventions, modern artists combine the motifs and connotations behind them in their visual work but not the forms and structures themselves. The codes of painting and sculpture remain intact. Alternative or more critical contemporary art practices are interdisciplinary, combining traditions and their forms into the same work, thus also moving beyond modern borders between aesthetic traditions and formal codes.

Although rather vague in his adoption of the term, I suggest that Supangkat had such an adaptation and incorporation of traditional uses of performance in mind when he employed the theoretical term ‘theatrical’ in constructing his version of an Indonesian postmodernism. For one factor that many of the works by the mainly Javanese and Balinese artists that he lists (see below) have in common is some form of appropriating traditional theater/performance modes, including ritualized movement or dance element, which are either staged alone, or more often within the installation space. Regardless of whether the piece is more socio-politically motivated or more aesthetically driven, it is often linked formally and symbolically to spiritual and ritual themes. Supangkat contends works such as these “demonstrate the effect of mystical space,” or are constructions of a theater space as “a medium to achieve something mystical” (Supangkat 1993a, 25).³⁵ In this particular context, he lists artists showcased

³⁴ Wright’s project can be seen, in part, as a continuation of Holt’s work in that both authors examine and unravel points of contact between the past and the present, the use of the past in the present and residual layers of cultural sediment in modern cultural formations and aesthetic practices in Indonesia.

³⁵ “[R]uang teatral ini sebagai media untuk mencapai hal-hal mistis.” This differs from the idea of ‘event’ that postmodernists such as Crimp tried to theorize in terms of performance art and the work performed by appropriative art, which underscored the image’s reproducibility. Here the notions of art as event, the

in the BJIX, such as Nyoman Erawan (Bali), Nindityo Adipurnomo (Yogyakarta), Andar Manik (Bandung), Krisna Murti (Bandung/Bali).

Although Supangkat goes no further in discussing specific works or artistic practices, a brief discussion of a selection of works may help to give further form to his criteria of this kind of mystical space. A pattern that can be discerned among many of the works by artists that Supangkat mentions as creating a kind of ‘mystical space’ is the shared tendency toward art as a kind of public offering steeped in religious or spiritual associations. It is art that taps into and empathizes with as much as it essentializes the human condition. This is, for instance, the case with Dadang Christanto’s body of installation works he made during the 1990s and after as poetic and profound expressions of grief for those who have suffered. His works, particularly those that include some form of personal performance, are ritual acts of remembering, a space in which to bear witness to suffering as a condition and human experience. Such is the case in the piece he staged for the BJIX - *For those: Who are poor, Who are Suffer(ing), Who are oppressed, Who are voiceless, Who are powerless, Who are burdened, Who are victims of violence, Who are victims of a dupe, Who are victims of injustice* (1993) (Figure 2.7).³⁶

dialectical image, and reproducibility in art works were the cornerstones of his argument against the myth of the ontological object in favor of art as restaging the event of experience, and experience as event.

³⁶ The piece is a slight variation from *For Those who have been Killed* that was exhibited in the Second APT and was purchased by the Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane in 1993. Over the course of that exhibition, people came and placed flowers and written sentiments at the edge of the work.

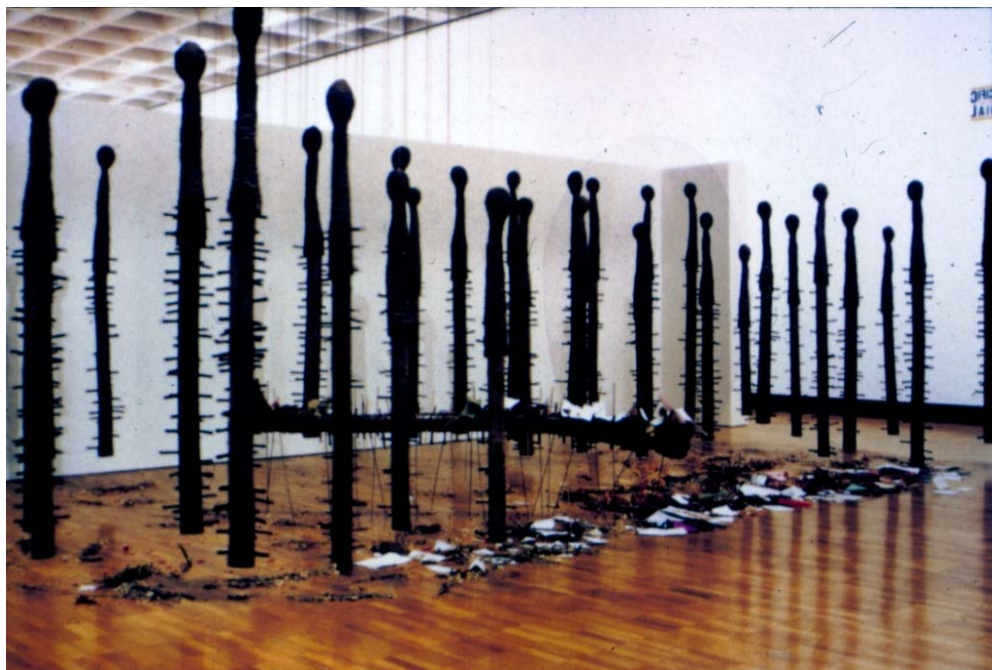


Figure 2.7 Dadang Christianto, *For Those Who...*, installation, 1993 (Collection Queensland Gallery, Brisbane, Australia).

He constructed the work from bamboo poles and tree trunks hung from the ceiling, each with several wooden spikes imbedded into their surfaces. The top of each post was covered with molded bramble fashioned by hand to resemble an abstract form of a human head. Each figure served as a metaphor for the wounded human body physically and/or psychologically wounded; together they suggested a collective or common experience in suffering. They are human souls hovering between two states. The artist explained the idea behind the work as “an epigraph for the victims of oppression...and those who have been waylaid by the process of history and development. With my work I hope to encourage a more comprehensive view—with a humanistic dimension—towards this age of development” (quoted in Supangkat 1993c, 12). After opening night, the installation remained a kind of public memorial as well as a silent forest of ‘victims’.

On the opening night of the BJIX, Dadang, nearly nude and covered in mud, wound his way in slow and deliberate movements through his forest, laying flowers on

the ground as he did so. His movements combined Hindu-Javanese meditation/yoga and writhing. His voice vacillated between low, chesty sounds of mantra recitation and moaning and crying as if in physical pain. While thus borrowing from ancient local tradition, the artist contended that his intention was to bring about a type of ‘Brechtian’, not religious, form of collective catharsis for his audience, with the hope of instilling in them a new awareness regarding human suffering caused by official institutions and those in power. His main theme of human suffering has remained constant for more than twenty years while the form that it takes has gone through permutations and has grown to massive public spectacle in some cases.³⁷

Nyoman Erawan’s (1957) BJIX contribution, *Yang Ditusuk Menusuk* or The Stabbed are Stabbing (1993) is intimately grounded in Balinese culture, religious and spiritual beliefs, symbolism, and aesthetic philosophy in such a way that it is difficult to separate the work of art from the ritualized, spiritually imbued object (Couteau 2002). The work resembles a burned out hull of a boat sailing on a sea of blood (Figure 2.8). The walls of the boat’s remnants have been pierced by a variety of sharp objects associated with traditional life in Bali and elsewhere, such as the *kris* (dagger) and fishing spear. These then also serve as an outer defensive layer protecting that which remains within. As if serving as a lifeline, lengths of different colored plastic tubing extend out from the boat into the viewer’s space, ending in a pile.

³⁷ Dadang Christantoo has been living, teaching and making art in Australia since 1999. While working in two-dimensional mediums such as drawing and painting, he continues to make large scale installations, many out of doors, and accompanied by similar ritualistic performances.

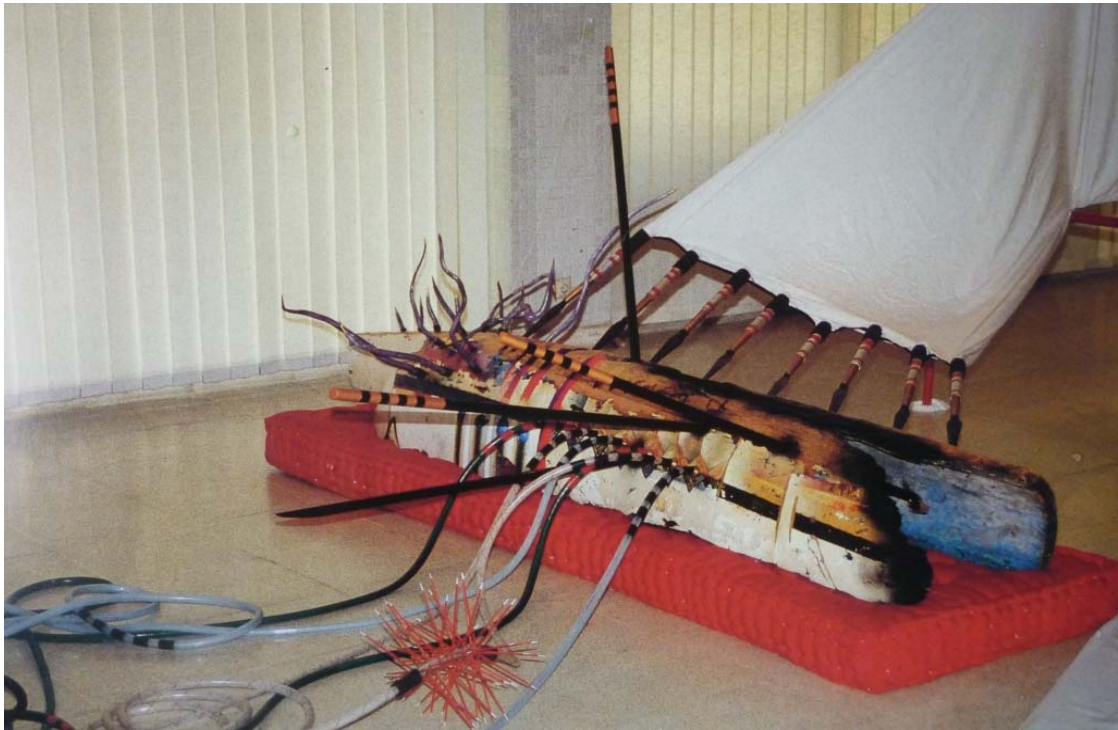


Figure 2.8 Nyoman Erawan, *Yang Ditusuk Menuk* (The Stabbed and the Stabbers), installation, 1993. Illus. in "From Tourism to Globalism, in *Art and Asia Pacific*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1994: 57.

The Stabbed and the Stabbers, like all of Nyoman's installation work and multi-media paintings, is to a certain extent more important for the process of its making than the finished object (Murti 1994, 58-59). This is because the act of making also involves traditional notions of ritual and/or ritual object and the laws that govern such acts and the making of objects (see also, Couteau 2002).

An underlying discussion in the work is the tension between the organic and the synthetic, traditional cultures within modernity, as well as retrenchment as possible self-defense. This was a common theme at the time in contemporary art, as Krisna Murti's *Barang-Barang dari Kampung Nagrak* or Objects from Nagrak Village also suggests but from a slightly different perspective on modernity (Figures 2.9-2.11).



Figure 2.9 Krisna Murti, *Barang-Barang dari Kampung Nagrak* (*Objects from Nagrak Village*), installation detail, 1993 (Courtesy of the artist).



Figure 2.10 Krisna Murti, *Barang-Barang dari Kampung Nagrak*, video installation detail, 1993 (Courtesy of the artist).



Figure 2.11 Krisna Murti, *Barang-Barang dari Kampung Nagrak*, video installation detail (Courtesy of the artist).

Barang-Barang dari Kampung Nagrak consists of traditional harvesting materials such as roughly hewn wooden troughs used in Bali to hold rice after having been shaken from its husks. These are supported by twigs typically used for kindling. Two of the troughs have been filled with soil and planted with rice shoots, thus transforming the trough into miniature rice fields. The young plants continue to mature for the duration of the exhibition. In other troughs, Krisna has planted video monitors among rice husks and other dried grains, and buried one monitor within a large mound of grain on the floor. Antenna wire runs from some of the troughs to the walls upon which are hung a variety of roof antenna sets that have become a permanent fixture in the landscape of most villages throughout Indonesia. The video is a series of edited loops portraying aspects of modernity and industrialization. Unlike the constructed linear time of documentary film, Krisna uses loops, repetitions and other effects to

push temporal juxtapositions. *Barang-Barang* is not intended as merely a reaffirmation of stereotypical cultural divides represented through the use of objects from traditional culture juxtaposed with those associated with modernity, but rather as a suggestion of the simultaneity of the different discourses, traditions, and temporalities that make up contemporary Balinese society. However, there is a pall of exoticization in this work, as the artist speaks of temporalities and cultural life to which he does not readily belong (Dim 1994).³⁸

In the above works, the ‘mystical’ manifests itself in the type of space or act that might be perceived as invoking ritual space or connotations of ritual acts. The mystical is also in the materials and cultural points of reference cited. Supangkat suggests these works are a form of re-mystification as a challenge to the rationalized singular forms of modernism, through their incorporation of the everyday, collective memory, and the spiritual.

It is thus less about how such art exists in between the art fields temporally and spatially, but more about the ways in which materials and mediums combine to displace the singularity of form he accords to modernism. In other words, these works, the new modes of installation within which specific extra-ordinary acts are staged, demonstrate layers of cultural sediment, and interdisciplinary practice that were denied by the forms of *seni rupa modern* and modernism. In this regard, in order to enact the work itself, it must be read in its multiplicity, in its non-linearity.

The above serves as a critical reading of Supangkat’s version of postmodernism in *Pengantar*, while also tying it to the larger discourses with which it is connected. This included bringing to bear on the discussion certain tendencies that

³⁸ Krisna Murti is from Balinese and Sundanese cultural backgrounds, and a Muslim. Yet in his artistic projects he typically applies the spirituality and appropriates cultural imagery from Hindu Balinese traditions.

were either only implied and/or absent altogether in his version of postmodernism. At base, his *pascamodernisme* is in the form that art takes, in this case mixed media painting and sculpture, as well as the international languages of installation and performance. These then create a relatively open category of the art object that is seemingly more ‘authentically’ Indonesian in that it incorporates a vast array of its traditions and discourses, including its construction of a ‘mystical space’.

Interestingly, it is not the finer points of Supangkat’s version of an Indonesian postmodernism that attracted criticism from his Indonesian colleagues, rather his essay sparked or rejuvenated the ongoing debate on postmodernism simply by his use of the term *pascamodern* to define Indonesian contemporary art in general.

A Growing Definition of Postmodernism/Pascamodernisme

Among the more general points of criticism of Supangkat’s terminology was that postmodernism in the West is a new morality coming from the previously socially marginalized and commodified in response to the rationalism and pragmatism of modernism, as was argued by BJIX committee member, Sri Warso Wahono (1994a and 1994b). Wahono also contends that postmodernism is associated with new technologies and how these have made possible a continuation of an avant-garde. He asks, then, if applying concepts of postmodernism to Indonesian installation art is at all accurate since most of Indonesians still come from agrarian backgrounds.

Another general point of opposition to Supangkat’s use of the idea of postmodernism in Indonesia was that postmodernism seemed to serve as a term meaning little more than a free license to make art anything the artist said it was, irregardless of tradition or the rules and judgments of quality established around any one discipline. In other words, it afforded little in the way of forming a discourse. Mara Karma (1994), DKJ member and art critic, argued, for instance, that it was too

soon to assume that this type of work, installations and performance, would sustain the test of time to become more than mere fashion.

Leading art critic and former artist involved in the ASRI rebellions, Agus Dermawan T., was particularly critical of Supangkat's use of postmodernism. He did not have a problem with the types of artwork on display in the BJIX. Instead, he disagreed with the use of postmodernism as a means of situating and explaining it. According to Dermawan, among others, Supangkat's universalizing of postmodernism was both premature and distorted the intelligibility of artistic practice in the Indonesian context. On the one hand, he points to a problem with Supangkat's supposed periodization. Being a former member of *seni pemberontakan* himself, Dermawan argued that Supangkat was too quick to draw a line of discontinuity between the 1970s use of installation and multi-media and that which came later. He, like BJIX participants FX Harsono and Semsar Siahaan, questioned whether postmodernism was yet another dominant discourse determined from 'the West' and imposed onto the Indonesian art world by cultural brokers such as Supangkat. This was certainly an issue when considering the selection process. As mentioned above, Supangkat selected primarily installation works that had either recently been exhibited in the First APT in Brisbane or from recent works produced within the academies, as well as requested installation works be produced specifically for the Biennale. Most critical voices suggest that this was because Supangkat merely wanted to ride the wave of the great sea change in the discourse of international art.

The question for Dermawan T. (1994a) is how artists put it to work in an Indonesian context and for what reason:

What is required is making it clear as to what, when, and how Modernism in Indonesia drove artists to call for and implement *pembaruan* [renewal and innovation] in the first place ... Without examining the mechanisms that control the presence of alternative forms of art, it is difficult to argue that [*seni kontemporer*] can be

identified as postmodern, which has broken through the dominance and centralization of the modernists.

In other words, it is not enough to argue postmodernism through illustrations of its form (i.e., installation, performance and video). One must attend to the mechanisms and conditions that make such art possible in the first place. Behind which is also the notion that if Indonesia wants to participate internationally, it must follow and take on the trends of that discourse, meaning forever lagging behind, rather than being given the opportunity to formulate its own contextually contingent discourse.³⁹ Earlier in the debate, Dermawan, argued that it was not yet the time to accept postmodernism outright, although artists, according to him, pushed themselves to search for a way to adapt their work to theories and understandings of postmodern art (Dermawan T 1993). Because of which, “what is happening is not the transition of ideas and forms from modernism to what is called postmodernism, but rather the jump or acceleration in stuttering (*kegagapan*) and ambiguous thinking.” Here, Dermawan possibly repeats or taps into an oft-heard complaint among art critics and instructors, artists translate postmodern artistic strategies while not necessarily having knowledge of the ideology, history or theoretical conceptions that lie behind them.

Dermawan also defined the essence of postmodernism as the expression of local color, an opportunity for alternative thinking, a rejection of absolute truth, domination, and centralization. He questioned whether this type of thinking was afforded to the artists reflected in the curating. Is there room, Dermawan asks, in Supangkat’s assessment for alternative thinking, innovation, local color in his

³⁹ See for example Herry Dim’s account of the responses by artists in Bandung after a public meeting with Supangkat following the opening of the BJIX. Artists in Bandung were concerned that their artwork was not as advanced as that being produced or at least discussed in Jakarta. They felt, according to Dim’s account, that if they wanted to be on par with national expectations, they too had to take up the frame of postmodernism. See Herry Dim’s “Instalasi Postmodern.”, and “Mazhab Bandung Teresok-esok [Bandung School of Thought Left Behind].”

analysis? Or does his theoretical lingo deny the opinion and ideas of the artists themselves, as there were no artist's statements included in the analysis (see also Yustiono 1994 and 1995)?

Regarding the international art world, arguably the cachet of postmodernism has great value for Indonesia in that it also affords new possibilities to Indonesian artists whose art had previously been marginalized from the international arena to participate in the world forum. However, as literary critic Nirwan Dewanto (1994) suggests, just because there are increasing numbers of artists from Indonesia participating in the international centers of contemporary art, and this largely because they produce works of art in forms that in the West seem postmodern, it does not naturally follow that the two contexts share an identical historical or cultural trajectory. Hence, one can draw the conclusion that the concept of postmodernism, if it is to have any meaning for an Indonesian context, must first be understood in its own context such that its limits can be tested as well as its content revised as viable means of discussing *seni rupa kontemporer* (Agusta 1994).⁴⁰

Due to such criticisms, and the particularly rancorous atmosphere at the seminar "Seni Rupa Kita Kini", a kind of 'state of affairs' roundtable and public discussion that accompanies all Biennales, Supangkat had publicly recanted his initial assertions. During the seminar, he stated: "The material in this biennale is Indonesian contemporary art, not installation art, postmodernism, or experimental art" (Supangkat 1994a).⁴¹ Some read this as a form of professional self-preservation and backsliding

⁴⁰ Agusta takes issue with the use of foreign theory, in this case postmodernism, to "name" Indonesian cultural production. She contends that it does more damage to the discourse by applying or mobilizing concepts from the international market of ideas without having a firm understanding of their own historicity. If such were available, then Indonesians would be better equipped to transform such concepts to better suit the Indonesian context, or be better able to discern when these are not applicable in the first place.

⁴¹ "Materi pameran biennale ini adalah seni rupa kontemporer Indonesia. Bukan seni rupa instalasi, bukan post-modernisme, juga bukan seni rupa eksperimental." He has since commented that his analysis "was

that brought the discussion of contemporary art in and the question of postmodernism in Indonesia back to square one (Detik 1994). However, this does not mean that he left the question of postmodernism completely behind. He just changed tactics in what mode or type of postmodernism he would invoke.

In “Menebak Postmodernisme dan Terpleset (Guessing Postmodernism and losing [one’s] balance),” printed five days after the BJIX opened, Supangkat (1993c) responds to criticisms that surfaced almost immediately after the opening, particularly Wahono’s and Dermawan’s initial criticism. Here, Supangkat takes a rather acerbic and didactic tone, or an attitude that Nirwan Dewanto (1994) describes as “trying to ‘out postmodern’ the other” (4).⁴² Supangkat remonstrates that “before the exhibition opened there already surfaced criticism that specifically problematized [the question of] postmodern tendencies. Unfortunately, such criticism was not based on a real understanding of postmodernism” (Supangkat 1993d).⁴³ In Indonesian traditions of criticism, such a response to one’s critics can then dismiss one’s critics outright because their basic understanding of the issue is publicly portrayed as flawed.

While seemingly trying to ‘out postmodern’ certain of his critics, in the mentioned article Supangkat also shifts his attention from forms that are supposedly inherently postmodern by adding another layer to his construction of *pascamodernisme*. In this regard, this article should be read in tandem with his “Menyela Arus Utama, Asia Pasifik dan Seni Rupa Indonesia (Disrupting the Mainstream, the Asia-Pacific and Art of Indonesia),” published in *Kalam* in 1994. In

not deep enough, but that [he, AKR] was merely trying to analyze a variety of ideas and apply them to make better sense of developments in *seni rupa kontemporer*.” Personal interview, February 1997, Jakarta.

⁴² Interestingly, while the debate outside of the art circles remained centered largely around a constellation of poststructuralist theoretical concepts, arguments for or against postmodernism (usually against) among the art circles were generally under the legitimizing guise of a variety of “authoritative names” chosen seemingly ad hoc, ranging from mainly American sociological readings to English cultural studies.

⁴³ “Sayang, kritik ini tidak didasarkan pada pemahaman tentang postmodernisme yang sebenarnya.”

these writings, his definition of a *pascamodernisme* is informed by what he calls a “new internationalism”, which, as briefly mentioned above, was in part constructed and disseminated to Indonesia through international events specific to the Asia-Pacific region, such as the *Asia Pacific Triennial* and its symposium, in which discussions of and ambivalence toward gestures of cross-cultural cooperation prevailed.

In the two articles mentioned above, Supangkat distinguishes between two versions of postmodernism. The one is particular to the *arus utama* or mainstream of contemporary art, which, according to him, is a homogeneous Euro-American response to an equally homogeneous Greenbergian High Modernism.⁴⁴ The other postmodernism is one constituted by positions of marginality or what for our present purposes can be called a “postmodernism of marginality.” Arguably, different from mainstream postmodernism, such a postmodernism does not cast doubt on but rather upholds the idea that there can be a centered subject capable of speaking for others and present her experiences in her own voice. It would seem that such a postmodernism provides Supangkat with what he sees is a common agenda shared among a variety of dissenting voices posed against a Western-centric homogeneous discourse. In this way, postmodernism in Indonesia, or *pascamodernisme*, is a reaction “not only against High Modernism, but also against the development of modernism, especially against the hegemony of the Western perception that hangs over it” (Supangkat 1994c, 107).⁴⁵

Indonesia’s experience with modernism was one of ambivalence; at certain times and for certain people it was enabling, while for other people and at other times

⁴⁴ This is not to say that ideas coming from the likes of Clement Greenberg did not have an impact on Indonesian modern art and its discourse. Greenberg’s 1961 “Modernist Painting” was translated into Indonesian and published in the influential and ideologically Angkatan-66 journal, *Horison*, IV, no. 11 (1969): 324-327. However, his ideas regarding pure abstract painting had little direct impact on the Indonesian discourse.

⁴⁵ “tidak hanya pada modernisme akhir, tapi juga pada perkembangan modernisme, bahkan pada hegemoni persepsi Barat yang membayangi modernisme.”

it was disenfranchising. Supangkat's conception of modernism, as discussed above, does not take into account such complexities, but rather views it as an incorrect and imposed cultural imperialism and bad faith. Therefore, it is not surprising that for his purposes, a "postmodernism of marginality" would seem more authentic, egalitarian, and local than modernism and even official *seni rupa modern*. It is something like an 'Indonesian response' in solidarity with other 'national' forms of contemporary art from the 'margins.'

The master narrative of modernism having been de-legitimized, a space also was opened through which to rethink and recuperate other so-called national modes of modernist art, not identical to official claims to the national but cultural, that "continued to demonstrate a localism (whether this be an emphasis on social problems, the influence of traditional culture, or local cultural identity)..." (Supangkat 1993d).⁴⁶ The recuperation of the local (read 'culturally national') as the basis of artistic production releases the marginalized 'Indonesian' artist from his or her subordinate position to Western-centric modernism, but not necessarily from official national culture.

Ambivalent Notions

Two years after the BJIX, during his presentation "What, Where, When" at the conference for the 1996 Asia Pacific Triennial in Brisbane, Australia, Supangkat rejected the discourse of postmodernism outright. Unlike before, his denunciation of postmodernism here is not so much a response to his critics. This time, his shift away from postmodernism as an enabling category comes mainly from his experiences in the very same international art arena that three years previous had held such promise

⁴⁶ "...yang masih memperlihatkan lokalisme (apakah itu masalah social, pengaruh tradisi, atau identitas budaya local) adalah seni rupa marjinal."

for a more egalitarian discourse of contemporary art (1996b). For example, the postmodern premise of pluralism hides the fact that the official chain of powers and functions of the international art world had largely gone unchanged. As Jean Fisher and Gerardo Mosquera (2004) observe:

Whereas there has been an increase in the number of artists, not only from the various diasporas but also from all corners of the globe, circulating through a seemingly internationalized art world, this has made little impact on the institutional structures of power that manipulate financial, intellectual, and aesthetic decisions (4).

Captivated by its strategies of decolonization in the early 1990s, the global art world quickly regressed into an institutional reification and commodification of expressions of cultural hybridity (Mosquera 1998, 64-67). Arguably, the shift in attention in the international contemporary art discourse from so-called universals to cultural identity concealed inequality in favor of synchronous difference(s), by assuming, perhaps, that an emphasis on and construction of difference automatically erases inequality (see Yúdice 1989). Understanding the tension between independence from and incorporation into any tradition or discourse is therefore fundamental to understanding the simultaneous ex-centric and universalizing pressures of postmodernism as a globalized lexicon of contemporary art.

In a similar vein, in “What, Where, When”, Supangkat contends that the discourse of postmodernism and the post-Avant-Garde should not and cannot be applied directly to an Indonesian context. Indirectly implicating himself, he suggests that one of the main obstacles facing what he calls the “Third World curator” is that in his desire to participate in the international arena he appropriates its dominant discourses to the detriment of addressing the actuality of the local condition and specific artistic practices (Supangkat 1996b, 9). Such arguments had been publicized already by other fellow curators from Southeast Asia who participated, along with

Supangkat, in the previous *Asia-Pacific Triennial* in 1993. As Thai curator Apinan Poshyananda suggested during the conference, Western centers of art continued to dictate the terms of the world's contemporary art and claims of ownership over what signifies as postmodern (Poshyananda 1993). In this relation, it can be concluded that postmodernism is no longer an emancipating but neo-colonizing discourse. In "What, Where, When," Supangkat similarly states:

Seeing how difference has been discussed both in the mainstream and the Third World, I came to realize that the effort to find a platform for discussing the world's contemporary art has resulted in another confrontation, misinterpretation and misunderstanding. This condition is an indicator that the contemporary art discourse has been trapped in the frame of *post avant-garde/post-modernity* (8).

Here Supangkat echoes a similar sense of frustration voiced by many of his critics over the BJIX three years before, in that it seemed to them as if he had forced a nominal shift onto *seni rupa kontemporer* as a means of accommodating the Indonesian situation to yet another foreign and dominant discourse. For example, Supangkat echoes Dermawan T.'s caution when he suggests that because of the pressure to conform to the dominant discourse dictated from the centers of art, "the Third World has never really had the opportunity to find (or understand) its own artistic development either within modern art, or now, within contemporary art."

It can be argued that in this last engagement with concepts of the postmodern, Supangkat articulates a condition that Robert Schwartz describes as "a painful existential condition" of an "imposed receptivity from the 'peripheries'" (quoted in Pratt 2002, 32).⁴⁷ It is a condition in which intellectuals and culture workers are

⁴⁷ Pratt makes use of Schwarz's notion of "imposed receptivity" or "being on the receiving end of an asymmetrical relation of diffusion," in suggesting conditions that play key roles in relational accounts of the nature and trajectories of modernity outside of Europe. One such condition is 'imposed receptivity', the other the "copresence of modernity's 'selves' and 'others'" (35).

required to respond to trends and ideas from abroad, produced in reference to different socio-cultural contexts. This situation, Schwartz continues, “deprives the society of the chance to create forms of self-understanding of its own making grounded in its own reality and history.”

Similarly, Nelly Richard (1992), also discussing the ways in which the postmodern discourse has been taken up by different interpretive communities in Latin America, underscores that no matter how much the postmodern discourse of a global culture may theorize the fragmentation and displacement of the center, thus suggesting its code open to translation, it “reaches the periphery patented by a metropolitan formula that generally promotes certain manipulations and inhibits others” (265). Mediated as it is by the “marks of authority”, it guarantees its association with the ‘Center’. Yet, it would be a mistake to dismiss postmodernism and the condition of postmodernity outright. In this regard, for some, such as Mary Louise Pratt (2000), the source of postmodernity is the process of decolonizing knowledge. Part of this process is the creation of an account of modernity that is both global and relational. Such accounts, according to Pratt, provide the referents for the term postmodern (22).

In addition, as historical assumptions of an authoritative referent are contested and the “metaculture” of Western modernity is translated, new “transcultural dialogues and formations are forged that no longer necessarily look to the old Western metropolitan ‘centers’ for legitimation or meaning” (Fisher and Mosquera 2005, 5). Although there may be agreement that old systems are no longer viable, the newly emergent ones may be enacted for different reasons and by different people. Their respective translations are partly contingent upon culturally specific ethics and morality of placing values on certain ideas and actions (Appadurai 1990; Appadurai 1996; Appiah 1997).

Conclusion

The BJIX and Supangkat's curatorial essay were highly important to the discourse of contemporary art in Indonesia. Not only did the event publicize artworks that conceptually dealt with or had as their theme socio-political issues. The catalog also provided 'theoretical legitimacy' for how such works of art would be discussed thereafter. Yet, the debate that ensued as well as the artists' own negative reactions to Supangkat's approach bring into further relief the fraught nature of and power relations inherent in processes of translating a dominant discourse associated with the West into a postcolonial Indonesian context.

Supangkat's apparent drive to assume a universal pattern of postmodernism in artistic practice did have its problems. Among which was manipulation of the artistic development itself to emphasize and push for certain types of work. Many of the works in the BJIX had already been exhibited that same year in the Asia Pacific Triennial (APT) and the artists selected by Supangkat as chief consultant for Indonesia. Alongside such works, Supangkat extended invitations to certain up and coming artists with the request that they make installation works. Installation was not only one of the most suitable means by which social commentary and social engagement in art took place. It was, according to Supangkat in 1994, inherently postmodern. This is because part of his definition of postmodernism in art are those works which no longer adhere to the aesthetic categories of (Western) modernism.

Nonetheless, the furor caused by the Biennale also helped fuel the flames for the further interest in such questions as to what postmodernism and contemporary art are, how to define installation art in an Indonesian context, as well as gave a boost to the growth of the alternative art scene that was then in its nascent stage of constructing its own infrastructure and audience. The exhibition apparently had a major impact on other artists who arrived to view the works. This was the case in regards to the

possibility of taking on socio-political themes as well as the pluralistic aesthetic approaches (Supriyanto 2007, 32). Hence, Supangkat, regardless of the problems inherent in his approach, can be seen also as one of the major enablers of a critical mode of contemporary art, or 'alternative' art.

CHAPTER THREE

PRE-1966 AND EARLY NEW ORDER PROPOSITIONS OF ART'S AUTONOMY

Sudjojono's Concept of New Artist, Artistic Responsibility and Artistic Freedom

In the visual arts, Sindudarsono Sudjojono (1914-1986) is considered by the Indonesian art world as a key *pemberontak* or rebel in the history of Indonesian modern painting of the early twentieth century; a position honed from an anti-colonialist opposition, the urgencies of war and necessities of revolution. Sudjojono's was also one of the first and lasting definitions of a modern artistic subjectivity and necessary autonomy.¹ In 1946, an anthology of his writings on art was published in a small book *Seni Lukis, Kesenian dan Seniman* (Painting, Art and Artist).² Through his writings, Sudjojono was the first of the colonial era painters to define in print what he

¹ Sudjojono was born in Kisaran, North Sumatra, and received his secondary education on the island of Java in which he received a Dutch (Western) education and was well read in European philosophy and literature. He was one of the founding members of and spokesman for PERSAGI (Persatuan Ahli-Ahli Gambar Indonesia, est. 1938), one of the first 'indigenous' art groups in Batavia (present day Jakarta). PERSAGI was a group of indigenous artists from particularly urban and/or well to do families. One of the main reasons for the creation of this group was to give space for the so-called native artist to exhibit and learn how to make art. There was no one ideological perspective that bound the group together but rather a shared desire to make art. He was also among a large number of artists and writers who joined the revolutionary government in fleeing Batavia to Yogyakarta where the king of the Javanese court turned over parts of his palace to become the seat of the revolutionary leadership, as well as gave space for the artists' communes or *sanggar*. Soon after, Sudjojono established his own *sanggar*, *Seniman Muda Indonesia* (Young Indonesian Artists, est. 1946) or SIM in Medun, close to Yogyakarta. For more in-depth discussions of Sudjojono's history, PERSAGI and the history of the *sanggar*, see Claire Holt, "The Great Debate," *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967b), Astri Wright, *Soul, Spirit and Mountain: Preoccupations of Indonesian Contemporary Artists* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992). See also Kusnadi, "Sedjarah Seni Rupa Indonesia Diterjemahkan Oleh Kusnadi Pada Seminar Ilmu Dan Kebudayaan Ugm Yogya, 1956," *Budaya* 9.4/5 (1960). for a list of *sanggar* and their members not included in Holt. The Claire Holt archive in the Special Collections of the Kroch Library, Cornell University, also contains invaluable first hand notes about and transcribed interviews with Sudjojono.

² This small book was republished in 1964 and again in 2000. None of the editions to date mention where these writings were published previously.

envisioned as a 'new artist' for a 'new Indonesia' based on the combined idea of a completely self-determining subjectivity and an art practice possessing a social mission. Not only is much of his ideal 'new artist' in response to colonialism and the influence of colonial desire on indigenous painting. He also rejects the dominance of Javanese court culture and traditions as the basis of a future Indonesian national culture/identity. His was also an argument against the ongoing East-West debate, which he contends should no longer be an issue.³

In as much as he was against the use of Javanese court culture and its 'golden age' of the past as a basis of Indonesian modern culture, he was not against employing certain of its concepts, combined with those of a western avant-garde romanticism, when discussing the finer goals of being a 'true' artist. According to Sudjojono, the ideal character of the 'new artist' is one capable of shouldering the burden of poverty and obscurity for the sake of making an offering to the *Dewi Kesenian* or the Goddess of Art, who will help the artist's genius soar (like the mythical Garuda) to unimagined heights of pure ecstasy. However, Sudjojono tempered this sensorial and spiritual ecstasy with his demand that the artist also take up social responsibility, one associated with a different religious and cultural background. For, in addition to the artist laying down one's life for pure, divine inspiration, the new artistic subjectivity is to be akin to the *walisongo*, the Javanese term for the nine *nabi* responsible for bringing the truth of Islam to Java.

³ This is in response to what has since come to be known as the *Polemik Kebudayaan* or series of arguments and rebuttals among writers associated with the Dutch publication for indigenous writers, *Poejangga Baroe*. See H.B. Jassin, "Sanusi Pane: Sintese Timur Dan Barat," *Kesusastraan Indonesia Modern Dalam Kritik Dan Esei [Indonesian Modern Literature in Criticism and Essay]*, ed. H.B. Jassin, vol. 1 (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1985), Achdiat Karta Mihardja, ed., *Polemik Kebudayaan* (Jakarta: 1954), Keith Foulcher, "*Pujangga Baru*": *Literature and Nationalism in Indonesia 1933-42*, vol. 2 (Flinders University Asian Studies, 1980), S.T. Alisjahbana, *Indonesia in the Modern World* (New Dehli: Office for Asian Affairs Congress for Cultural Freedom, 1961), S.T. Alisjahbana, *Revolusi Masyarakat Dan Kebudayaan Di Indonesia*, 5 ed. (Jakarta: Dian Rakyat, 1988).

If the artist has both the character and the courage to present his ideas to the world (like a gift), then he also will live according to the slogan of ‘truth and beauty’. This does not necessarily mean the production of beauty deemed acceptable or beautiful by prevailing tastes of the public at large, but what is aesthetically good according to the artist (Sudjojono 1946c, 4). The artist is to paint from his own sense of what he feels and thinks is beautiful: “a painting symbolizes the *Jiwo Ketok*” or the “human spirit which is manifested onto canvas making itself visible” (quoted in Sudarmadji 1974, 79). In this way, “good and truth are one and the same.”⁴ Such art is “made for the improvement of humanity in society” (Sudjojono 1946a, 52).

Employing elements of socialist, populist, as well as avant-garde rhetoric, Sudjojono saw the painter as a self-determining social agent whose complete artistic autonomy or freedom (*kebebasan*) was necessary in order to serve as a tool for the expression of truth: painting should be free from any one group “of moralizers” and political parties. It must be free from all “moral ties and traditions”. He suggests that morals may change, but not the goodness of a work of art (Sudjojono 1946c, 5-6). Related to the insistence on self-determination, the new artist must not entrench ‘himself’ in the old world, in outdated traditions, ideas, or in social hierarchies. In this way, artists no longer need make issue of what is by any standards considered East or West but to learn and take from what is positive from both in order to build a better future. Accordingly, points of reference for artistic production are not to be found in the lofty realm of the kings, or in those depopulated and romantic landscapes churned out for tourists, colonial nostalgia, and the elite native classes. Instead, the new artist is to paint the factory, the poor farmer, the cars of the rich, and the prostitute on the side of the paved road. “This is our reality,” and “this is where the new artist’s soul is to be

⁴ “kebagusan dan kebenaran ialah satu.”

located” (5). In this sense, then, the artist must identify with and live among the *rakyat* or common people and to paint them and for them.

His 1939 *Cap Go Mie* is one example of such a work, which demonstrates his expressive style and records a street festival scene. Instead of the visual rhetoric of the harmonious, seemingly empty landscape of what Sudjojono associates with a decadent European and elitist taste, the street scene that comprises *Cap Go Mie* bristles with energy both in the image itself and in the way the artist has painted it. It is peopled with referents of an urban crowd that culturally combines the traditional (style of dress, the *wayang kulit* going on in the background, dances, and the festival itself) and the modern (e.g., the wearing of sunglasses among the women, and men with ties). Typical of most of his work, Sudjojono deploys a non-linear format to his imagery, packing the scene with visual chaos that in this case reflects the chaotic yet optimistic atmosphere of an urban center. The tableau itself is enclosed by symbols of life and renewal in the potted plants that frame and foreground the scene within. Unlike the *Mooi Indies* style that he rejected so strongly, Sudjojono’s painting shows ‘life’, human beings in their very human states of being (Figure 3.1). Such was to serve as representations of the new beauty for the new art created by the new artist.



Figure 3.1 Sudjojono, *Cap Go Mie*, 1939, Oil on Canvas, (Claire Holt collection, Kroch Special Collections, Cornell University).

However, it was not enough to represent life in its exuberance or banality; the artist must also insist upon art's social mission and a strong ethical practice. As such, the new artist will protest and struggle against injustice, and will not shy away from boldly expressing those unpleasant, bitter feelings of the people. Thus, the artist is called to go against social decorum in which the expression of negative emotion is seen as sowing the seeds of disharmony (Sudjojono 1946c, 24). Sudjojono advocates the artist to support society, social justice, but never be afraid to go against the status quo for these very things.

Things, which have not been prearranged, are represented simply but correctly. Bad things are represented as bad. The painter does not run to the mountain in search of goodness, but instead to the city to show life around them. [...] All these things are represented as symbols of truth, in order to make a clear and good foundation for a new society that is to come (1946d, 65).⁵

From the above, the artist is given quite a unique role and profession as a self-determining subjectivity who is a part of yet *avant* society. An artist then has an important function as educator, barometer of the moral good, and justified critic.⁶ He must be morally just if not morally superior, and have empathy for the weak and disdain for the corrupt. As such, the artist is a humanist who struggles for absolute self-determination and fealty to the common people (*rakyat*) and the nation.

⁵ "Benda tak diatur digambarkan secara sederhana. Tetapi secara benar. Barang yang jelek digambar jelek. Pelukis ini tak lari ke gunung untuk mencari keindahan, tetapi di kota menunjukkan kehidupan di sekeliling mereka. [...] Digambarkan terang-terang semua itu sebagai lambang kebenaran, untuk membuat dasar yang terang dan bagus bagi masyarakat baru yang akan datang."

⁶ For more on the tradition (Islamic and pre-Islamic) of 'artist' or '*empu*' as critic in Javanese and Malay tradition see for example, Ben Anderson, "Cartoons and Monuments: The Evolution of Political Communication Under the New Order," in *Language and Power: Exploring Political Culture in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992): 63-71; Rendra, *The Struggle of the Naga Tribe (Play and Commentary)* (St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1979); Wright, *Sou, Spirit and Mountain: Preoccupations of Indonesian Contemporary Artists* (Singapore and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): 243-44.

Yet, Sudjojono's concept of artist and his idea of 'art' itself would have made sense only to a very small section of Indonesian society at the time: namely, the urban 'middle class' (from civil service families, Dutch educated). This meant that the artist possessed a separate form of identity, and revolutionary artists in particular belonged to a specialized group who viewed themselves as such. Sudjojono's conception of art was thus one that was simultaneously populist and elitist.

While most accounts of Indonesian art history view Sudjojono as the progenitor of the above ideas, he was also part of a dynamic cultural milieu in pre-war Jakarta. This included the influential ideas of Sutan Syahrir, a member of Indonesia's small, European educated intelligentsia at the time, and later national politician.⁷ Syahrir's intellectual horizons were predominantly European-oriented, while his cultural roots were Sumatran/Indonesian (See Sjahrir 1938; see also Bodden 1997b and 2002; Foulcher 1986 and 1987). He held a progressive concept of modernity and modernism in which the individual (whether capitalist or socialist) was to be in charge of creating his or her own history. As such, the artist and writer were to be free from the constraints of tradition and from any one political or religious doctrine and dogma. Syahrir's was a secular, anti-totalitarian, anti-communist, socialist-democratic vision

⁷ Sutan Syahrir (1906-1966) was a Batak from Sumatra. He was the uncle of the acclaimed modernist poet Chairil Anwar (1922-1949). In his writings, he maps out his cultural and aesthetic program, which distances new Indonesian cultural works from ancient cultural traditions which he contends are the productions of feudal society, and cannot therefore provide a template for a new socialist-democratic nation. See Syahrir's *Out of Exile* (New York: J. Day Company, 1949) and "Kesusastaan dan Rakyat," *Pundjangga Baroe* (1938): 17-30, both written during his exile in Banda, Aceh. In the latter, he stresses the educative role of the avant-garde (based on European literary models) as well as the artist as individual creator. He edited the newspaper *Siasat*, which was the publishing arm of the *Gelanggang* group (see above). Syahrir's ideas were highly influential in the sphere of literature and were echoed in the words of literary critics such as Sitor Situmorang and Trisno Sumardjo. See for example, Sitor Situmorang, "Fungsi Seniman Dalam Pertumbuhan Kebudayaan Indonesia," *Seni Rupa* 5 (1955a); Sitor Situmorang, "Pengaruh Luar Terhadap Sastra Indonesia Jang Terbaru," *Seni Rupa* 3 (1955b); Sumardjo, "Tjatatatan Masalah Kulturil-Aktip Dilapangan Kesenian." See also Keith Foulcher, "*Pujangga Baru*": *Literature and Nationalism in Indonesia 1933-42*; Keith Foulcher, "Literature, Cultural Politics, and the Indonesian Revolution," *Text/Politics in Island Southeast Asia*, ed. D.M. Roskies, vol. Monograph 91, Monographs in International Studies (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1993).

in which the unfettered artist/writer must attempt to renew Humanist values of good governance, social justice and basic human freedoms. From the above, we can see that although Sudjojono's conception of 'new artist' for a 'new Indonesia' is rather romantic, it also shares many things in common with Syahrir's approach and vision of a progressive Indonesian cultural production that in many ways was in critical response to colonial presence and control, as well as the ongoing debate over the relation between East and West among intellectuals and artists at the time.

Sudjojono was among a large number of artists who fled with the revolutionary government from Dutch occupied Batavia (Jakarta) to Yogyakarta in 1946. By that time his ideological leanings were decidedly Communist, viewing Communism as the ideal system for achieving social justice. By the early 1950s, art for Sudjojono was to serve to make people politically aware, and he thought social-realism best suited to the task.

However, even in Sudjojono's most realist mode, his paintings continue to demonstrate a highly expressive style. This is the case with his *Perusing a Poster* (Figure 3.2), which was painted some fifteen years after his call to artistic arms of his



Figure 3.2 Sudjojono, *Perusing a Poster*, c. 1956, 109x140 cm, Oil on Canvas (collection of Dr. Oie Hong Djien)

fellow ‘new artist’. Here, Sudjojono continues to paint ‘the people’ in their everyday existence, in this case as a montage of images of what are clearly representations of individuals. While their countenances are painted realistically, thus placing emphasis on the individual person, they are depicted in painted sketches, hurried brushstrokes, and the artist’s mental meandering in paint. The subject of the work is quite in keeping with the artist’s philosophy of painting the rituals of the everyday, as well as deploying art as a means of socio-political engagement. In *Perusing a Poster*, the group of seemingly alienated individual figures, while not directly interacting in the frame, is seen staring ostensibly at a poster, the general means by which politics and governmental policies were disseminated. The expression on their faces is serious.

Though the viewer is not privy to the poster's message, it is clearly a tense moment. According to Helena Spanjaard (2004), this work is a subtle means by which the artist voiced his concerns over the escalation of political tension during the fifties (53).

Sudjojono represents, here, a foundational figure in the history of 'Indonesian' modern art, particularly in his philosophy of the 'new artist' as examined above. His core values resonated with an overall social-egalitarian outlook that marked what many have called a 'Yogya camp'.

Lekra

The above conception of art practice is exemplified in the post-independence organization *Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat* (Organization of People's Culture) or Lekra, established in 1955 as the cultural branch of the Indonesian Communist party (PKI). While never possessing a coherent aesthetic program (Foulcher 1986),⁸ Lekra did promote a form of socially engaged art that was to be created for the *rakyat* and about their daily lived realities, often resulting in romanticized depictions in expressionist signature styles. Lekra's program found a partner in the newly established *Akademi Seni Rupa Indonesia* (The Indonesian Academy of Art) or ASRI, in Yogyakarta. Many of its predominately non-academically trained faculty were members of Lekra, including Sudjojono.⁹

⁸ Keith Foulcher's scholarship on both the Communist Party's cultural branch Lekra and its opposition in the *Manifes Kebudayaan* provides a relatively balanced discussion of both positions. Foulcher attempts to recuperate Lekra's project and dispel the myth of a prescribed socialist realism that, according to official history of this period, was supposedly its predominant aesthetic policy.

⁹ See particularly, Claire Holt's chapter "The Great Debate", 1967. See also, Helena Spanjaard, *Moderne Indonesische Schilderkunst (1938-1988): De Functie Van De Moderne Schilderkunst Voor De Ontwikkeling Van Een Indonesische Identiteit*, Art and Archaeology (Leiden: University of Leiden, KITLV, 1998), Sudarmadji, *Dari Saleh Sampai Aming: Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru Dalam Sejarah Dan Apresiasi (from Saleh to Aming: The New Indonesian Art in History and Appreciation)* (Yogyakarta: ASRI, 1974), Astri Wright, *Soul, Spirit and Mountain: Preoccupations of Indonesian Contemporary Artists* (Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), Sanento Yuliman, *Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru, Sebuah Pengantar [New Indonesian Painting, an Introduction]* (Jakarta: DKJ, 1976). For Lekra in relation to literature see Keith Foulcher, *Social Commitment in Literature and the*

Claire Holt (1967a) explains that the more socially oriented art and socialist ideology among primarily the ASRI-Lekra-Yogya camp underscored the artist's socialist concern for democratic systems of representation. They did not separate their artist's consciousness from their social conscience. "They would never say, 'The picture is the thing', but would insist that it has a social significance. The majority of Jogja's [now spelled Yogya, AKR] artists were or were trying to be, in this sense, moral men" (232). Art's moral mission was to demonstrate not the 'peasant's rage' but rather the artist's compassion for the peasant.

The above conceptions of a progressive and 'new art' were slightly different from one of the other streams of thought in revolutionary and post-independence Indonesia. Although sharing the common conviction that the revolution remained incomplete after the war as the social ideals that it promised had yet to materialize ("Sejarah Lahirnya Manifesto Kebudayaan" 1963), each group took their artistic projects in seemingly different directions.¹⁰

Gelanggang

The *Gelanggang* group, formed in Dutch-occupied Batavia in 1946 during the war for independence, comprised young writers and artists under the aesthetic leadership of maverick poet Chairil Anwar.¹¹ Similar to certain elements of

Arts: Indonesian 'Institute of People's Culture' 1950-65 (Melbourne: Ctr for SEA Studies Monash University, 1986); Martina Heinschke, *Angkatan 45. Literaturkonzeptionen Im Gesellschaftspolitischen Kontext. Zur Funktionsbestimmung Von Literatur Im Postkolonialen Indonesien* (*Angkatan 45: Literary Concepts in Socio-Political Context. On Determining the Function of Literature in Postcolonial Indonesia*), Veröffentlichungen Des Seminars Für Indonesische Und Südseesprachen Der Universität Hamburg (Published Thesis), vol. 18 (Berlin and Hamburg: Reimer, 1993)..

¹⁰ The idea of the incomplete cultural revolution in post-independence Indonesia was not new at that time. It dates back at least to the early 1950s in journals such as *Seni* and *Zenith*. See for example the writings of Trisno Sumardjo, fellow Manifesto Kebudayaan signatory, such as "Kedudukan Senilukis Kita," *Zenith*. Oct. (1953), and "Tjatan Masalah Kulturil-Aktip Dilapangan Kesenian," *Seni* 1 (1955).

¹¹ The artists and writers who founded the group in 1948 lived and worked in Jakarta and published their works and manifesto in the culture section of *Siasat* called *Gelanggang*, from which they also took their

Sudjojono's conception, the *Gelanggang* artists saw themselves "as the culture hero capable of living in accordance with their convictions, independently of societal approval and existing norms," and required complete autonomy in obeying "the call of his own inner thoughts and feelings" (Heinschke 1996, 150). However, the two perspectives differ in that the *Gelanggang* ideal seems to lack the exacting social mission that Sudjojono and the aesthetic program Lekra imparted to art. In their 1950 *Surat Kepercayaan* (Letter of Convictions), the *Gelanggang* group contended that they were the rightful heirs of the world's cultures and, as such, it was not their task to saddle their art to any one culture or tradition, nor to any national cause (Gelanggang 1950). This includes the styles of international modernism (Figure 3.3).

The main characteristics which grew out of this group and became the primary ideological premise of much of the next generation was an attention to the individual human condition, both in terms of moral and psychological growth, and such dilemmas were seen as universal issues of all humankind. The creative power of the

name. Ideologically, *Siasat* was socialist-democrat and under the guidance of Sutan Syahrir (see footnote 106 below). The group comprised of writers Asrul Sani, Rivai Apin (later a Lekra member), M. Balfas, and painters Baharudin, Henk Ngantung (later a Lekra member) and Mochtar Apin (the one painter from the Bandung Teacher's training college, later to become the Fine Arts Dept at ITB, Bandung).



Figure 3.3 Mochtar Apin, *Two Women*, 1963, 90 x 75 cm, Oil on canvas (Collection of Dr. Oie Hong Djien).

artist and technical and stylistic innovation were fully recognized and advocated (Foulcher 1993). They had envisaged their art as a positive force in the world via its very existence rather than being *about* or *for* anyone in particular.

The above discussion maps a series of different yet overlapping concepts of a modern artistic subjectivity and perspectives of what constitutes something of a ‘new

art' capable of being progressive and innovative. It suggests a conception of an 'alternative' mode of art that is very much a response to colonialism and the construction of the artist as an agent of decolonization and a positive force in the modern world. Yet, inasmuch as the above suggests the rise in the conception and expectation of individual artistic subjectivity, after independence cultural production was placed in the service of the new Indonesian state, giving visual art a role to play in the creation of something called 'Indonesia'. Much of the art discourse at the time focused on art and its methods of representation that aimed at maintaining collective cohesion. The socialization of the idea of the nation went hand in hand with the socialization of images. In this matrix of the social, cultural, national and local, communal and nationalist, painting remained the primary mode of artistic production in the visual arts.

The years between 1945 and 1959 proved to be the most dynamic in terms of the relationship between the arts discourse and the artist and 'his' position and the question of nation building. This is one of the reasons why this period is seen as the ideal of development for the social function of both art and artist in Indonesian history. By the end of the 1950s the basic differences between the aesthetic programs mapped above transformed into ideologically narrow camps. The growing gap between them is largely because national politics and cultural development were seen as part of the same project: that of nation building and the construction of a national culture/identity. As Wright (1993) explains, "artists with different approaches to defining 'modern', 'Indonesian', 'aesthetics' and the role of art and artists found themselves aligned in unprecedentedly separatist and warring factions" (Wright 1993, 194). After the Socialist Party, which had a European intellectual foundation combined with local cultural roots, was banned in 1961, the Communist Party or PKI had a political monopoly over the Left; thus leaving artists the choice between the Communist-led

camp and the religiously inclined right, with parts of the latter demanding an Islamic-inspired state.¹² The push for all cultural production to serve national politics eventually drove moderate socialist and liberal anti-totalitarian positions to call for a nonpolitical space for art.

Manifes Kebudayaan

In September of 1962, a group of artists and writers, primarily from the major cities on Java, came together to publicly call for art's autonomy from politics. They published their *Manifes Kebudayaan* (Cultural Manifesto) in the literary journal *Sastra*.¹³ The signatories and supporters of the manifesto were a heterogeneous group with certain things in common.¹⁴ Firstly, they were considered to be part of the still small 'middle' class intelligentsia (meaning from civil service families and usually Dutch educated high school graduates, and some with international study experience and degrees) in Indonesia. Secondly, they did not adhere to Marxist conceptions of class, nor did they promote or engage in the reengineering of society in terms of the poor and disadvantaged. Thirdly, they did not agree with the PKI and its political mandate over cultural production, or with the sloganism of Sukarno's stateism. Fourthly, they were anti-totalitarian. Finally, they found little in common politically or culturally with

¹²Most of those involved in the ideological debates over cultural and artistic production were not in favor of an Islamic state. Instead, they were predominantly secular Muslims, Catholics and Protestants. Although Indonesia comprises the world's largest Muslim population, it is not an Islamic state.

¹³ Here, I rely on a hard copy of both the *Manifes Kebudayaan* and *Penjelasan Manifes Kebudayaan* (1963) obtained from the HB Jassin Archive at the Taman Ismail Marzuki Cultural Center. Both of which have been printed in the journal *Sastra*.

¹⁴ For more regarding the particular points discussed in this paragraph, see for example, Keith Foulcher, *"the Manifesto Is Not Dead": Indonesian Literary Politics Thirty Years On*, Working Papers, ed. CSEAS (Monash University, 1994) 2; Gunawan Mohamad, "Peristiwa "Manikebu": Kesusatraan Indonesia Dan Politik Di Tahun 1960-an (the Issue of "Manikebu": Indonesian Literature and Politics in the 1960's," *Tempo* May 1988; Gunawan Mohamad, *The "Cultural Manifesto" Affair: Literature and Politics in Indonesia the 1960s; a Signatory's View*, Working Papers, vol. 45 (Monash: CSEAS Monash University, 1988); Gunawan Mohamad, "Afair Manikebu, 1963-1964," *Ekstopi: Tetang Kekuasaan, Tubuh Dan Identitas* (Jakarta: 2002).

those factions wanting an Islamic state. Most of them were drawn from what fellow signatory, Gunawan Mohamad, has suggested from the ‘young bohemians’ who pursued the ‘cult of the artist’ similar to that which emerged among the *Gelanggang* group two decades before (Mohamad 1973 and 1977).

As a defense of individualism against the sublimation of art and artist under politics, the *Manifes Kebudayaan* advocated a separation of artistic production from the sphere of politics. Yet, the call for the separation of the two spheres did not necessarily assume art’s separation from its social mission. According to the manifesto, art and politics refer to the same set of social functions and therefore should be integrated as equal but *separate* spheres into the nation building process. Additionally, according to the 1963 “Sejarah Lahirnya Manifes Kebudayaan” (The History of the Birth of the Cultural Manifesto), which followed shortly after the Manifesto’s publication, socialism promises art’s freedom (*kebebasan*) from both subordination under totalitarian regimes and politics, and bourgeois economic liberalism (30; see also Mohamad 1963). As such, a non-partisan artistic freedom is prerequisite in order that artists should be in a better position to participate in the nation building process as (politically independent) guides and witnesses, to help lead society in a new and healthy direction in completing what many had already deemed an incomplete social and cultural revolution.¹⁵ Like the early Sudjojono and others before them, they promoted a renewal of certain humanist ideals such as social justice, morality, and ethics, and the modernist assumption of a self-determining art and individual insofar as these were not naturally affiliated with politics.

¹⁵ For a discussion on this point in the arts, see for example, Tisno Sumardjo, “Tjatan Masalah Kulturil-Aktip Dilapangan Kesenian,” *Seni* 1 (1955): 17-21.

This does not mean that aesthetic criteria and rules should not apply. An art object does and cannot exist according to the laws of art itself while also serving society by integrating the lives and realities of that society into its content. If this balance is not met, the result is either aestheticism of the ivory tower or political propaganda ("Sejarah Lahirnya *Manifes Kebudayaan*" 1963). The question is who holds the authority to determine the criteria by which art is to be gauged. As the following chapters will show, such issues weighed just as heavily on the deeply invested practices of the 1980s and 1990s as they did on the various modes of socially engaged and committed artistic practices of the 1950s and 1960s. Such issues and questions would lead to structural changes in the work of art itself and the 'work' that art does.

In its time and moment, the *Manifes Kebudayaan* was labeled imperialist, anti-revolutionary and anti-nationalist by both President Sukarno and the Communists. Its ideological argument for art's political neutrality had no place in the construction of the nation and national culture at the time.¹⁶ This suddenly changed with the killing of leading generals on September 30, 1965 (the so-called GESTAPU), which was blamed on the Communist faction in the military as an attempted coup, and the subsequent physical and ideological purge of the Indonesian Communist Party (1965-66).¹⁷ This

16 Soon after its publication of the *Manifes Kebudayaan*, the journal *Sastra* was banned, and certain of its signatories were fired from their posts and their work was banned.

17 Many artists and writers who were Communist Party members, and unknown numbers of those nominally affiliated with it were either killed or imprisoned without trial, some for over a decade. Much of their work has been destroyed or lost and except for a few well-known cases, most of their histories have been lost as well. In this regard, Holt's *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* (1967) and her visual archive housed in the Special Collections at the Kroch Library at Cornell University becomes all the more important to the history of Indonesian modern art of that period. Astri Wright has also written about some of these artists, including Hendro Gunawan and Joko Pekik. See Astri Wright, "Painting People," *Modern Art of Indonesia: Three Generations of Painters*, ed. Joseph Fischer (Jakarta: 1991a), Wright, *Soul, Spirit and Mountain: Preoccupations of Indonesian Contemporary Artists*, Astri and Agus Dermawan T. Wright, *Hendra Gunawan: A Great Modern Indonesian Painter* (Singapore: Archipelago Press, 2001).

was also the beginning of the end for Sukarno's regime, thereafter called the "Old Order", ushering in the "New Order" under the command of General Suharto who wrested presidential power from Sukarno effectively in 1966.

Aesthetic and Cultural Policy and the New Order's Neo-traditionalism

The transition from the so-called Old (1949-1967) to the New Order (1966-1998) entailed the abandonment of a radical anti-Western nationalism and socialist ideology and a move toward a pro-Western focus on *pembangunan* (development) and *modernisasi* (modernization). The new goals of national development were reflected in the statement of "formation or development of life that is both progressive and cultured" (Taryadi 1974).¹⁸ According to the 1973 and 1978 official documents on national cultural policies, to be both progressive and cultured meant a nation that is modern, technologically advanced, but still in possession of strong roots in traditional culture and spiritually grounded (Departmen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan D 1973 and 1985; see also Departmen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan 1992; Pemberton 1994b, 154). In other words, national development was linked to the development of national culture and identity.

National culture, identity, and unity were stressed over and against the vast social, economic, religious, and ethnic diversity and inequality in the country; all of which was seen as potentially destabilizing. This entailed a quasi-ban on references to class and social division, the emergence of and conflict among which were blamed on the political parties of the Old Order and the Communist party (Raillon 1985; Robinson 1992 and 1981). Raillon suggests that the New Order proposed an image of society in which different social groups collaborated to ensure the better functioning

¹⁸ "mewujudkan kehidupan yang maju serta berbudaya."

of society that then better enables the processes of development (Raillon 1985, 208-209).¹⁹ In addition, in order to serve national stability and unity, and to disarm its disruptive political potential, the ‘ethnic’ was “replaced by the larger and more constructed category of regional culture” (Jurriens 2001, 44; see also Departmen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan 1992; Rath 1997; Taylor 1994). In addition to sublimating the supposed negative influences from within, both the 1974 and 1978 official documents on cultural policies also state that regional cultures were expected to provide a sense of national unity and identity in the face of foreign influences brought by economic development (Departmen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan 1973 and 1985; Soebadio 1985). This began a new celebration of conservative, hierarchical values of tradition, particularly those of the Javanese court (Hatley 1993; Hellman 2003; Pemberton 1994a). Traditional culture in this context served as a series of emblems of national security and stability; emblems that then became part of government officialdom and ceremony (Geertz 1990).

Such a policy of neo-traditionalism and the glossing over of ethnic, social, and class differences within the framework of development and national stability was part of what Michael Bodden explains as the New Order’s “hegemonic ‘art of living’ [referring to Bourdieu, AKR] – its carefully constructed rules of taste and judgment regarding not only aesthetics but social behavior as well” (Bodden 1997a, 269). Martina Heinschke describes the aesthetic program and the shifting meaning of artistic

¹⁹ Raillon further explains that reference to class was quasi-banned from the socio-political vocabulary. However, the concept of a middle class takes on prominence in the 1980s, particularly in its role as a force for democratic and liberal reform. Although social divisions could be blamed on the Communist party, the anti-communist massacres were not interpreted in terms of class struggle but more as moral retribution by the popular masses against the overstepping or transgressing of social boundaries and the treason of the PKI. The trauma of the early years of the New Order then included nostalgia for an ideal order of mythical cohesion of the past, and the idealization of *gotong royong* (communal cooperation and representation by consensus) that supposedly took place in village communities.

autonomy that came to prominence during the first decade of New Order Indonesia, which helped to construct as well as to serve dominant ‘taste’, as follows:

During the first decade of the New Order, the idea of the autonomy of art was the unchallenged basis for all art production considered legitimate. The term [autonomy] encompasses two significant assumptions. First, it includes the idea that art and/or its individual categories are recognized within society as independent sub-systems that make their own rules, i.e. that are not subject to influences exerted by other social sub-systems (politics and religion, for example). Secondly, it entails a complex of aesthetic notions that basically tend to exclude all non-artistic considerations from the aesthetic field and to define art as an activity detached from everyday life... (Heinschke 1996, 2)

As mentioned before, by the early 1960s art had lost some of its varied positions regarding art’s autonomy particularly in the sense of its self-determination under the pressures of a Communist cultural policy. Art during the first years of the New Order had quickly taken on a certain ideology of autonomy, that is, autonomy as being *set apart*. Previously seen by many during the revolutionary and nationalist period as the possession of ‘the people’ in general, art in the New Order becomes the ideological purview of ‘high’ culture.²⁰ After Suharto came to power in 1966, the aesthetic program associated with the *Manifes Kebudayaan*, namely the separation of the sphere of art from that of politics, became the primary ideological basis of the cultural institutions including the academies and cultural and intellectual journals for over two decades. This ideology came to be associated with *Angkatan 66* to denote the generation of intellectuals and students who had won the ideological battle with the advent of the New Order.²¹ With the loss of the Communist party so too was the Left

²⁰ The category of ‘high’ can be further differentiated in that high culture encompasses both modern art and classical art. Although taking shape much earlier as discussed above, the split between high and low was indeed part of the New Order’s gentrification and rise in middle class.

²¹ Those responsible for helping to bring down Sukarno’s regime through weeks of demonstrations came to be known as the *Angkatan 66* (Generation of 1966), a group of upper to middle class students and other

in general as a viable counter discourse truncated. As Wiratmo Soekito, the main author of the *Manifesto Kebudayaan*, stated in 1973: "It is not just Communism and the Communist Party that has been outlawed, but also its socialist ideology. The state cannot and will not accommodate alternative or oppositional ideologies" (18-19). While institutionally never fully realized during the New Order and artists had to continuously negotiate and at times struggle with state power and various forms of governmental and social interferences, an aesthetics of autonomy did come to prevail as the *legitimate* ideology of art.

As part of this new aesthetic order, academy curricula were centralized, while the concept and image of modern art in Indonesia took on more of the trappings of anti-Communist Cold War ideology promoted through an international modernism. The history and theory of western modern art became more prominent. Students were taught the historical context of the pre-66 art discourse distinctly from only one side of the ideological wars. As Wright (1993) observes, "Art with any overtones of populist solidarity or humanist empathy with suffering people was seen as being synonymous with communist propaganda" (194). It should not be surprising, then, that after 1966 abstraction and decorative styles come to dominate the scene even at ASRI in Yogyakarta, the former stronghold of an Indonesian 'painting the people' art. As discussed above, these styles came to serve as the 'official aesthetic' of New Order

intellectuals (including artists and writers) who took to the streets between late 1965 and early 1967 in a series of ever increasing demonstrations in Jakarta. David Hill has written on how several of these students and intellectuals, including some of the signatories of the *Manifesto Kebudayaan*, such as writer and intellectual Gunawan Mohamad, came to occupy key positions in the New Order civilian hierarchy, and were among the first generation of the *Dewan Kesenian Jakarta* (Jakarta Arts Council at TIM, see Chapter One). See David Hill, "Mochtar Lubis: The Artist as Cultural Broker in New Order Indonesia," *RIMA* 21.1 (1987); David Hill, "The Two Leading Institutions: Taman Ismail Marzuki and Horison," *Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia*, ed. Virginia Matheson Hooker (Kuala Lumpur: oxford University Press, 1995).

Indonesia, combining an ideal image of modernity, order, harmony, beauty, with elements of traditional culture in motif.

While their instructors insisted on the promise that art had a space of its own, or *kebebasan kesenian* or artistic freedom, such beliefs were taught in what many students during the 1970s, and after, described as an authoritarian way (Marianto 2001; Supangkat 1979). In addition, students were also expected to copy the styles of their instructors. As such, the art academies were unable to adequately respond to changes taking place outside of their respective campuses.

Understandably, this would make developing an artistic practice of resistance aligned with social activism a difficult if not a dangerous proposition. However, Bodden (1997a) underscores that:

[The] dominant New Order ‘taste’ and the system of social and political practices which it authorizes are hardly uncontested. The socialist, egalitarian ideas which took deep root in the nationalist movement as well as in Sukarno-era rhetoric have created a social discourse of legitimation not easily erased by the New Order’s pragmatic, capitalist development. These ideas were further developed during the New Order by the anti-Sukarno student activists of 1966 and their successors in the universities, who combined the socialist ideas of the nationalist leader, Sutan Syahrir (including egalitarianism and an activist state), with Western notions of rational development (269).

This ‘clash of discourses and the practices they authorize,’ along with the shifting sands of artistic autonomy helped to create the key conditions that made the emergence of *pemberontakan* or rebellion/revolt in the arts possible. It brought to the fore not only the tension between autonomy as ‘self-determination’ and autonomy as being ‘apart’. The rebellion was part of the debate over the uses of culture in the New Order as legitimating elements of national culture.

CHAPTER FOUR

SENI PEMBERONTAKAN OR THE ART REBELLION IN THE 1970S

In this chapter, I am interested in *pemberontakan* or rebellion as a crucial mechanism in the development of contemporary art in Indonesia. As discussed above, the history of *pemberontakan* in visual art in Indonesian has been written mainly by Jim Supangkat (b. 1948). In other words, its history has been written through the lens of one who had been intimately involved in the rebellions as a co-founder of the group *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* or New Art Movement (*GSRB*) active between 1975 and 1979. As explained in Chapter Two, to a large extent the art rebellions had been articulated as a listing of names and events, and a brief description of aims, which were: to expand the field of art and to recuperate art's supposed intimacy with the social. This allegedly required the recuperation of one's traditions as well as creating new types of work and artistic practice. As I discuss below, such intentions were at times easier to envision than to carry out.

In most discussions of the *pemberontakan*, its written discourse is largely ignored except with what have become decontextualized quotes that travel from one text to another like floating topoi. An exception to this sort of work are the structurally similar texts by Asikin Hasan and Brita Miklouho-Maklai. Both trace the sequence of exhibitions and map the key claims of the artists and the main arguments between two of Indonesia's most prominent art critics, one in support of and the other against the new art. In his Masters Thesis, "Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia" from FSRD-ITB, Hasan (1992) provides something of a recounting of the events with a series of photocopied original documents in appendixes. While containing literally identical data, Miklouho-Maklai, in *Exposing Society's Wounds: Some Aspects of*

Contemporary Indonesian Art Since 1966 (1991) stresses artistic intent of socially engaged work and tries to place this in context to current political climate. Her work remains a standard text for English readers of contemporary art in Indonesia.¹ Therein, the author maps mainly the exhibitions of *GSRB* and *Kepribadian Apa?*, and these mainly through press clippings. In this way, her text also underscores what John Clark has argued regarding reading the avant-garde in Asia, gauging how influential the new art movement has been in any one art world often resides in the media and official reaction to the works of art (J. Clark 1998, 226).

My present discussion contributes to the discourse in that I critically read typically underrepresented aspects from the archive of written texts that surrounded, preceded, and often attempted to explain it. In so doing, I often read artistic intent against this larger context. It entails examining aspects of dissent that, while not completely ignored, generally have been underrepresented in the standard versions, including the specifics and weight of ideas from the written archive. In addition, I maintain a constant relation between the rebellion and its dependence on the very system that it wished to criticize and distance itself. This chapter deals specifically with the collision of aesthetic ideologies and discourses, and the types of works they authorized from within the institutions of art, primarily that of TIM and the art academies on the island of Java, particularly the *Akademi Seni Rupa Indonesia* (the Art Academy of Indonesia) or ASRI in Yogyakarta, and the *Fakultas Seni Rupa dan*

¹ Miklouho-Maklai's work, while remaining largely positioned from within artistic intent against the hegemonic official aesthetic, also maps the heated exchange between the senior Kusnadi, at that time DKJ member, painter, art critic, and staunch modernist, and the younger Sudarmadji, an ASRI graduate, critic and supporter of new art. However, Miklouho-Maklai's text is mainly a list of attributes, events, intentions, and works. It is the most comprehensive English-language text on the subject to date. See also Brita Miklouho-Maklai, "New Streams, New Visions: Contemporary Art since 1966," *Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia*, ed. Virginia Matheson Hooker (Oxford, Singapore, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Desain at the *Institut Teknologi Bandung* (the Faculty of Fine Art and Design at the Institute of Technology in Bandung) or FSRD ITB.²

Artists engaging in the rebellion, and calling for reforms within arts education were participants in the debate over national cultural identity and art's role in its construction. They did not reject the idea of a national culture, but rather, borrowing from John Clark (1998) regarding an Asian avant-garde', entered into the ongoing ideological debate "about the authority to choose what is relevant to a local discourse's needs" (J. Clark 1998, 225).

Desember Hitam and the Discourse of the Pesta Seni 74

I have repeatedly pointed to the important role that institutions play in disseminating official aesthetic and standards of 'serious' and 'good' art, distinguishing art that serves the good of the nation and that which does not, and that instills notions of artistic freedom and responsibility. One of the primary means of disseminating these aspects of a New Order 'art of living' was the institution of the *Pameran Besar Seni Lukis Indonesia* (The Grand Painting Exhibition of Jakarta), organized by the DKJ (see Chapter One).

The second *Pameran Besar* was held at TIM between 18 and 31 December, 1974. It was part of the larger national *Pesta Seni 74* (Art Festival '74), which also encompassed the annual art seminar, *Seni Rupa Indonesia Masa Kini* (Art in Indonesia Today), and the annual literary congress. 81 artists participated, with 240 painting and sculptural works in all. Works by the older or senior artists over the age of 36, including some former and current members of the DKJ, were exhibited in a space

² Prior to the opening of the *Institut Kesenian Jakarta* (Jakarta Art Institute) or IKJ in 1977, the nation had two art academies on Java, namely ASRI (est. 1950), now the *Institut Seni Indonesia* or the Institute of Art Indonesia (ISI) and FSRD-ITB (est. 1947).

separate from those of the younger artists. Among the younger artists were ITB student Nyoman Gunarso (1944), and ASRI students Bonyong Munni Ardhie (1946), FX Harsono (1949), Hardi (1951), Nanik Mirna (1951), Siti Adiyati (1951), and Sudarisman (1948). These younger artists exhibited collages and other forms of mixed media, two-dimensional works that did not neatly fit into the conventional category of painting (Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1 View of ‘unconventional’ work by unknown artist, *Pameran Besar*, silk screened prints on canvas and wooden box, 1974. Illus. in *Taman Ismail Marzuki 25 Tahun*. This work, unconventional for the time in its format, material and nude imagery, was hung next to paintings rendered in more accepted styles of abstract expressionism.

While such types of work had already been exhibited in lesser venues (not many) and at TIM, it had not yet been acknowledged as legitimate for a national exhibition designed to represent national artistic identity. In addition, in the eyes of the establishment students were *belum matang* (not yet mature) artistically. Mature artists make serious art, and serious art is good art; good art follows established rules of

painting and sculpture. The DKJ jury dismissed their work as merely experiment for experiment's sake, *main-main* (child's play, not serious), too reliant on current foreign trends, and hence did not meet the criteria of what signifies as good art for a national exhibition. The five awards for best painting went to senior artists on the grounds of 'originality' and 'beauty'. The works that won were decorative or abstract in style, and demonstrated the artist's individual signature styles that had not changed much since the late 1960s.

On closing day ceremonies (31 December), the five participating ASRI students – Bonyong, Hardi, Harsono, Purnama, and Ardyati – joined nine other participants in staging the *Desember Hitam* (Black December) protest. They sent a funeral wreath to the awards ceremony that read “Ikut berduka cita atas kematian seni lukis kita” (condolences on the death of Indonesian painting). They also attempted to hand out their *Pernyataan Desember Hitam* (Black December Proclamation) bearing each of their signatures before they were forced out of the room.³ The *Pernyataan* read:

Remembering that for some time now, art and cultural activities have been carried out without a clear cultural strategy, we therefore draw the conclusion that those entrepreneurs in cultural art (pengusaha seni budaya) who produce high culture show not even the slightest insight into the most fundamental problems of our culture. This is a sign that a spiritual erosion has for many years been destroying the development of cultural art. Because of this, we therefore feel it necessary in this black month of December of 1974 to declare our stand regarding the apparent tendencies in recent forms of painting in Indonesia.

1) That the diversity in painting in Indonesia is something that cannot be denied. However, such an array does not in itself demonstrate a good development.

³ Abdul Hadi WM, Adri Darmadji Daryono, Bahrudin Marasutan, Bonyong Munni Ardhi, D.A. Peransi, Hardi, Haris Purnama, FX Harsono, Ikranegara, Muryoto Hartoyo, Nanik Murni, Jurmad, Juzwar, Siti Adiyati, and Sulebar.

- 2) That for a type of development that would ensure the perpetuation of our culture, painters are called upon to bring spiritual guidance that is grounded in values of humanism, and oriented toward the social, cultural, political and economic realities of life.
- 3) That creativity is a God given nature of painters, who must take the necessary steps to achieve new perspectives of Indonesian painting.
- 4) That with this, the identity of painting in Indonesia is in itself clear in terms of its existence.
- 5) That which has hindered the development of Indonesian painting for far too long is the obsolete concepts that are still adhered to by the 'establishment', by entrepreneurs in culture, and already established artists. For the sake of saving Indonesian painting it is time to give our respects to this establishment, namely to bid farewell to those who were once engaged in the battle for cultural art (reproduced in Hasan 1992, Appendix 5).⁴

While in most writings that deal in one way or another with the art rebellions of the 1970s, the above *Pernyataan* is usually taken as given, particularly as an indictment of the lack of a clear cultural strategy in the development of Indonesian modern art that was 'too reliant on Western models'.⁵ However, little attention has been paid to the import of the list of signatories or to the statement's overall rhetoric, and this in relation to the larger ongoing discourse against New Order aesthetics. Aside from the ASRI students as well as ASRI graduate and collage artist Muryoto Hartoyo (1943), the list of signatories of the Black December group also consisted of poets, writers, and theater playwrights and actors. Some of them, such as poet Ikranegara, and filmmaker and painter, D.A. Peransi (1939-1993), were members of *angkatan 66*. Peransi was also among the first membership of the DKJ at TIM. From artists' statements after the fact, it is likely that the ASRI students did not necessarily have a hand in writing the entirety of the *Pernyataan* and some, such as Bonyong,

⁴ For the Indonesian version of *Pernyataan*, see Appendix 1.

⁵ Supangkat, for example, typically isolates this passage as forerunner to the sentiments put forward by the *GSRB*.

claimed that they did not really grasp the meaning of what they were signing.⁶ By this, he meant that they had not realized the ramifications of doing so, as well as did not fully understand the ideas therein. Regardless, they were willing participants in a much larger protest.

As the present discussion will show, the sentiment behind *Pernyataan* was, on the one hand, one of dissent that had been brewing in the art world for the past few years. On the other hand, it echoes ideas about art and artist that demonstrate a line of continuity with past sentiments regarding the relationship between the artist as individual ‘creator’ and art’s social mission, as well as the modern artist’s relationship to traditional culture and hierarchies.

Such ideas and counter-arguments were reflected in the seminar “Seni Lukis Indonesia Masa Kini” (Indonesian Painting Today) held in conjunction with the *Pameran Besar* on 21 December, ten days prior to the *Desember Hitam* event. The main theme of the seminar was the question of what signifies as ‘Indonesian’ art, the major obstacles in achieving it, and the problem of Westernization of the art field (Dewan Kesenian Jakarta 1974, 171-213). A primary argument put forward was that an Indonesian artistic identity was greatly in doubt, largely because it was too much the slave or too influenced by Western art history and theory, and an imbalanced support for ‘high’ traditional cultural forms. This condition excluded many forms of cultural production that would otherwise give substance to an ‘Indonesian’ art.

It would seem that the *Desember Hitam*, and later manifestations discussed below, reflects many of the themes put forward in that seminar, most particularly those broached by American (Cornell University) trained ITB faculty member, Sujoko, in

⁶ Interview with Bonyong, August, 2002, Yogyakarta.

his presentation *Kita juga Punya Romantic Agony* (We too have Romantic Agony).⁷ His argument against ‘romantic agony’ should be read in conjunction with his earlier remonstrations of modern art in Indonesia in his 1973 “Masalah-Masalah dalam Seni Modern Indonesia” (Problems in Modern Art in Indonesia). In this piece, he argues that there had yet to be a modern Indonesian art because it demonstrated little relation to the cultural reality lived by most Indonesians at the time; a population that was still largely rural or village. Accordingly, the only ‘authentic’ Indonesian art was that which was lived, produced and enjoyed by the masses of people in these highly diverse, yet collective, communities throughout the nation.

The same is true in “Romantic Agony”, in which Sujoko derides what had become a romanticized overblown idea of artist, yet also supported the recuperation of the lower class traditions. Here, he accuses artists of arrogance, of feeling themselves superior in sensibility and therefore ‘needed by society’. In expressing one’s own personal emotions and in styles difficult for anyone but an elite class to understand, artists placed themselves above society itself. Such self-interest placed the artist in the position of guide and teacher to the ignorant rather than the artist being guided by the needs and interests of society. Traditional art, on the other hand, was more egalitarian and, therefore, should serve as the basis of an ‘Indonesian’ art. Yet, and perhaps in response to those aspects that had been taken up as ‘official’ culture, he argues that it is not enough to refer to those most *agung* or noble forms of the court traditions as the site of Indonesian values. Art had a function only if it was contextual. He suggests that in-depth research needed to be done about traditions that are typically denigrated,

⁷ This article was published shortly after the Jakarta seminar in the culture journal *Budaya Djaya*, VIII, No. 81 (1975), 192-203, and was repeated in a presentation at ASRI the following month. “Nilai budaya Indonesia sebagai sumber inspirasi” (Indonesian cultural values as a source of inspiration) was the topic of discussion organized to accompany the ASRI’s 25 year anniversary celebrations.

belittled or ignored by the dominant aesthetics as a way of developing cultural values which have a mental, intellectual, spiritual, and ethical 'Indonesian' character.

As will be shown in the remainder of the dissertation, such ideas were never resolved and often resurfaced in a number of artistic projects and discussions. Yet, Sujoko's position requires further differentiation in that it is embedded in the long-standing ideology of social egalitarianism repeatedly underscored here, as well as represents a kind of neo-traditionalism.⁸ Sujoko's neo-traditionalism, itself the product of modernity, is not one that assumes the forms of the past but the 'traditional culture' of the majority of Indonesians who are poor and agrarian; traditions that he argues are still alive and just as much a part of Indonesian modernity as the modern artist. However, in one important factor he does assume the values of 'past' in that he argues that 'art objects' among such elements of society have 'traditionally' been one in which the idea of 'artist' had no use in reference to individual subjects. Referring to traditional notions of what he calls 'art', art was a skill not an object.⁹ In this sense, Sujoko's neo-traditionalist' stance is located not in the "content or style that can be marked as tradition as such" but in "the discursial and social aims of its motivation..." (J. Clark 1997, 75).

While selected aspects of Sujoko's arguments regarding the recuperation of traditional forms of cultural production of the lower (or at least not court) classes did appear to have a major impact on some in the burgeoning dissent in the art world, it

⁸ For a different interpretation of modes of the 'Neo-traditional' in Asian modern art, see John Clark, "Modern Asian Art: Its Construction and Reception," *Asian Contemporary Art Reconsidered* (Japan Foundation, 1997) 71-87.

⁹ For a discussion of this traditional idea of art as skill in regards to Sujoko's concept of egalitarian artistic production, see Moelyono, "Sebuah Proses Seni Rupa Kagunan (a Process of Kagunan Art)," *Dialog Seni Rupa* 5 & 6.11 (1991). For an English translation of certain aspects of his argument see Moelyono, "Seni Rupa Kagunan: A Process," trans. Paul Tickell, *Imagining Indonesia: Cultural Politics and Political Culture*, eds. Jim Schiller and Barbara Martin-Schiller, #97 ed., Monographs in International Studies, Southeast Asia Series (Athens, OH: Ohio University Center for Intl Studies, 1997).

would also seem that opposition to artists' 'romantic agony' did not. At least it seems that some artists were reluctant to see themselves included in such accusations. As we can see in the *Pernyataan Desember Hitam* proclaimed ten days after the seminar, the artist takes a singularly central position as one with a 'God given calling' to bring spiritual renewal to the art arena which had stagnated under the jealous guardianship of an older generation and the commercialization of art and cultural production. In this, the *Pernyataan* demonstrates continuity with a romanticized notion of artist rearticulated pejoratively by Sujoko as 'Romantic Agony'. Yet, certain elements of *Pernyataan* also point to D.A. Peransi's own philosophy of art as a correction to modern art's ills that he formulated by as early as 1972/73 in which he does not forfeit the role of artist as creator.

Peransi, among the older artists involved in *Desember Hitam*, was a former DKJ member as well as one of the presenters alongside Sujoko in the seminar. In his presentation "Lee? Levi? Amco? Texwood?" he advocates a 'return' to the spiritual foundations of artistic creativity over and against the dehumanizing demands of the still developing art market and the instrumentalization of human creativity by the forces of modernity and capitalism (Peransi 1974).¹⁰ An abstract painter and later documentary film maker, and trained in both Indonesia and the Netherlands in philosophy and social theory, he borrows from, among others, the Frankfurt School's distrust of the democratization of art and the erosive force of the cultural industry on art. In this regard, he maintains a fundamental opposition between art and rationality, between the 'serious' artist and the 'entrepreneur'.¹¹ Peransi, at least in his writings on

¹⁰ His presentation repeats much of what he argues in his exhibition catalogues and newspaper articles between 1973 and 1974. See also his seminar paper given at the 1975 seminar for the Biennale entitled "Merasa Aman dengan apa yang Sudah ada Adalah Ancaman Bagi Kebudayaan [Feeling Secure with what already is is a Threat to Culture]"

¹¹ By that time, the art market was beginning to develop beyond primarily a tourist trade and governmental commissions. It was not until the 1970s, with the opening up of the national economy to foreign capital,

painting, gives little or no attention to the socio-political or socio-economic issues in art or art's social mission.¹²

From the above, we can see a connection between his philosophy of art and certain aspects of past conceptions of art and artist. He, like the *Gelanggang*, believed the aesthetic way of thinking was a counter and even corrective to what he perceived as an increasing functionalism in Indonesian society. Quoting from Heinschke regarding *Gelanggang* literature, art was seen as “best suited to strengthen the position of the individual in society and counterbalance the impact of technology, rigid norms, and power structures” (Heinschke 1996, 152). Peransi's aesthetic approach and that declared in the *Desember Hitam Pernyataan* argue that the artist's spiritual calling is to rectify such a situation. This places the artist in a superior position in which the creative process is paramount.

Similar to arguments put forward in his writings, the artist as singular creator with a God given calling is given a high degree of moral authority in *Pernyataan*. Yet, the spiritual and moral calling of the artist should not be taken as a claim confined to the aesthetic sphere, but as also tapping into a rich tradition in Indonesian activism. However, with New Order assumptions of limited artistic freedoms under an enforced ‘autonomy’, artist-as-moral-conscience had to be reinvented ideologically and formally, using different modes of representation.

and the emergence of large private corporate bodies, that a shift in patronage began to take shape from state and state institutions as the primary patron to an emerging middle class collecting and private galleries attached to banks and hotels.

¹² This is somewhat puzzling as Peransi trained as a documentary filmmaker in the Netherlands, and most of his films dealt with controversial subjects such as corruption and politics. However, in his discussions of painting and his conception of his own art, he takes a fairly opposite view, arguing that art should be nothing other than the product of pure spontaneity.

New Tradition of Dissent in ASRI

While there was little repercussion for the *non-student* artists for their participation in staging *Desember Hitam*, this was in stark contrast to the reactions from the Ministry of Culture and Education in Jakarta, and the ASRI administration and faculty regarding the students' participation. The proclamation and more specifically the students' involvement was thought by some in the ASRI faculty to be a personal attack on them, particularly in calling for the old guard to retire. The students' actions were condemned as *kurang sopan* (rude), *kurang ajar* (uneducated, ignorant), and *tidak biadab* (uncivilized), all concepts associated with ideas of decorum, acting responsibly, and 'knowing one's place'.¹³ The committee responsible for interrogating the students was led by Abas Alibasyah, who was then the Rector of ASRI, held a post in the Directorate General of Culture within the Ministry of Education and Culture, was a member of the DKJ-TIM, as well as was one of the artists awarded prizes in the Grand Painting exhibition in question (Figure 4.2)

¹³ On one level, the faculty's response can be viewed within framework of traditional Javanese conceptions of decorum and teacher/student relations. The students behaved in a *kurang sopan* and *kurang ajar* manner. While this literally means that their actions were rude and ignorant, these have a deeper meaning in Javanese society to categorize the actions of a person as *tidak diadab* or acting in an arbitrary and uncivilized manner. It denotes a person who is too immature or not yet 'formed' enough to know their proper place in society and, hence, cannot act accordingly for the sake of social harmony.



Figure 4.2 Abas Alibasyah, *Boy and Bird*, 1963, Oil on Canvas, 66 x 66 cm, (Collection of Dr. Oie Hong Djien). The work is an example of the artist's abstract, decorative style favored by the jury and part of the prevailing official aesthetic at the time.

To Alibasyah, and others of the faculty, the protest also smelled of political rancor in its implied attack on the direction of national culture in Indonesian art. According to Alibasyah (1975), “artists should not associate themselves or their work with such socio-political issues. These should be left to the ‘experts’. Combining art and politics is a dangerous thing to do” (Staff 1975). Soon after the protest, he was summoned before Ali Sidikin, the then governor of Jakarta, to answer for the students’

actions. The Ministry of Education and Culture also sent a representative to the ASRI campus to underscore the government's policy. The very fact that the Governor of Jakarta and the Ministry of Education and Culture got involved meant that this was seen as a national and serious matter.

Governmental involvement also suggested an even more significant distrust of student group behavior outside of campus. As Indonesian sociologist, Arief Budiman (1976) explains, with the New Order and the rapid changes and improvements in education, *mahasiswa* or 'students' were no longer considered as traditional *pemuda* (youth activist(s)) in their revolutionary role. Instead, they served as future intelligentsia poised to take up the mantel of *kekuatan moral* or moral force, "with the express desire to participate in reaching the nation's goals" (Budiman 1976, 57-58).¹⁴ As a moral force, students saw themselves as a critical voice responsible for revealing social injustices and corruption as part of working with the government to advance the nation. This was a cornerstone of the *Angkatan 66* mandate.

At first, the government welcomed such activities. However, while initially the New Order state provided a semblance of economic, social, and political confidence, by 1972/73 student criticism against inhuman development policies and corruption had increased and was seen as a direct criticism of the government. Such criticism culminated in mass demonstrations against perceived neo-colonial economic practices that were at first lead by students and which came to be called the *Malari* incident in Jakarta on January 15–16, 1974, resulting in mass riots and the arrest of several student leaders, intellectuals and members of parliament (Zakir 1989, 79).¹⁵ Two

¹⁴ At the end of the revolution, there were less than 150 university graduates in Indonesia, and there was no full university in Indonesia until the 1950s. See also Ruth McVey, "Taman Siswa and the Indonesian National Awakening," *Indonesia* 4.Oct. (1967); Herbert Feith, "Some Political Dilemmas of Indonesian Intellectuals," Conference of the Australian Political Studies Association (Canberra: 1964).

¹⁵ *Malari* is an acronym for "malapetaka lima belas Januari", or "the 15th of January disaster". It was the culmination of weeks of mass student demonstrations in Jakarta and elsewhere against the visit of

weeks after the riots, President Suharto ruled all student organizations disbanded and placed them under military jurisdiction.¹⁶ Student protests were still allowed, but not beyond the confines of the campus grounds and not in statements that went beyond the limits of 'responsible' political behavior established by the government. Students, artists, and intellectuals perceived this as direct political intervention in extracurricular activities and social activism. Asrul Sani, senior author and essayist, stated that this marked the end of "freedom to question and dialogue about the various social problems, and the voicing of opinions that differed from official evaluations" (Sani 1997, 690; see also, Yuliman 1986).¹⁷

As an arm of government policy, the ASRI administration exercised the New Order government's prerogative to set the limits of what can be said in public and how its students can say it. In the end, Harsono and Hardi were expelled, while Bonyong and Purnama were given six months probation after submitting letters of apology to the committee.¹⁸ Ardyati was immune from academic censure as she had already graduated by the time the committee handed down their judgment. However, this did not put an end to artistic dissent in and against the academy.

Japanese Prime Minister Kakue Tanaka. Similar protests took place in Malaysia as well. Such demonstrations were against the growing dominance of Japanese industry and economic power in Indonesia and Malaysia respectively. In Indonesia, at the height of the demonstrations, chaos had broken out leading to Japanese cars being torched and large scale looting. While the demonstrations were driven by students, they were eventually taken over by factory workers. The demonstrations led to several arrests and lengthy prison sentences for those thought to be the student instigators.

¹⁶ This process was complete by April 1978 under the Normalization of Life on Campus and Campus Coordination Body (Normalisasi Kehidupan Kampus and Badan Koordinasi Kampus/ NKK and BKK). See Dwi M. Marianto, "Kebijakan Depolitisasi akan Seni Apolitis," *Surrealisme Yogyakarta* (Yogyakarta: Rumah Penerbitan Merapi, 2001) 135; F. Akhmad, "The Indonesian Student Movement, 1920-1989: Force for Radical Change?" *Prisma: the Indonesian Indicator* 47 (1989); J.A. Denny, "Understanding the Indonesian Student Movement in the 1980's," *Prisma: the Indonesian Indicator* 47 (1989).

¹⁷ "kebebasan untuk mempertanyakan dan mengkomunikasikan pelbagai masalah sosial, dan mengemukakan pendapat yg berbeda dari penilaian resmi."

¹⁸ Besides Alibasyah, the committee consisted of student representative Kadi, Abdul Kadir (the Director's representative), Soedarso Sp (as lecturer), and Fajar Sidik (head of the painting dept.).

Prior to their involvement in *Desember Hitam*, FX Harsono, Hardi, Bonyong Munni Ardhie, Siti Adiyati, and Nanik Mirna had already been part of a growing opposition on campus against dominant conceptions of art and the prevalence of lyrical abstract painting among its faculty and enforced in the curriculum. Students in general were attempting to rethink ideas of experience and its relation to the social fabric, and by extension art's and artist's social function. In this regard, they publicly called for the older generation to allow them to find their own points of reference in constructing their artistic identities, even if this meant turning their backs on the traditions of the past that for them as members of a younger generation had little relevance (See for instance Adiyati 1975).



Figure 4.3 Kelompok Lima, from left: Hardi, Siti Adiyati, Bonyong Ardhie Munni, Nanik Murni, and FX Harsono shown in front of some of their geometric paintings, c. 1973 (HB Jassin archive).

By 1972, the five artists (Figure 4.3) had become one of the main groups driving the call for *pembaruan* or renewal and innovation in both thought and production of art, becoming the core “agents of debate and discussion” among ASRI students at the time (Sumartono 2000, 27). They were the main organizers of a student group on campus that had close connections with the literature students and lecturers, and other intellectuals from the Gajah Mada University (UGM) in Yogyakarta. Through this study club, they shared ideas and had access to books and ideas that the academy neither possessed nor taught. Many new ideas and recent trends in Western contemporary art circulated through the series of talks they organized on campus, for which they often invited Indonesian and foreign speakers (28). In addition, they acted as editors of the campus *Jurnal Seni*.

Between 1972 and 1974, they exhibited together under the name of *Kelompok Lima* (Group of Five) and *Pelukis Lima* (Five Painters).¹⁹ As a group, they did not develop a common style as much as a common attitude about art and artistic individuality. Harsono and Bonyong, for instance, worked toward the elimination of personal style, precluding individual expression and display of ‘talent’ by adopting geometric painting as a form of disinterested rationale. Hardi painted in a flat, comic book style, and in several of his works, he lampooned figures of authority by combining generic imagery of authority and/or national figures with sexual references in imagery and text. However, the group was yet unable to break away from conventional assumptions of the art object, particularly from the medium of painting itself. This is partly due to the overwhelming dominance of painting as a discipline in the art academy.

¹⁹ As *Lima Pelukis Muda*, they exhibited together three times between 1972 and 1974 in Solo, Surabaya, and Jakarta. This group had the support of a young art critic and faculty member at ASRI. He helped organize their last exhibition called *Pameran Seni Lukis 74*.

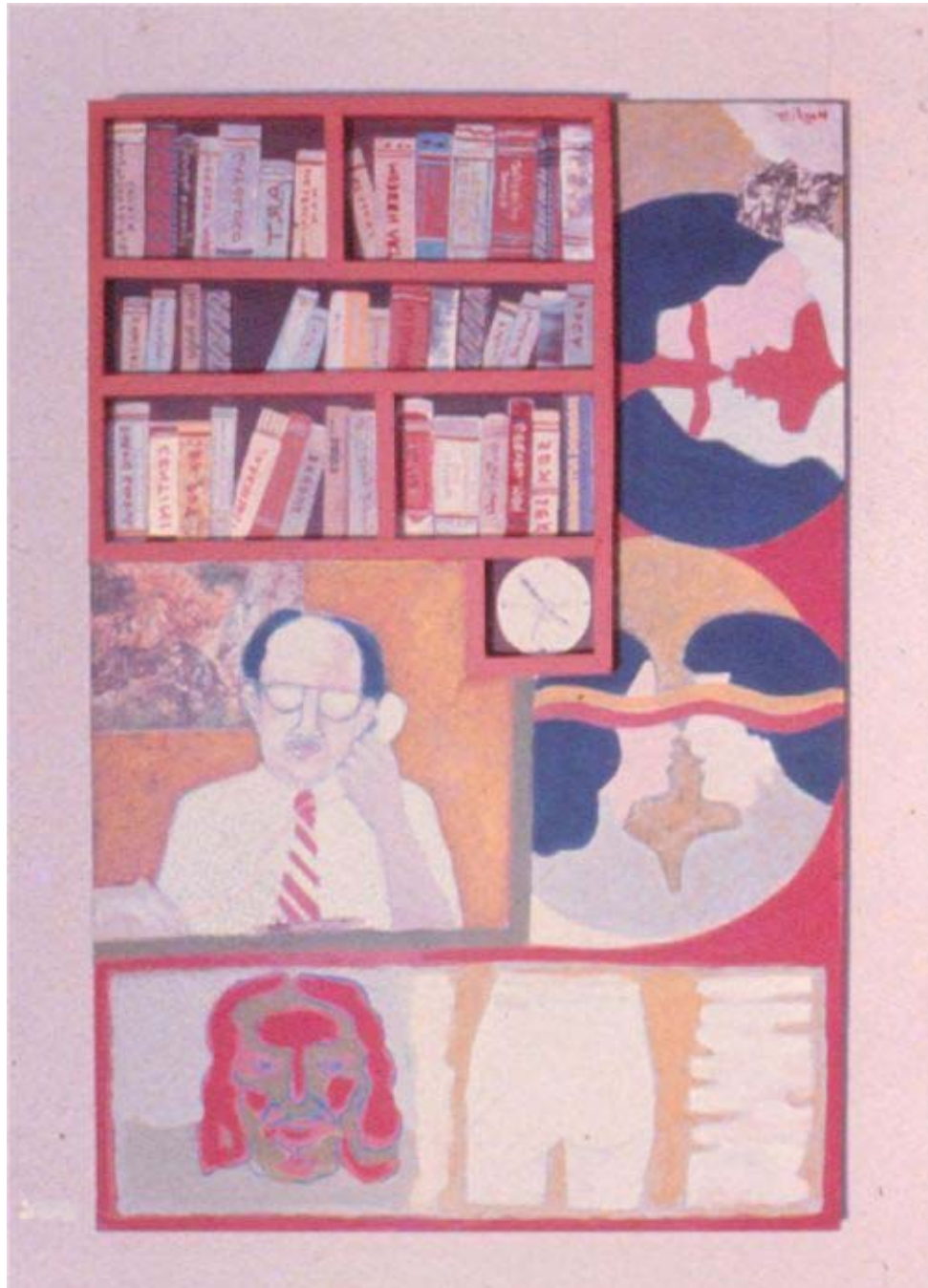


Figure 4.4 Hardi, *The Director*, 1974, Mixed Media, 120 x 90 cm, (Courtesy of Cemeti Art Foundation, Yogyakarta, Indonesia).

Four months following *Desember Hitam* and the subsequent expulsions, another group of ASRI students staged *Pameran Nusantara-Nusantara* (Exhibition of the Indonesian Archipelago-Homeland) at the Indonesian-Dutch foundation Karta

Pustaka (24-29 March).²⁰ Like their fellow *Desember Hitam*|*Kelompok Lima* cohort, they exhibited works of collage, montage, and other mixed media, while also mocking the established styles of their ASRI instructors. Their statement is also remarkably similar to that of the *Pernyataan Desember Hitam*, particularly in its suggestion that painting had sold out to the market (small though it was), producing “softly sweet, promotional, over-traditional, commercial, touristic, and watered down” painting of the Nusantara. Yet, the first sentence of the exhibition’s statement points to a key aspect of the New Order aesthetic regime that was also incorporated into ASRI’s mandate: “Nusantara (Indonesian archipelago)! The womb that once gave birth to an *adiluhung* culture” (quoted in Hartoyo 1975, 271).²¹

Adiluhung is a part Sanskrit and part old Javanese concept, a form of noble sublime or original value. According to Hughes-Freeland (1997), *adiluhung* encompasses social institutions, thus suggesting the practice of art as a moral and ethical activity of an artist possessing a mature and *halus* or refined character. As such,

²⁰ It was organized by Samikun, I Gusti Bagus Widjaja, Wardoyo, Kristianto, Sudarisman, Suatmadji, Augustinus Sumargo, and Agus Dermawan T.

²¹ The full statements reads:

Nusantara! (Indonesian archipelago) It is the womb which once gave birth to a culture that is *adiluhung*. Nusantara is the mother of millions of human beings, lovers of that culture... Therefore, are these paintings the result of an old fashioned perception of civilization? Softly sweet, promotional, over-traditional, commercial, touristic, and watered down – is this a good thing? This is the painting of our Nusantara... [T]his is probably faulty thinking in our world of painting today; creativity has already been emasculated by erroneous advice and funneled through the very mouths of the ‘big influencers’ in this field. As we dim-wittedly accept this, what else can we do if that which is not dim-witted can find no place?

Nusantara! Adalah sebetuk rahim yg pernah melahirkan budaya *adiluhung*. Nusantara adalah ibu sekian juta bayi manusia pencinta budaya itu yg...dan seterusnya. Lantas inilah lukisan-lukisan hasil tanggap kolot peradaban itu? Lembut manis, promosional, over tradisional, komersial, turistik, dan diempuk -- enakkah? Inilah lukisan-lukisan Nusantara kita ...dan seterusnya: berangkali itulah kesalahan pemikiran dunia seni lukis kita kini; kreativitas telah dikebiri oleh anjuran-anjuran yg keliru dan dicorongngkan justru lewat mulut "besar pengaruh" dalam bidan gini. Sementara kita Cuma menerima dengan modal 'kedunguan', namun aoa boleh buat kalau yg tak dungu tak dapat tempat? (nah satu bukti lagi, ucapan akibat adanya penekanan untuk jadi contrik dalam kondisi usang!)

not all objects or practices are considered *adiluhung*, but all *adiluhung* objects are considered or categorized as possessing a high status or ranking and are beautiful, thus morally correct. *Adiluhung* aspects of culture reside in the domain of ‘high’ culture, that is, a series of cultural values handed down by members of the dominant class (Hughes-Freeland 1997, 481).²² The objects of this class may change. One aspect of such an aesthetic is abstraction, which, in a figurative sense, is a matter of mediating the appearance of the ‘natural’ as a means of separating it from the real, from the baser senses, from the *kasar* (Florida 1995; Hughes-Freeland 1997; Pemberton 1994a).²³ In other words, there is an expected mimetic distance between the actual and the way it is signified. Hence, in this sense, abstract and decorative, or what in Indonesia is also frequently called *lyris* or lyrical painting, and certain modes of Western modernism, would be seen as amenable to such a dominant taste.

The very concept of *adiluhung* was written into the ASRI charter in 1967 (Tashadi and Sularto 1981). As a concept, it simultaneously describes the student’s moral responsibility and determines the standards by which works are to be judged. *Nusantara-Nusantara!* suggests that these high ideals are not only outdated but have

²² Hughes-Freeland borrows from Bourdieu in suggesting that *adiluhung* is the “aristocracy of culture”, a series of cultural values, and not objects, handed down by members of the dominant class. While the objects of this class have changed, the position of art retains its position as *adiluhung* in the domain of the dominant class. Hughes-Freeland’s analysis also suggests that objects considered *adiluhung* are high culture because their qualities are high and perfect, not because the form or medium in the way art itself is considered ‘high art’ and ceramics are ‘low art’. Things that today are categorized against art as craft may also be categorized as *adiluhung*. Things that are *adiluhung* are not necessarily or would not necessarily be categorized as art. Her analysis counters Supangkat’s notion that *adiluhung* encompasses only those practices thought ‘high’ as in ‘high art.’ Although *adiluhung* encompasses what might be considered art, it also includes practices that fit general class of tradition or custom. There are also non-art practices and objects that are not included in *adiluhung* such as daggers, cloth, and traditional marriage gifts.

²³ In his study of Javanese court culture during the Dutch period and into the modern era, John Pemberton suggests that *adiluhung* is neither ancient nor essentially Javanese but a marker of the coming of modernity. According to Pemberton, *adiluhung* is a term arising from the colonial discourse of Javanese-ness which has more in common with Dutch codes of order and social control than with an ancestral legacy couched in the legendary past.

been corrupted by the influence of a culture industry fueled by capitalism. It also comes dangerously close to insulting traditional aesthetic principles and by extension the taste of those who uphold them. As already pointed out, certain forms of traditional culture, namely Javanese court culture, were treated as something sacred during the New Order. To insult them was to insult the sanctity of a certain level of officialdom and national culture and identity. Although the exhibition took place off campus, it is perhaps not surprising that *Pameran Nusantara-Nusantara* ended badly in that Agus Dermawan T. was expelled from ASRI mainly for his writing of the exhibition's introductory text.²⁴

Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia (*The Indonesia New Art Movement*)

From the above handful of events, we can see a pattern of dissent growing within the ASRI student community. It took up a number of themes and issues being discussed in the larger public and intellectual discourse discussed above. Bonyong and Harsono believe that this was the beginning of *Seni Rupa Baru* (New Art) or *SRB*, instigated by ASRI students and graduates, including themselves, who already knew and had experienced the risks of going against the tide.²⁵ However, it can also be argued that different perspectives of a 'new art' were shared by and developed among other artistic communities in other cities at the time.

The art academy in Bandung also played a key role in the development of an alternative mode of artistic practice. Perhaps because of its traditionally more internationalist outlook and support for a Universalist approach to modern art, student

²⁴ After which, he was not very active making art, but went on to become one of Indonesia's most respected art critics. For Dermawan's version of these events, see Agus Dermawan T., "Yang Sempat Saya Catat, Sebelum Dan Sesudah Pagelaran Seni Rupa Baru, 1977," *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia*, ed. Jim Supangkat (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1979).

²⁵ Interview with Bonyong Munni Ardhie, 28 August 2002, Solo, and FX Harsono, 12 May 2002, Jakarta.

experimentation with new aesthetic propositions was met with less antagonism from the ITB faculty than in ASRI. Initially overseen by abstract sculptors Gregorius Sidharta, Soegijo and Rita Widagdo, the experimental art course, established in 1974, was designed to give vent to the student's desire to explore mixed media and other non-conventional practices that did not fit into the categories of *seni rupa modern*.

Bandung was also the site of the first so-called alternative art galleries. Decenta, a faculty cooperative gallery, was originally designed to showcase experimental graphic art, including the new media of silk screen. Galeri Pop Art Aktuil, later called Galeri Aktuil, was established in 1975 under the leadership of the late art critic and ITB faculty member Sanento Yuliman, and supported by the French Cultural Centre. However, such experimentation had not yet touched on the contentious issues associated with the dominant aesthetic regime of the New Order as did the ASRI dissent discussed above. Nor did it touch on socio-political issues that would become the hallmark of much of the later experimental or, more precisely in this context, alternative art.

With the assistance of Sanento Yuliman, the ASRI cohort involved with *Desember Hitam*, along with Martoyo Hartoyo (1943) (another ASRI graduate and *Pameran Besar '74* participant), joined like-minded ITB students Bachtiar Zainul , Pandu Sudewo, Prayinto, and Jim Supangkat in forming what they initially called the *Kelompok Seni Rupa Baru* (New Art Group). They would exhibit together four times between August 1975 and October 1979, three times at TIM.²⁶ Over the course of its existence, the group lost members and took on others, such that by the fourth exhibition it consisted of 28 members. Although they did not call themselves *Gerakan*

²⁶ Their first exhibition at TIM was restaged in Bandung in the Galeri Aktuil. Their 1977 exhibition was held at Balai Seni Rupa, Indonesia's. first museum of modern art. Sudarmadji, ASRI graduate, art critic, and supporter of the New Art, was its first director.

Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia (The New Indonesian Art Movement) or *GSRB* until their final exhibition, I use this name throughout to refer to this specific group of artists as distinct from what would become a general *seni rupa baru* (new art) constellation of practices and attitude.

GSRB did not publish a type of manifesto until 1979, just when the group was ready to disband. Nonetheless, their *Lima Jurus Gebrakan Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* (Five Lines of Attack of the New Indonesian Art Movement), published in the book *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru*, delineate the group's long held conceptions of the basis for a new 'Indonesian' art. Below is a brief summary of their Five Lines of Attack.²⁷

The boundaries between the different modern (Western) artistic fields and between traditional and modern are no longer relevant. Art is no longer separated into specializations, but instead exists as a 'totality' consisting of "visual elements which can be linked with elements of space, movement, and time. Art no longer possesses its own rules, but enters into a dialogue with the real world. Therefore, all activity which can be categorized in Indonesian art, although based on different aesthetics [are thus] considered legitimate as living art."

If the divisions of aesthetic fields and between the traditional and modern are to be eradicated, then so too should the idea of artist as specialist be rejected as elitist.

²⁷ For the Indonesian-language of this manifesto see Appendix 2. The fact that the manifesto consisted of *five* points begs discussion. In Javanese culture, the number five has many linked associations between the mundane and the sacred landscapes. The number is associated, for example, with the cardinal points (North, East, South, West and Nadir), each of which is associated with a particular color; each color is associated with a particular point of the harvest and human life cycles; each cardinal point, color, and cyclic phase have associations with the macrocosm of cosmological forces. In other words, the number five is something like a 'perfect' number of a cosmological map that has been inscribed onto the material world. It would be a stretch, however, to assume that the number five in the manifesto takes on these residual attributes. It should be noted, nonetheless, that the number five figures prominently in what is considered a balanced, and rhetorically and structurally correct, mode of argumentation in Javanese culture. It is perhaps this aspect of the number's significance that has traveled in this particular case. See Th. G. Th. Pigeaud, "Javanese Divination and Classification," *Structural Anthropology in the Netherlands*, ed. P. E. de Josselin de Jong, Translation Series 17 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977 (1928)).

The artist as sole creator making art has become increasingly isolated even from the small group of elites who support it. Art should not be the sole domain of a certain group, nor based on the laurels of personal expression. Rather, it should be universal in its humanist concerns. Hence, “social problems rather than personal emotions expressed through art should be the basis of a new Indonesian art.”

While rejecting illusionistic practices and emotional and gestural bases of art, *GSRB* also argue “there should be no limit to the possibilities of art and artistic exploration in artists discovering their own style, thus enriching the ‘style’ of Indonesian art.” This includes setting Indonesian artistic production within an indigenous framework, one built upon “the development of its own theories relevant to the situation in Indonesia, as well as the study of its own art history, rather than relying on imported texts.” In this way, Indonesian artists would not be dependent for their development and history on the West whose problems are not the same as those in Indonesia. So far, the *Lima Jurus Gebrakan* argues for ‘contextualist’ work similar to that envisaged by Sujoko above.

In the above, *GSRB* artists set themselves as the harbingers of a ‘new tradition’, a *seni rupa baru* or ‘new art’. It was a rejection of modernism and what it repressed. They rebelled against the elevation of traditional ‘high’ culture as the supposed sole basis of Indonesian culture. On the other hand, they also joined in the larger protest against what many saw as an over-reliance on Western categories and forms of modern art. Both issues must be tackled, according to the manifesto, if only by way of throwing them out altogether; thus allowing art to regain its ideal freedom from interference, yet also free to recuperate its social mission. In this regard, we cannot discount the role of Sudjojono’s conception of art, allegedly without his concomitant romantic view of the artist as genius and as singularly important creative force in cultural production.

Use of Traditional or Regional Culture

In response to the New Order cultural intent and as part of its consolidation of national culture and identity, many artists from every discipline during the 1970s engaged in what Hatley (1993) describes as an almost detached appreciation and appropriation of indigenous culture, taking from it according to their own needs. Others, feeling that Indonesian modernism was alienated from and alienating to the public, sought deeper elements from within pre-modern court and local folk traditions that retained relevance and resonance for the times. Bodden (1997) and Foulcher (1978, 1990) also examine ways in which this invocation and appropriation of regional culture was often as a counter to that same hegemony, a counter narrative to the nation and its official contents. They separately contend that this was always from within the discourse of 'Indonesian' culture, and from a middle class position and understanding of social change. In many respects, this could include the *GSRB*, as their appropriation and engagement with certain elements of 'traditional culture' also signals the artist's own ambivalent relationship to the processes of modernization and modernity, and all that this implies both socially and culturally.

Within *GSRB*, it seems that the ASRI cohort especially positioned themselves as antagonists to neo-traditionalism and an official idea of *keIndonesiaan* (Indonesian-ness, national identity) that had been developing during the New Order. They felt the horizons of which had become quite narrow and that art was being manipulated by this. FX Harsono stated in interview that at the time, "tradition was upheld as the cultural apex of the past and the past was held up as sacred. In such an environment, experimental art, art not based on these traditions, had no place."²⁸ Siti Adiyati

²⁸ Interview with FX Harsono, 15 January 2002, Jakarta. See also FX Harsono, *Pemahaman Simbol-Simbol Pada Senirupa Dalam Prespektif Sosial Dan Budaya (Understanding Symbols in Art in a Socio-Cultural Perspective)* (Kaliurang: Seminar and Lokakarya Seni Rupa (PIIP-AILM), Duta Wacana, 1994b); FX Harsono, "Instalasi: Sosial Politik [Installation: The Socio-Political]," *Kompas* 24 July 1994a.



Figure 4.5 Siti Adiyati Subangun, *Dolanan (The Toys)*, 1977, 120 x 120 x 125 cm, Mixed Media (Courtesy of Cemeti Art Foundation, Yogyakarta, Indonesia).

similarly argued that the younger generation no longer related to the ‘glorious’ past of the Javanese court traditions (Adiyati 1975). Instead, they wanted the right to seek out new traditions more in keeping with their own experiences. This does not mean that they dismissed traditional forms outright. *GSRB* artists engaged traditional culture by

either elevating its populist roots or appropriating ‘high’ culture traditions in order to parody their meaning within official constructions of national culture.

For example, in *Dolonan* or *Toys*, Siti Ardyati appropriates the populist level of the *wayang* for use in contemporary art (Figure 4.5). While typically discussed as a court tradition, the *wayang* continues to be reproduced in comic books, cartoons, and television and radio programs. Such a range of interpretive media shows the cross-class popularity of this traditional form. In contrast to court *wayang kulit* made from lamb-skin leather puppets ornately painted on one side, Adiyati’s work consists of a series of small plastic *wayang* figures and other ornamental objects used as children’s toys; thus, immediately situating her appropriation of the *wayang* within low culture and the tourist trade. In addition, the title of her piece, *Dolonan*, which means toy(s), also suggests that she intends these as nothing particularly special, or worthy of being ‘art’, but as something residing in the everyday.

Similarly, in *Offerings for our Time*, Harsono refers to the Javanese social and cultural tradition of *slametan*: a ritual meal that when communally enacted reaffirms mutual support, cooperation, and harmony between neighbors, villages, and religious communities, as well as ensures the security of the realm. In its local setting, it begins with the patriarchal leader of the family or neighborhood giving an opening prayer. After which, the men sit together on a mat covered floor to share a meal consisting of a myriad of local specialties. In his *slametan*, Harsono placed a series of glasses containing plastic flowers on the floor mats, and filled his dishes with small plastic toys (Miklouho-Maklai 1991, 69). Here he has appropriated a symbol of communal sharing and has altered it to perhaps call attention to the shift toward consumer culture and that the national manipulation of concepts of *gotong royang* or communal cooperation and governance through consensus is more a game than reality.

While some works such as *Dolanan* and *Offerings* suggest a popular ‘living’ tradition designed to deny the sacred position of traditional culture as ‘high’ culture, other *GSRB* works often refer to that same ‘high’ culture in juxtaposition with the ‘modern’ and ‘low’ in a way that maintains and even reaffirms these divisions. For example, in his sculptural work *Ken Dedes* (Figure 4.6) Supangkat juxtaposes the two main axes of national culture: the modern and the traditional, and in such way that the two collide and even clash. In this piece, Supangkat appropriates the torso and head of an 11th century statue of the seated figure *Ken Dedes*. Considered exemplary of the golden age of Hindu-Buddhist Javanese power, culture, and artistic virtuosity, the statue depicts a serene queen seated in meditation in the guise of a goddess. According to Javanese legend, she symbolizes the mystical fiery womb or the essential female force. Supangkat placed his plaster replica of *Ken Dedes* atop a simple pedestal, upon which he has drawn a simple black outline of a female figure from the waist down. However, this half of the female body is shown with a bare mid-drift and wearing jeans unzipped to expose pubic hair.

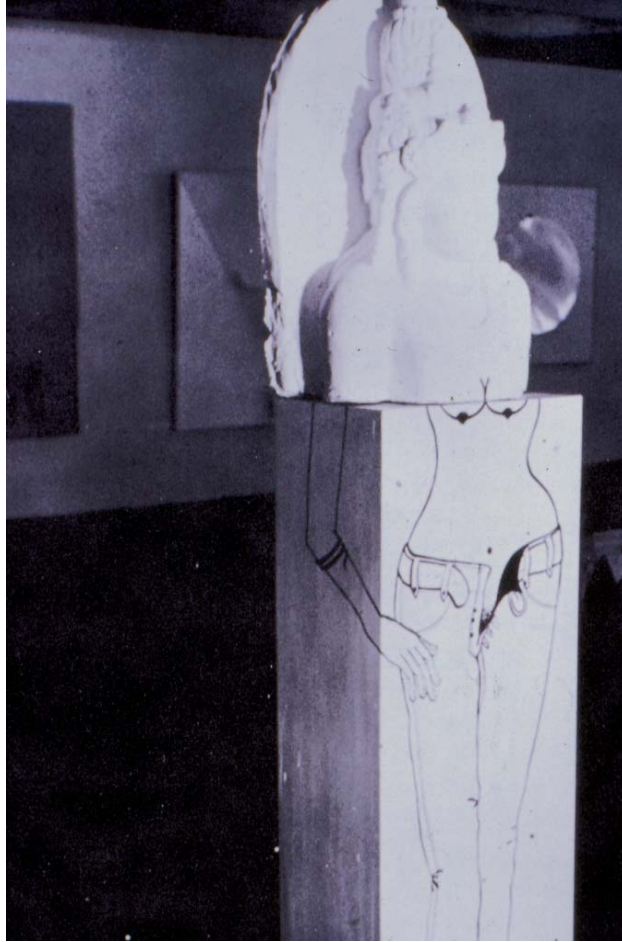


Figure 4.6 Jim Supangkat, *Ken Dedes*, 1975, mixed media (Courtesy of FX Harsono).

On first flush, it is clear that he juxtaposes two genres of ‘art’, that is, classical religious court sculpture and the modern cartoon or caricature. It also brings into collision two stereotypical images: the golden age of the Javanese past and the decadence of modernity. This has a twofold result. On the one hand, he denigrates the sanctity of ‘high’ traditional culture and the past through the baseness of modernity. On the other hand, he indicts the baseness of modernity through a nostalgic reference to ‘high’ traditional culture. In this, Supangkat simultaneously parodies and reaffirms national rhetoric, which prizes images of the glorious past as a counter-weight to the negative effects of modernity; a glorious past first standardized by the Dutch. Such a reading of this piece is clear enough (see for example, Miklouho-Miklai 1993).

However, what has not been questioned is the moral message behind it in relation specifically to his deployment of the female figure. In modern visual art in Indonesia, for example, the female body and figure is often deployed nationalistically to represent the mother of the nation. In many works, the female figure comes to represent an impoverished nation and the site of the negative effects of modernity. In this regard, *Ken Dedes* can be read as the figure of woman no longer representing the ‘sacred womb’ of the past but instead sexually and morally questionable behavior of the present. She is no longer ‘mother’, ‘goddess’ or ‘lost heroine’ but perhaps ‘prostitute’ or personifications of the ‘West’.

Such works not only suggest that certain images or icons upheld as national culture are no longer relevant, but serve as social commentary regarding what these artists perhaps viewed as women losing their moral respectability as they take up the vestiges of modernity. Perhaps read from a slightly different angle, women are considered more susceptible to the negative effects of modernity, which continually threatens a patriarchal control over women’s sexual and social freedoms. This is not a new trope, but rather dates to at least the 1930s in Indonesian literature in which women are often represented as most susceptible to the ‘negative’ aspects of modernity.²⁹ It can be argued that such works demonstrate the ambivalence that these artists perhaps felt toward modernity and the forces of modernization, including the changing social role and position of woman and the male artist’s relationship to such possible changes in society.

²⁹ Such a personification of modernity dates back to at least the 1930s in literature, for example in Armijn Pané’s *Belenggu* (Jakarta: Dian Rakyat, 1941). For more on this issue, see Henk Maier, *We Are Playing Relatives: A Survey of Malay Writing* (Leiden: KLTV, 2004).

A New Realism

This ‘new art’, or what certain members of *GSRB* called a ‘new realism’, was produced by a younger generation undergoing rapid changes to their visual and mental experiences and ways in which they interpret the world. It was an aesthetic approach born from “cracks in morality, pop culture, consumerism, ecological and political crises, energy and monetary crises, unemployment and population explosion, the blind race for technological and scientific advance, the crisis in social justice and offenses against human rights, competition, etc...” (Sachari 1979b, 2).³⁰ In such a reality, perhaps echoing an earlier Sudjojono, Riyanto (1980) contends that: “in order to grasp something sickening, or even those values that are amoral in the environment in which they live, it is not rare for artists to lose the pretense to make something beautiful”.³¹

In his introduction to the first *GSRB* exhibition in 1975, Sanento Yuliman opined that *seni rupa baru* was the first definitive step in artists’ distancing themselves from subjectivism and individualism that had prevailed in Indonesia for the last forty years. Their art denied the realm of abstraction in favor of what he called *kekonkretan* or concreteness. Art was no longer a part of the imaginary world, mediated from a distance, but rather the concrete object from life: Art comprised “objects made from other objects” (Yuliman 1975, 16).³² In being confronted with the reality of the object,

³⁰ “...dari sela-sela bobroknya moral, kebudayaan pop, konsumerisme, krisis lingkungan dan politik, krisis energi dan moneter, pengangguran dan peledakkan penduduk, membabi-butanya teknologi dan ilmu pengetahuan, krisis keadilan dan pelanggaran hak-hak azasi manusia...”

³¹ “...untuk memperoleh sesuatu yg menyakitkan, atau bahkan nilai-nilai amoral dari lingkungan hidupnya, tak jarang seorang seniman kehilangan pretense untuk berbuat sesuatu yg *indah*.”

³² As far as I am aware, no account of this so-called concreteness or concrete art takes into account that this notion of the concrete was one that was not particular to the *GSRB*, but that this group of artists and Yuliman’s reading of it were also referencing a trend taking place also in poetry that began in the early 1970s, around poets such as Danarto and Sutarji Calzoum Bachri. See the 1979 edition of *GAS (Grup Apresiasi Sastra)*. Berita Puisi Bebas; Krisna Murti, “Seni Rupa Dalam Puisi Indonesia Tahun Tujuh puluhan,” Working Seminar Paper, ITB, 1980a; Krisna Murti, “Seni Rupa Dalam Puisi Indonesia Tahun Tujuh puluhan,” Skripsi, Institute of Technology Bandung, 1980b; Sutardji Calzoum Bachri, “Puisi

it was suggested that the audience would mentally leap to the concept behind object as opposed to obsess over form and its surface or be absorbed by the work as an emotional experience (Riyanto 1980). Accordingly, such a 'shock' would spontaneously transform the person and the ways in which he or she thinks about the world. Of course, the question remains as to whether such 'shock' alone is enough to effect social change, or whether after the initial surge the work does not sink back into its sources unchanged.

From the above discussion of certain of the *GSRB* works, it would seem that this 'concrete' or 'concreteness' art is not intent on wrenching loose the concrete object from conventional cultural and social codes and their corresponding values. Instead, the intact relationship between the concrete and the social context, between the sign and its referent remain highly important to it. New Realism in Indonesian terms then depends on and affirms references attached to the sign as it functions in everyday life. This presented a problem for some critics of certain work by *GSRB* members. Ikranagara (1977), a faculty member of the Institut Kesenian Jakarta (Art Institute in Jakarta) or IKJ, and fellow *Desember Hitam* signatory, for instance argued that artists such as Bonyong had failed to construct new meaning or to even reflect on already existing ones in their work; the objects from the everyday remained merely the materials but never became the *medium* of the work.

Differences in Ideological Directions and Aesthetic Approaches: Political Art

From the onset, the ideological differences between the various members of *GSRB* were evident. In general, the ASRI contingent developed an increasingly frontal social commentary and a type of political art, something rather radical for the time. Harsono,

Konkrit," *Horison* XII (1978); Dami N. Toda, "Angkatan 70 Dalam Sastra," *Berita Buana*.14 Feb. (1978); Dami N. Toda, "Puisi Indonesia dalam Dekade Terakhir," *Horison* XVI (1980).

Hardi, and Bonyong, for example, started to create more socially critical works based on current themes of presidential succession, abuses of power, corruption, militarism, and as counter-arguments to the prevailing conceptions of national culture and identity. By their second exhibition in 1977, artists associated with FSRD-ITB retreated somewhat from more extreme extra-artistic themes and were, instead, more concerned with breaking through the barriers of modernism and focused on experimentation with media, materials, and form. This does not mean that their work was less aggressive or less insulting to convention. However, it was not as socially and politically thematic as that of the ASRI cohort.

For example, for the first *GSRB* exhibition, Harsono made direct reference to violence associated with militarism in *Paling Top 75* (Figure 4.7), in which his minimalist aesthetic approach assembles a plastic automatic rifle in a rectangular box covered by steel wire fence. Harsono explained that “the plastic M16 rifles point to the greatness of military might that controls student movements (demonstrations).”³³ The theme of violence is again implied in *Rantai yang Santai* (The Leisure Chain, 1975) (Figure 4.8), in which he uses the intimate space of the bedroom to comment on the pervasiveness of state interference in the private realm, which he articulates by wrapping chains around a mattress and pillows that have been compressed into a pedestal-like base.

³³ Interview with FX Harsono, January 2002, Jakarta.

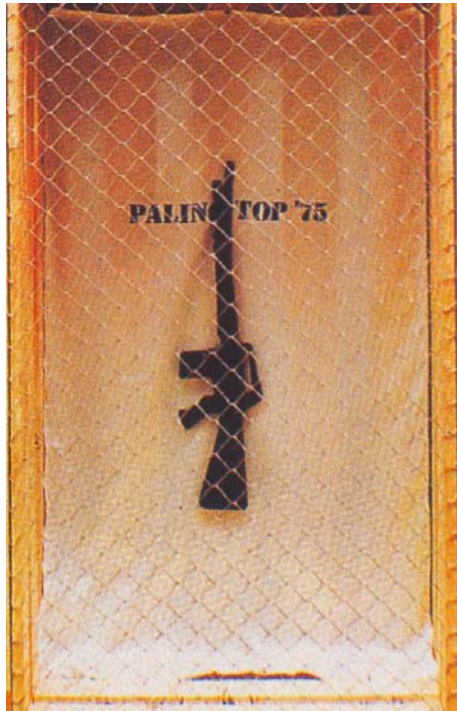


Figure 4.7 FX Harsono, *Paling Top (The Best)*, 1976, plastic gun and textile, 150 x 80 x 50 cm (Courtesy of the artist).

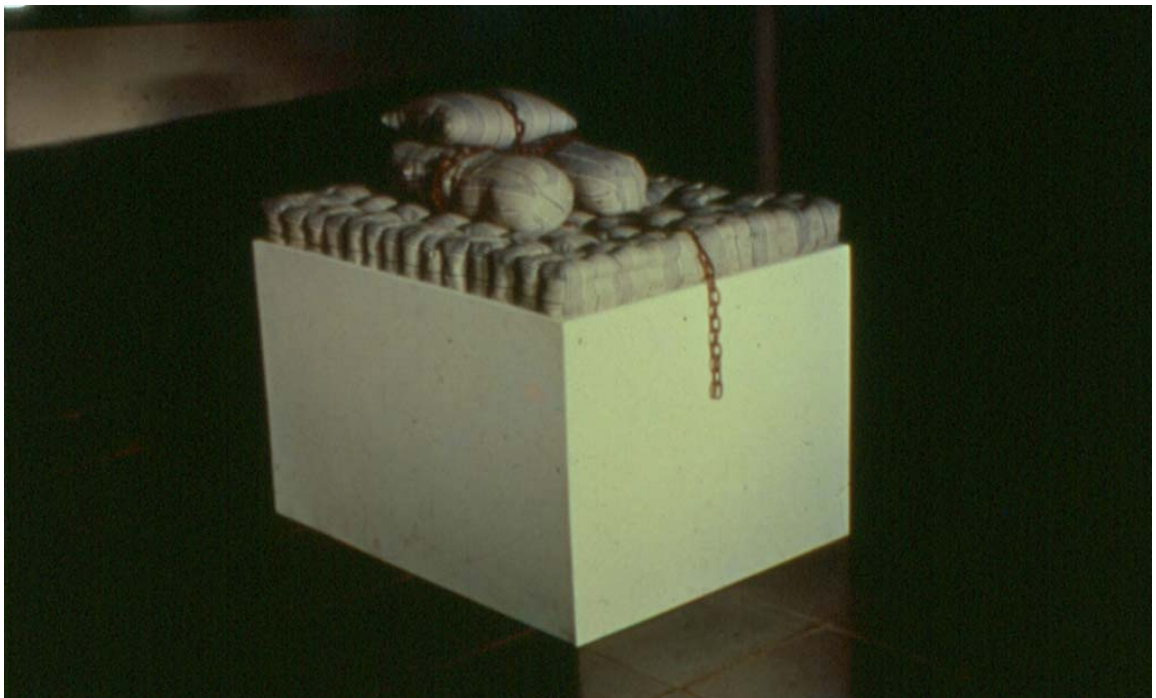


Figure 4.8 FX Harsono, *Rantai yang Santai (The Leisure Chain)*, 1975, Mixed media (Courtesy of the artist).

Bonyong also dealt with politically touchy subjects in his appropriation of symbols of the nation and representations of Indonesia's revolutionary, heroic past depicted and commemorated in the many national monuments and icons. For example, in *Merah Putih* (Red White), exhibited in *GSRB*'s first exhibition, Bonyong takes the colors of the national flag as the backdrop upon which to attach a row of seven headless plastic baby dolls, with the central one twice as large as the others that flank it on both sides (Figure 4.9). The baby dolls emphasize the *masyarakat* or generalized conception of society, with the central figure perhaps acting as the leader or *bapak* of the family. President Suharto referred to the nation as a family, with himself as the father, the patriarch. Called *bapakisme* or "fatherism", it has been associated with the still feudal social structures utilized by the New Order government in which people were encouraged to follow their superiors without question. Such blind adherence to one's superiors in Bonyong's work is symbolized by an absence, in this case, of heads. On yet another level, the piece is an allusion to violence regarding the blood that was shed for the sake of national independence, and that continued to be lost in the name of the nation and national.

In his 1977 work *Monumen Revolusi Diresmikan oleh Pak Bejo Tukang Becak* (Revolutionary Monument Inaugurated by Pak Bejo, *Becak* Driver), he appropriates the national monument as a means of disrupting the narrative of the revolutionary past and the image of the national hero as it is typically commemorated in national monuments (Figure 4.10). The piece consists of military boots covered in a thick black



Figure 4.9 Bonyong Munni Ardhie, *Merah Putih (Red and White)*, 1975, mixed media, 125 x 125 cm (Courtesy of Cemeti Art Foundation, Yogyakarta, Indonesia).

gooey substance and placed haphazardly atop a pedestal, thus segregating the everyday object from its function and making the everyday function as art. Bonyong visualizes an unambiguous power relation between the military and the *rakyat* (common people) and, in this case, the working poor collectively represented in the figure of the *becak* driver.³⁴ It also suggests a resistance to official ceremonies typically carried out with great pomp, in which politicians inaugurate the national monuments; politicians instead of the *rakyat* who also fought and died in the revolution. The *rakyat*, however, are present in name only on the plaque that labels the

³⁴ A *becak* is a type of pedicab. Prior to the New Order bans, these were one of the main modes of short-distance transportation in cities. Beginning in the early 1980s, pedicabs are primarily seen today only in Yogya and Solo. The *becak* and its driver in the visual arts has been a symbol of the working poor since at least the 1940s.

piece. This presence of the *becak* driver's absence is Bonyong's way of recuperating the marginalized working poor into the normative narrative of the nation, and, in this case, as national heroes on par with military might.



Figure 4.10 Bonyong Munni Ardhie, *Monumen Revolusi Diresmikan oleh Pak Bejo Tukang Becak* (Revolutionary Monument Inaugurated by Mr. Bejo, Becak Driver), 1977, sculptural object (Courtesy of the artist).

While the works produced by *GSRB* were not overtly censored during its four group shows, related events involving some of its members were. Such was the case for *Pameran Seni Rupa Seniman Muda* (Young Artists' Exhibition of Fine Art) in Jakarta (Dec., 1979), which was dominated by the 'New Art' style and attitude. The local authorities closed the exhibition after opening night. When it reopened three days later, Slamet Riyadhi's mixed media work titled *Dilarang Protes* (It is forbidden to protest) and four of Hardi's works, including his 1978 *Presiden RI 2001, Suhardi*



Figure 4.11 Hardi, installation view *Presiden RI Tahun 2001*, 1979, installation, Pameran Seniman Muda. Illus. in *Tempo*, Pargimin photographer (H.B. Jassin Archive).



Figure 4.12 Hardi, installation view *Presiden RI Tahun 2001*, 1979, installation, Pameran Seniman Muda. Illus. in *Tempo*, Pargimin photographer (H.B. Jassin Archive).



Figure 4.13 Hardi, *Presiden RI Tahun 2001*, 1979, silkscreen poster on board (Courtesy of Cemeti Art Foundation, Yogyakarta, Indonesia).

(President of the Republic of Indonesia of the year 2001, Suhardi) (Figures 4.11 - 4.13) were gone, but not before the works had been seen by unknown numbers of people.

This was Hardi's first major group exhibition since returning from a year's study at the Jan van Eyck academy in Maastricht, Netherlands in 1978. While there, he studied painting, graphics, and silk-screen techniques. His time in the Netherlands, as well as participation in Joseph Beuys' workshop in the 6th Documenta in Kassel, had a large impact on his work, as evidenced in *Presiden*.

President of the Republic of Indonesia consisted of a series of silk-screened posters containing the artist's photographed image wearing a general's uniform. He pasted these onto various surfaces such as board, bamboo matting, and walls. Inspiration for this piece originated from the youth culture obsession for military garb ("Intermezo Akhir Tahun" 1979). Yet in technique, one cannot miss the reference to Andy Warhol's *Mao Tse Tung*, which Hardi saw in a traveling exhibition while in the Netherlands. In any case, this piece directly touched on the politically taboo question

of Presidential succession. President Suharto came to power while a military general in 1967. In appropriating the iconic image of official portraiture, Hardi also claims presidential and military power for himself. Below the rows of his own portrait as general *cum* presidential candidate, Hardi printed the regulations for becoming president: each candidate must have graduated from state indoctrination classes of state ideology of *pancasila*, and must therefore have a thorough knowledge of its contents.³⁵ He chose the year 2001 because he would be 50 years old at that time, an age that in many Asian cultures is seen as a turning point in one's life from external concerns to more internal self-cultivation. In addition, Hardi claimed that if he were president he would move the capital city out of Java, intensify farming, slowly decrease foreign aid, and create domestic industries.

In addition to having his work confiscated, Hardi was arrested and interrogated for two weeks by Jakarta authorities and representatives of the Ministry of Information. Interestingly, the then Vice President of Indonesia, Adam Malik, interceded on his behalf, claiming such treatment was an abuse of his human and civil rights.

³⁵ *Pancasila* is Sanskrit/Javanese for Five Pillars or points upon which the nation and its ethics are based. The Preamble to the Indonesian Constitution states: "We believe in an all-embracing God [Ketuhanan yang Maha Esa]; in righteousness and moral humanity; in the unity of Indonesia. We believe in democracy, wisely guided and led by close contact with the people through consultation so that there shall result social justice for the whole of Indonesia." *Pancasila*, as the ideological and ethical foundation of the nation, was taught in schools under the program Pancasila Moral Education called Pedomen Penghayatan dan Pengalaman Pancasila – Ekaprasetia Pancakarsa, or P4, intended as "a directive and rule of conduct". In 1985, *Pancasila* was legislated as the sole legal ideological basis for all political, social and cultural organizations. Michael van Langenberg discusses the relationship between Pancasila and national education, social engineering, religion, and attempts to depoliticize public discourse in "The New Order State: Language, Ideology, Hegemony," *State and Civil Society in Indonesia*, ed. Arief Budiman, vol. 22, Monash Papers on Asia (Monash Center for SEAS, 1990). Ali Moertopo, former Major General of the Indonesian Military Intelligence, and better known for his role as Minister of Information during the New Order, provides an "official" interpretation of Pancasila as a state ideology as opposed to a political frame of reference. See Moertopo, *The Acceleration and Modernization of 25 Years Development* (Jakarta: Yayasan Proklamasi CSIS, 1973) 8-20.

A slightly altered, more aggressive attitude in the *pemberontakan* exploded onto the scene in Yogyakarta with the collective group effort, *Kepribadian Apa* (What Identity? or What Personality?) or *KA*, staged at Galeri Seni Sono (17-23 Sept. 1977), with a second similar event in 1979. Membership of *KA* included FX Harsono, Bonyong Munni Ardhie, Ronald Manulang (1954), and Redha Sorana (1952-2001), Gendut Riyanto (1955-2003) and Tulus Warsito (1953), among other artists. All of them were either former or current students from ASRI. The event also included people from geology, music, theater, literature.³⁶ The group held two events (1977 and 1979); the present discussion pertains specifically to the group's 1977 event.

Like most artist collectives and groups at the time, *KA* produced a statement and something of a manifesto. In this case, the manifesto was contained within the pages of the group's brief, photocopied catalog, and condensed, in effect, in the piece written by Ronald Manulang, another member of *GSRB*. As might be expected, the lamentations, stated claims and demands are quite similar in spirit, tone and rhetoric as those previously discussed. This is of course is important in the construction of a discourse of *pemberontakan* and demonstrates how certain ideas and tropes came to define an *Angkatan*. The main points of the statement present the work of the group as a refusal and alternative path, a means of attempting to 'bulldoze' a 'mummified', established art world and its seemingly singular concepts of art, artist, and what signifies as art, and the art object as an end in itself. "[T]housands of artists are prepared to perpetuate these rules while sacrificing their honesty totally hoping for something extraordinary to come. This is a mistake that violently robs what creativity

³⁶ Including Jack Body (from New Zealand, lecturer in the ISI music dept.), Sawung Jabo (musician from AMI), Sapto Rahardjo (music and theater), Joko Sulisty Kahar (studying geology and literature at Universitas Gadjah Mada).

is left...”³⁷ In order to preserve creativity in its construction and regenerative aspects, art must broaden its terms and parameters: “For too long our art has been tripe based on second-hand concepts that have never known refreshment, the environs, or the social dynamics. Such that the dialectic circle has been closed to art.”³⁸

The statement also presents something of the group’s profound sense of loss of identity; an identity had been given to them as artists in the academy but was ill fitted, ill suited to their needs and experiences. The artists feel they and art in general possess no identity or personality of their own, nothing to ground either artist or art in the here and now that can help propel them forward. This is aptly represented in Redha Sorana’s Artist Page for the first *Kepribadian Apa?* event, in which he represents himself merely as a question mark.

Using particularly Javanese words associated with proper behavior and social decorum, Manulang, in his KA statement, calls on artists to have the effrontery enough to go against staunch systems dictating freedoms and responsibilities that preclude the inclusion of lived harsh realities not of a collective experience and mind, but of individuals who come to make up a whole. The construction of a personality and identity is not the sole domain of the singular, gifted creating genius, but that of the whole, of which the artist is a part. In this, there is no one norm or type that can dictate what the “Kepribadian Super” of the whole should be. In other words, the ideal identity or personality is messy, free, and cannot be contained under the niceties of a particularly Javanese notion of ‘proper’ and ‘responsibility’. If this is true for society,

³⁷ “...sejuta seniman setia menelusuri peraturan-peraturan itu sambil mengorbankan kejujuran dirinya dalam totalitas yang mengharapkan lain dari yang itu-itu saja. Inilah sebuah kesalahan yang menjadi rampok terhadap kreatifitas yang seharusnya masih secuil.”

³⁸ “Telah terlalu lama kesenian kita berbasa-basi dengan konsep loakan yang tak pernah mengenal kesegaran, tak mengenal lingkungan, tak mengenal dinamika social. Sehingga lingkaran dialektik begitu tertutup dari keseniannya.”

the same must be true for art. Its arbitrary boundaries must be crushed to unite the many fields together, yet refuse any one overarching notion of art and artistic practice.

In Part, *KA*, consisting of a number of *GSRB* members, furthered the latter's key arguments and points of opposition. In much of its output, it also broke free from the bounded categories of painting and sculpture, becoming the first exhibition up to that point in Yogyakarta consisting mainly of installations and body actions. *KA* surpassed *GSRB*'s activities in its mode of opposition that presented the vital uses of the absurd, the nonsensical, as well as brought open and relatively unbridled aggression to the arena of art and art practice in unprecedented ways. Gendut Riyanto, for example, wrapped himself in newspaper and drove his motorcycle around the exhibition room. A mock hospital room was constructed with 'patients' (large cotton stuffed dolls) using a piss pot. The audience was also encouraged to look through pornography magazines. In other words, many of these 'works' played off of the absurd and the shocking as a way of rejecting social expectations and expectations of aesthetically harmonious art and the tastes behind them. Aspects of such tactics were already part of student protests in general but had yet to develop much in the visual arts by the time *KA* came to employ them, presenting the audience with a level of realism and scandal that for the time seemed to dare censorship.

Besides the scatologically and pornographically shocking elements to the work, *KA* brought political art to a new level. This included Bonyong's *Mimbar Bebas* (Podium for Free Speech) that tapped into the audience's fears as political actors in New Order Indonesia. Here, the artist placed a wrestling ring in the gallery among the other works. The audience was invited to enter the ring and read aloud from a selection of President Suharto's speeches. The artist explained this work as a reflection

of the basic human right to freedom of speech and to one's own opinions.³⁹ According to various accounts, only one person had the nerve to enter the ring.

At base, the very concept behind the event's title of *Kepribadian Apa?* is a direct reference to one of the key tropes in the government's discourse at the time, namely *Kepribadian Nasional* (National Identity). The problematic of national identity, although partially a continuation of older nationalist themes, had taken on new resonance in post-1965 Indonesia in which, after having purged the Left, the government turned its attention toward development and its ideal vision of modernity. Not only did the KA event question the concept and the direction of national identity, it did so from a politically sensitive angle: the discourse of development, especially regarding expectations of sacrifice on the part of the masses for the good of the nation in the future. This was particularly touchy because it took up the issue of class that the New Order aesthetic ideology had been in earnest to squelch. For example, another of Bonyong's installations, *Hotel Asia* questions the displacement of the homeless for the construction of an international hotel (Figure 4.14).

³⁹ Interview, Bonyong, August 2002, Yogyakarta.



Figure 4.14 Bonyong Munni Ardhie, *Hotel Asia*, 1977, installation, *Kepribadian Apa?* Illus. in *Outlet: Yogya Dalam Peta Dunia Seni Rupa Kontemporer Indonesia* (Yogyakarta, Cemeti Art Foundation, 2000): 54.

In this work, a human figure made of cotton batting and dressed in jeans and shirt sits surrounded by what we are to perhaps take as the figure's few possessions. The figure sits against a kind of bamboo woven fence one might see barricading construction sites from public view and admittance. Similar to so much of his work, the poor and homeless are seen here as not only having been routed by but also barred access to certain aspects of modernity.

After opening day, a number of works and performances were banned by the local authorities. The participating artists were once again required to give full details of the works to be shown or performed. All works that the authorities considered as possibly "causing public unrest" had to go. This apparently included so many works that the KA artists were afraid there would not be enough left to open the second day. The exhibition was officially closed on the third day. Nonetheless, people continued to sneak in by the side entrance. Every day, other artists, poets, art students, sociologists, students of philosophy, as well as journalists and professors of communication joined in the event. It turned into a series of seemingly 'clandestine' discussions, rants, and debates; seemingly clandestine because although the police

barred the entrance to the gallery, they did not forcibly shut down *KA* until two days later. *KA* was reportedly the first art exhibition in Yogyakarta to be canceled for reasons of National Stability by the local authorities.⁴⁰

According to Agus Dermawan T. (1978), a major supporter of the *GSRB* and fellow expelled ASRI student, commented that *KA* was the most "brutal form of art seen in the history of Yogya". It was condemned by many detractors from the art world as well as other spheres as *asal heboh*, porno, foolish, anarchist, crazy, out of control. Certain ASRI faculty members again feared that this was a sign of a new Left emerging among the students. Again, the students were punished. By then, expulsion was becoming something of a rite of passage and a badge of honor. Yet, after this round, ASRI saw a drastic decline in rebellious events among its students. On the one hand, this was because the idea of a 'new art' had already taken hold among younger artists and spreading beyond the academies. It was becoming something of a style and common attitude. On the other hand, certain tactics of the 'new art', particularly those demonstrated in events such as *KA*, were little more than ranting that allowed (male) artists an outlet for their aggression and frustration, but had little sustaining power.

Not without Refusal: Critical Responses to GSRB

Responses to the *GSRB* and related events, some of which have been mapped above, can be divided into three very general categories.⁴¹ The first type of response is one that is in support of such work. The terms *menyegarkan* (refreshing) and *pembaruan*

40 Interview with Bonyong Munni Ardhie, August 2002. Yogyakarta.

⁴¹ Certain critical aspects of particularly the polemic or debate between the two art critics and academy faculty, Kusnadi and Sudarmaji have been recounted numerous times. See for example Jim Supangkat, ed, *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru*. Jakarta: Gramedia, 1979; Asikin Hasan, *Polemik Kusnadi dan Sudarmadji, Sekitar Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* (Bandung: FSRD/ITB, 1989); Asikin Hasan, "Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia (Masters Thesis)," Institut Teknologi Bandung, 1992; Miklouho-Maklai, *Exposing Society's Wounds: Some Aspects of Contemporary Indonesian Art since 1966*.

(renewal) were used to describe its potential for a new way of perceiving and making art, one that not only infused a new vitality into art, but that also broke through and blurred conventional boundaries of the aesthetic order (see for example Bujono 1975b, 1975a; Dermawan T. 1978, 1984). This positive perspective was typically held and written by artists *cum* art writers already associated with the *pemberontakan* movement, but who were not involved in *GSRB*. Some, like Dermawan T., felt that by the second exhibition (1977), the initial shock of *GSRB* had worn off and there was a genuine sense that such works were cautiously accepted as a legitimate yet alternative stream of artistic production at the national level. Dermawan's contention can be seen born out in the instigation of the *Pameran Seniman Muda* (Young Artists' Exhibition) in 1977, in which it was clear that *Seni Rupa Baru* was not the purview of just a small group of young artists but had become a *semangat* or *élan vital* with its own 'style' among the visual arts. By its final exhibition in October 1979, critics accused *GSRB* of devolving into mere repetition.⁴²

The second general category of responses was critical of the artists' taking recourse in supposedly foreign cultural references. For example, some felt that *GSRB* was a kind of promotion for what was new in Western art such as Pop Art, Op Art, and Installation, repackaged as "Indonesian". This is illustrated in a cartoon by T. Sutanto depicting *Seni Rupa Baru* illustrates just such a position (Figure 4.15). It shows the New Art as a novelty, a thing of odd wonder, and to be dismissed as mimic. In it, the figure of 'artist' is encompassed by an ornate frame, an arm protrudes from the frame as if holding the work of art/artist up by one hand. The other hand of the art/artist waves the national flag with the logo "New Indonesia". The caption within

⁴² Their third exhibition was held in TIM 9-20 October, 1979. 27 artists from Bandung, Yogya and Jakarta participated.

the frame reads “Art: National art with the latest international flavor”. A couple with a small child, dressed in basic, traditional clothes of the ‘rakyat’ or common folk, look up questioningly at the framed oddity. The father says “Wah, we didn’t even get what was going on before, now something new’s come along. The main thing – ‘be creative’ ...!”

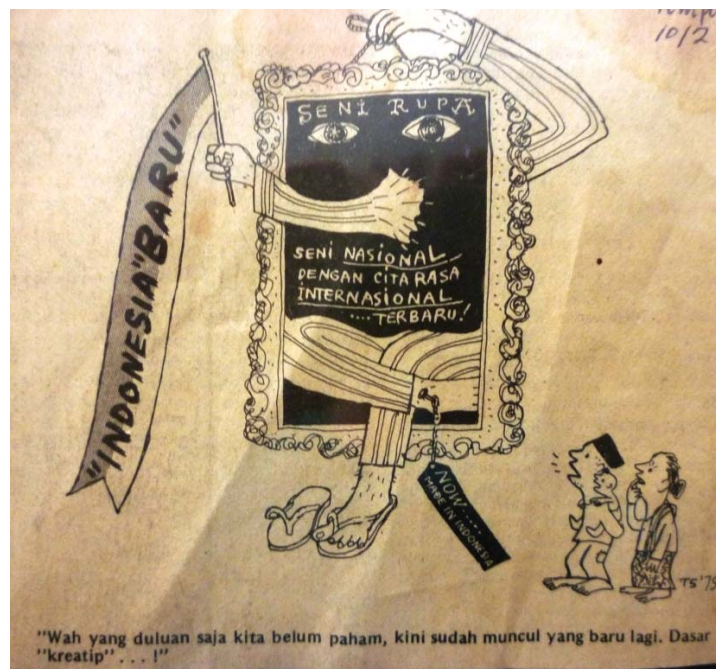


Figure 4.15 T. Sutanto, *Seni Rupa Baru* cartoon. Illus. in *Tempo*, Oct. 27, 1979, 5.

Umar Kayam, former head of DKJ and accomplished sociologist, asked why, in trying to create something new in Indonesian art, did the artists seek inspiration once again from western art? He felt that to take on the themes and forms found in American and European avant-garde art trends of the time was to take on cultural baggage and history underlying the appropriated image not fully understood by the young artists who adopted them. For Kayam, *GSRB* artists had yet to reflect their own environments (recalled in Riyanto 1997, 21). Kayam’s response seems to disallow that as something is appropriated, it is decontextualized, deterritorialized, and thereby

transformed. In defense of criticisms voiced by Kayam and others, members of *GSRB* pointed out that their generation grew up with many of the things included in their art which critics argued was mimicry of the West and its culture, but in fact were part of Indonesian modern urban culture as well.

Aside from criticisms that the art was too influenced by Western trends and culture, there were more hostile reactions to the work as standing outside the rules of modern art. Here, the question of beauty is set as the gauge for good art, and good art as the gauge for a stable society and proper ethical responsibility.⁴³ Good art follows the rules of art. If it follows its own rules, then art also strives toward the beautiful, the essence of all artistic endeavor. As the works fly in the face of such criteria, the new work is not considered 'art' at all. Lacking a vocabulary to discuss these works as art, critics such as Kusnadi,⁴⁴ among others, did have an arsenal of terms to frame these works as acts of cultural and social defiance and even deviance: terms such as porno, vandal, vulgar, juvenile, naughty, and *liar* (wild), terms associated with the world outside the sphere of art.

I want to pause for a moment to take up the concept of *liar*. It was used by critics and artists alike. For the former, it was a way of dismissing this work as not being serious art, and its artists as not being 'true' artists. Traditionally, the distinction

⁴³ Take for example Nanang Sukmara's analysis in which she argues that art created according to long established norms and values concerning art and its aesthetics signify a healthy society. However, by rupturing the membrane between the transcendent space of art and the mundane space of reality, the new work reflects an increasingly disembedded artist from society, which has itself become alienated from its collective roots and ethics of aesthetics. He suggests that by taking these everyday mundane objects out of sync, art work, such as that by FX Harsono, shows that something has gone awry in society; that artists are giving form to something unrepresentable in conventional art. See, Nanang Sukmara, "Pameran Seni Rupa Indonesia Baru '77," *Pikiran Rakyat* (20 April 1977), 5.

⁴⁴ For Kusnadi's aesthetic categorization and interpretation of *GSRB* works, see Kusnadi, "Menilai Pembelaan Sudarmadji Pada Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia," *Kedaulatan Rakyat* (1975a), Kusnadi, "Peningkaran Dan Pengelakan Sudarmadji Sekitar Nilai Seni Rupa Baru," *Kedaulatan Rakyat* (1975b), Kusnadi, "Terakhir Untuk Sudarmadji," *Kedaulatan Rakyat* (1975c).

between *liar* and not *liar* was the difference between uncivilized and civilized, jungle and cultivated land. The latter exists only after the wild has been tamed or fenced out. In New Order Indonesia, it was a term for those things not sanctioned by or outside the bounds of official control. The *liar*, in terms of state control, are those things slated for periodic erasure or crackdowns (i.e. shanty towns and informal economic sectors such as the street food vendor). Afrizal Malna (2000) has argued that *pikiran liar* or wild thinking was the basis of much of the avant-gardisme during the 1970s (476). Artists and writers deliberately created ‘wild’ works, ensuring that their work would be rejected by the critics, galleries, and publishing houses. Members of *GSRB* demonstrated a similar desire to be rejected in producing porno-vandal-vulgar-juvenile-naughty-*liar* work. The problem did not necessarily lie in the public’s or critic’s refusal to appreciate new works and new ways of saying something. The artists made artworks that were part of an already existing language of the porno-vandal-vulgar-juvenile-naughty-*liar*; hence these works would be seen as such.

According to prevailing Javanese aesthetic principles, the *liar*ness of the work in connection the group’s idea of a new realism was akin to what Hughes-Freeland calls ‘excessive dynamism’, which means something that is too natural in character and in emotive state (see above). As such, it lacks beauty, refinement, and evokes feared states of mind and spirit. In a word, *GSRB* new realism would, if gauged according to such a perception, be considered *kasar*, ugly, and therefore morally suspect and disturbing to hegemonic ideals of harmony.

Yet as Supangkat explained in an article published in answer to harsh criticisms of *GSRB*’s first exhibition, the artists were afraid both that their work would be accepted or rejected (Supangkat 1975). He goes no further in explaining why this would be so. However, it can certainly be suggested that either position held consequences. On the one hand, if they were not accepted, it meant they had strayed

too far from convention, and hence could be mobbed out as well as interpreted as fomenting social unrest. On the other hand, if accepted, it could mean that their work reaffirmed dominant definitions of what signified as art (ptg and sculpture) and prevailing tastes, further entrenching the old guard, which they had set out to displace. However, what has yet to be pondered is to what extent its 'radical' nature was 'already' absorbed by the art and cultural system before the artists exhibited their works. Why were these exhibitions accepted in the first place from the top level of the art infrastructure at TIM and by the faculty at ITB if they were such a challenge, so *liar*? From the beginning as a group, *GSRB* experienced few problems finding a place to exhibit, and in fact did not produce projects outside the so-called white cube as a group. In other words, *GSRB* and their new realism was both a gesture of rupture as well as a demand for entry into that same system. While it sought to disenchant conventional, beautiful, and complacent ways in which the dominant culture represented the world to itself and to others, *GSRB* also could not afford to lose its support altogether.

The third category of responses was one that scrutinized the relationship between idea and its realization, for messages behind the 'shocking' use of everyday objects, and audience perception. I have already discussed a particular stream in this category regarding the effective use of materials as medium in the New Realism. For critics, such as Agus Dermawan T. (1978), fellow rebel, the question arises as to whether the *pemberontakan* artist understands his or her audience, or attempts to construct an ideal one. Such criticisms and questions are significant in that they point to certain potential problems in how cultural resistance, social commentary and perhaps activism in this art are structured and from what position. This can be said of a certain strain of artistic activism among certain members of *GSRB* who also identified with and took up the mantle of the 'disenfranchised' or the 'marginal', a topic further

taken up in Chapter Six. In this regard, some of the works such as those discussed above play out one of Sujoko's main criticisms of art in general in Indonesia: that art and the artist have little sense of intimacy with the people on whose behalf the he or she claims to speak. Instead, borrowing from Georg Yúdice, there is a degree of appropriation going on; the appropriation of the language of the poor, as well as a "mining of the urban code" of pop culture (Yúdice 2001, xx). As such, they search for cultural resistance as they themselves conceive of it.

This category also consists of those who viewed the aesthetic program of the new art as a symptom of a 'moral crisis' and potential social instability. As suggested above, critics and Ministers cautioned that artists should not involve themselves in matters they do not understand, meaning art and artists should avoid overt statements, as these may lead to social instability. In this view, audience reception is very much on the critic's mind. However, they were not critical of art's failure to change minds, but rather afraid that it would. In this view, radical change in the sphere of aesthetics was not seen as transformative as much as destructive and dangerous to already existing structures of social institutions and political discourse.

Concluding observations

After *GSRB* disbanded its history slipped into legend, to be recounted in commemorative articles and resurfacing as the palimpsest of a kind of artistic experimentation and the recuperation of the social as theme. It is understandable that, as the *GSRB* was largely something that erupted from the academies, once the artists had graduated and had to think about earning a living, shifted their positions, some more than others. Many of its members rarely produced works of art, or stopped making art altogether after a few years of *GSRB*'s dissolution. This included Siti Adiyati and Nanik Mirna, the two women in the group, who married and, as was the

general custom for women at the time, gave up their artist careers. Others, such as Jim Supangkat, eventually gave up making art. He went on to become a lecturer at IKJ and an influential art writer and curator. Some, like Hardi, one of *GSRB*'s staunchest voices advocating art with a social and political message, reverted to conventional modes of painting and began producing expressionistic paintings with pious Islamic themes. Dede Eri Supria began to attract both domestic and international collectors of his signature depictions of urban poverty. His photorealist paintings initiated a new mainstream of socially engaged painting that was suitable for the maturing art market.

Undeniably, the New Art movement did expand the art field as well as sparked a development of a "new realism" emphasizing the banal situation, as well as a rhetoric of general human suffering and abuses of power as viable, albeit risky, themes for art. The rebellions and experiments of the 70's ushered in new modes of art practice and structures in the work of art, such as collage, mixed media painting, and three-dimensional objects made from found objects, as well as installations. In so doing, the visual art rebellion, and the decade of the 1970s in general, established the idea of 'contemporary art' as a category distinct from modernism and *seni rupa modern*. Yet, although the possibilities introduced by the new art had an impact upon the work of the next generation of art academy students, the works themselves of *GSRB* and the like were quickly forgotten.⁴⁵

At base, over the course of the 1980s there seemed to be a continued and shared sense of restlessness and an anti-establishment, anti-mainstream attitude. There

45 However, playwright Putu Wijaya, one of SRB's most constructive critics, and Dermawan T. contended that the influence SRB had on subsequent art was one of copying the modes of production without the spirit behind it. Putu Wijaya, "Kelompok Menjadi Momok," in *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru*. Jim Supangkat, ed. (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1979), 61-63; Agus Dermawan T, "Yang Sempat Saya Catat, Sebelum Dan Sesudah Pagelaran Seni Rupa Baru, 1977."

was a gradual shift from a prolonged restlessness and loss of direction felt during the 1980s towards maturation and consolidation of what might be called an (postmodernist) artistic-cultural movement in the 1990s. As the chapters to follow in Part III make clear, this shift should also be seen in connection to the internationalization of Indonesian contemporary art that began in the early 1990s.

There was indeed a decline in support for and, perhaps consequently, the making of such works after the disbanding of *GSRB*. Writing in 1984, art critic Rudi Isbandi states “one by one, those who either supported or experimented with such art have evaporated, there is now absolutely no avant-garde. [...] No longer are there exhibitions of experimental art capable of moving us, save for the aesthetic return to already established values” (17; see also “Mengharu Seni Rupa Baru” 1984; Dermawan T. 1984). At the risk of generalizing the terrain, there were two main reasons for this. First, governmental influence in the arts was increasingly felt, compelling some artists to take their experimental works out of the institutions to develop different kinds of art. Some were driven by a need for escape in experimentation for its sake, others by a committed interest in developing a critical artistic approach to current social issues, which in turn demanded a different way of exhibiting. Second, the drawing power of the developing art market also meant that funds previously available to sponsor non-conventional works were also diverted to investments in the market.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ With the rapid opening up of the economy to Western capital, large private corporations, business people, and a new middle class emerged in the first decade of the New Order. See, Richard Robinson, “Indonesia: An Autonomous Domain of Social Power?” *The Pacific Review* 5.4 (1992). A number of new private galleries emerged to supply the new collecting class with its objects, and Indonesia experienced its first painting boom in the mid-1980s. One of the major players in this field were the Chinese, who had been locked out of active politics, but continued to control most of the country’s capital outside of that coming in from foreign investment. It is therefore not surprising that a group of collectors began to emerge in the early 1980s and have amassed some of the most important private collections of modern and contemporary art in Indonesia. For a discussion of collecting practices at the private level at the time, see

Although economically a boon for many artists, according to Sanento Yuliman, the rapid rise in art market demand in the 1980s was detrimental to the development of experimental and thought provoking works (Yuliman 2001, 24-25; see also Yuliman and Supangkat 1987). Socio-political art was something one went to see, not collect. Just supporting alternative modes of art was to set oneself as a maverick. Similar to Isbandi's concern, Yuliman's basic point was that a disconnect had taken place; that due to the pressures of the market, art of the 1980s demonstrated a regression instead of a further development of what had been the 'premature' concepts put forward by *seni rupa baru*.

The next chapter follows some of the projects embarked on by mainly the Yogyakarta cohort of *GSRB*, as they attempted to further develop an artistic practice with an ethical purpose aimed at making the 'work' that art does and the work that goes into 'art' socially and politically effective.

Astri Wright, "Soul, Spirit, and Mountain: Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Painters," Dissertation, Cornell, 1991b.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CONTEXTUALIST PROJECTS OF FX HARSONO AFTER *GSRB*

The late Sanento Yuliman commented in 1987 that *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* or *GSRB* (1975-1979) was “the first step in distancing [the making and idea of art] from subjectivism and individualism, the first move in deviating from making art oriented toward a creator” (Yuliman 2001/1987, 147).¹ He saw *GSRB* as an initial attempt to create a different kind of art that shifted focus from the artist to the public. “Art such as this,” Yuliman continued, “must be able to problematize itself and society, and to produce the appropriate concepts for such a project” (148).² This required alternative art practices capable of implicating an alternative way of life.

This chapter serves as a case study of such assertions in certain projects and works by BJIX participant and *GSRB* co-founder, FX Harsono (1939, Blitar, East Java), made between 1985 and 1994. During this period, he further developed his earlier *GSRB* era notions of a critical alternative practice that rejects concern over the primacy of object and the artist as sole creator in favor of a more open idea of the artwork as process oriented, contingent, temporary, and serving an ethical purpose beyond itself. During this time, the artist produced a number of assemblages and installations which concern social, technological and environmental change in Indonesia. His methodology of the contextualist work added something new to the structure of the artwork.

¹ “langkah awal menjauhi subyektivisme dan individualisme, gerak permulaan menyimpang dari laku seni rupa yang berorientasi pencipta.”

² “Seni seperti itu tentu perlu berkemampuan mempersoalkan diri dan masyarakatnya, dan melahirkan gagasan-gagasan yang cocok.”

After *GSRB* disbanded, Harsono remained consistent in arguing that the function of art was not to preserve tradition and affirm dominant taste but to take a critical stance, accuse, and question. Art was not to “translate deep insight” (*menerjemahkan ilham*) or to produce harmony, but to proclaim its commitment toward humanity (*kemanusiaan*). He contended in 1993 that the production of art and the work itself was a contextual mode of ‘writing local histories’ about the people and events that take place around him, as well as larger socio-political issues. Installation art was best suited to the task of the ethical purpose he had in mind. Installation art is capable, he suggests, of telling and enacting stories (Harsono n/d-a, n/d-b). Its strategies of appropriating local metaphors and materials in the critical articulation of issues present a more direct and immediate kind of communication, engaging the observer as part of the problem observed and thus provoking the simultaneous questioning and sense of solidarity (Interview with the artist in McGregor 1993). Yet, even installations comprised of these local metaphors should be legible beyond their specific cultural borders. The proliferation of installation as a global form of artistic expression suggests, for him, a widespread “response to and a concern for the processes of globalisation (sic) which remain outside the capitalisation (sic) of art. They are a forum for expressing strong social concerns and yet still allow for some expressions of individuality” (31).

He oriented his practice and work ethically and morally “to the social renewal through art serving to expose the ‘truth’” (Harsono 1992b, 70; see also Moelyono 1992; Moelyono 1993). We have seen such claims before in the discussion of Sudjojono’s ‘new art’ above. Yet, revealing the ‘truth’ takes on different operations in *pembaruan* or renewal during the time in question (1985-1994) in which the artist is called on to take up “the problems of poverty, oppression and suffering of the ‘marginal people’” (Harsono 1992a). Artists had the task of deriving practices that not

only revealed the truth but that somehow were to raise the consciousness of the observer and/or the people about whose plight the work is said to speak; thus helping to initiate new social awareness, enacting a self-empowering change. These are the basic principles that govern FX Harsono's approach to the art making process, or more precisely artistic practice as an assumed *praxis*.

Of course, the plight of the poor, the dispossessed, the oppressed, had been a theme in art in Indonesia since at least the 1930s with painters such as Sudjojono, Hendra Gunawan, Affandi, and others (compare Holt 1967; Soedarso 1993; Supangkat 1993; Supangkat 1997; Wright 1993; Wright 1994; Wright 2001). However, fellow *pembaruan* artist, Moelyono, makes a clear distinction between the contemporary project of renewal and exposure of the 'truth' and the imagery of the older generation. In the latter case, the 'poor and oppressed' remained objects for the artist's personal expression, "no different from inanimate objects, scenery, flowers, or a woman's body. They are objects that can stimulate inspiration and excite an expression of tension"(Moelyono 1997b 122). Aside from the disconcerting notion that 'a woman's body' is somehow 'naturally' akin to other and inanimate objects, there to stimulate and excite, Moelyono underscores the *pembaruan* artist's desire to move away from mediums of personal expression to create opportunities of interaction as part of the 'work' that art does.

Arguably, the idea of 'work' in this sense is a key difference between Harsono's notion of *seni pembaruan* from its roots in the revolutionary era and *pemberontakan* of the 1970s. For a period during the 1980s, Harsono in collaboration with members of his ASRI cohort and particularly with Moelyono, worked to develop *seni pembaruan* as an artistic practice with an ethical purpose aimed at making the 'work' that art does and the work that goes into 'art' socially and politically effective.

An artist concerned with poverty, oppression or other problems connected to the people, will not give priority to art as an expression in praise of individuality. Such elitism is not concerned with art's social function. This type of art cannot change social situations. No art can, but the concerned or committed artist is aware that art has a social function, and from all of the accumulative actions can assist in social change. This type of commitment then requires working together with the public, other non-art foundations, groups, etc. (Harsono 1994a).

Harsono contended, in particular, that for art to have meaning for anything or anyone beyond the art world, artistic practice had to go beyond the confines of the aesthetic and cross into 'non-art' spheres. At the heart of his suggested artistic practice is a pseudo-socio-anthropological process, and required the artist to work with the local community, to learn from their values and modes of expression (Harsono n/d-a, n/d-b). He distinguishes this as an authenticity produced in the collaborative process between artists and the community. The research about the local social problems "gives them [works of art AKR] validity and they are created from a base of involvement with villages and communities and the issues important to them" (quoted in McGregor 1993, 31). As he also suggests, part of the challenge is to reconcile the needs of the community to represent themselves in this supposed collaboration and the artist's own needs to "develop and innovate" in order to construct a visual language easily understood locally and beyond, "a simple but not mono-dimensional language" (Harsono 1994b, 4).

Taking certain cues from the larger discussions going on at the time, Harsono would later call his approach or artistic practice *seni kontekstual* or 'contextual art', which in my reading will often be called 'contextualist' art in that it more directly assumes a deliberate agenda on the part of the artist.

Theorizing Contextualist Art

One of the leading critical writers in the field of contemporary art from the late 1970s until his death in 1991 was Sanento Yuliman. According to some, he was instrumental in formulating and consolidating the thinking behind *GSRB*'s agenda. As some of his writings from the 1980s attest, Yuliman desired to see their unfulfilled democratizing aims come to fruition. By this is meant that he wanted to see further exploration beyond the boundaries of 'fine art', and he continued to push for an 'aesthetic pluralism', the idea of visual art beyond the province of 'high culture' to acknowledge and mingle with other disciplines in order to supersede the elitism of the established art world (Yuliman and Supangkat 1987).

Writing in the early 1980s, Yuliman wrote that the dominant aesthetic discourse operates on a "singular viewpoint, one that assumes there is only one fine art (with one structuring order), and only one society, namely a global one that is imagined as existing whole and complete" (Yuliman 2001/1984, 23).³ His agenda is to argue the impossibility of such a universal referent by pointing out that such an assumption requires the "marginalization of a number of the realities in our society, such as ethnic cultures, rural and urban, as well as the different classes and social strata."⁴ In his now well known "Dua Seni Rupa" or "Two Arts" (first presented in 1984), Yuliman calls for the diversification of this image vis-à-vis modes of practice capable of representing cultural heterogeneity; and that take into account the simultaneous temporalities and experiences of modernity that put pressure on ideas of

³ "pandangan serba tunggal, yg menganggap hanya ada satu seni rupa (dengan satu tata acuan), dan hanya ada satu masyarakat, yaitu masyarakat seluruh (global) dibayangkan sebagai wujud yg utuh dan padu"

⁴ "mengesampingkan sejumlah kenyataan masyarakat kita, seperti kebudayaan-kebudayaan etnik (suku bangsa), desa dan kota, serta golongan-golongan dan lapisan-lapisan sosial."

universal points of reference.⁵ In addition, he argues against an over-reliance on Western categories and trends as primary points of reference in constructing a new artistic language, and warns against assuming another society's and culture's historical trajectory as Indonesia's own (compare with Budiman 1985).

Yuliman contends that the dominant aesthetic of national culture, which was characteristic of a Westernized, educated, middle to upper urban class, had laid claim to modernity, its vision of which being largely based on Western categories. At the same time, it also laid claim to 'local' art and 'traditional culture' which it mainly associated with an essentialized elite (Javanese) court society.⁶ A pluralistic understanding of the aesthetic, or visual art, would acknowledge that Indonesian culture and society was not modernizing at the same pace, and would therefore encompass the small-scale cultural production of the local, poorer or economically weak (Yuliman 2001/1984, 25). It was within the lower classes that relations between the uneven effects of economic, social, and cultural modernization, as well as experiences of modernity, surface in all their complexity (26-29). Their cultural production had been forced to change by the increasing pressures of economic development, often having to resort to recycling the refuse from the middle class to make new kinds of aesthetic objects (29). He calls for visual artists participating in the elite sphere to incorporate into the body of the artwork these 'local' points of reference, knowledge, and techniques. However, Yuliman's aim is not to suggest uncritical appropriation or mining of the visual language of the poor. A critical art practice must be "something that implicates an alternative way of life" (30). Such an

⁵ "Dua Seni Rupa" was first given as a presentation in 1984 and was later revised and reprinted in January 1992 in *Tempo*. The version used here is from a collection of his writings published in 2001.

⁶ For a more general discussion of how the government transformed local art from a supposed lived praxis into an aesthetic sign of culture, see Greg Acciaioli, "Culture as Art: From Practice to Spectacle in Indonesia," *Canberra Anthropology* 8 (1985)..

‘alternative’ requires constructing a dialogue between the two discourses, the ‘high’ and the ‘low’ such that the one does not absorb or subsume the other. Thus, the field of art itself has to be rethought, resulting in an acceptance of simultaneous, possibly different or even conflicting artistic and cultural expressions.

Yuliman’s conception of a categorically possible critical alternative art practice echoes certain of the propositions put forward in the previous decade, however with more emphasis placed on aesthetic and cultural plurality and its potential as a critical force against assumed universal referents of national culture. He emphasizes particularly on the cultural context and the different experiences and paces of modernity in the country that then should be incorporated into a critical art practice.

The above arguments were part of a larger move toward a new current of thought, a kind of contextualist artistic-cultural movement. Yuliman first presented “Dua Seni Rupa” at the National Symposium of Art, in Surabaya in July 1984, six months prior to the now famous *Sastra Kontekstual* (Contextual Literature) conference.⁷ Concepts and formulations of a contextualist practice were forged, debated and aired in the media beginning in 1982, and further developed in part in a

⁷ The 1984 conference held in Solo (north of Yogyakarta) was dedicated to developing *sastra kontekstual* or contextual literature, and developed into a major debate. The conference was organized by a group of cultural activists as an alternative forum to the officially sanctioned and governmentally funded National Symposium on Indonesian Literature, which took place one week prior at the University Gajah Mada (UGM) in Yogyakarta. The conference served to further formulate such a practice, and for Budiman’s purposes, a radically new form of literary interpretation. For an anthology of the published debate and summary of the discussions, see Ariel Heryanto, ed., *Perdebatan Sastra Kontekstual* (Jakarta: Rajawali, 1985). One of the major proponents of the new current of thought in literature, Arief Budiman, propagated the term *sastra kontekstual* as an interpretative practice in opposition to officially sanctioned, ‘mainstream’ categories of literature that upheld the tastes of an educated, middle class, urban culture that based its criteria on Western categories of ‘literature’. Budiman, a trained sociologist, contended that literature is situational and historical; no one work can perform the same way in all contexts all the time, and what is thought to be ‘good’ literature is not the same across all contexts. Contextualist interpretation should therefore aim to incorporate text based forms that have previously been marginalized or dismissed as non-‘literature’ according to the dominant urban culture.

number of literary, visual arts, and cultural congresses and symposiums held in Java (Solo and Yogyakarta) as well as Surabaya (North Java) that took place between 1984 and 1986.

Reading similar manifestations in literature of the same period, Keith Foulcher (1987), suggests that contextualist practice was a an emerging current of thought in the 1980s calling for a sustainable and alternative discourse capable of situating art as interventionist and as a form of protest. Foulcher further states that it was a “humanist response to what [artists andwriters perceive AKR] as the growing and self-induced ‘isolation’ of art and artists from the society to which they belong” (Foulcher 1987, 12). At base, contextualist works deal with themes “relevant to the problems of Indonesian society” and the “struggle for a better life for all humanity.” By extension, contextualist works should also serve in the capacity of ‘consciousness awakening’ (Harsono 1992a, 1994, n/d-a). All of the above argues for a kind of renewed social function of works of art and as the work that art does.

The notion of the contextual also obviously had political implications, with its focus on issues of decentralization of the dominant (Western and so-called ‘Westernized’ Indonesian) discourse and criteria in the arts, as well as the recuperation and inclusion of those elements repressed by dominant ideologies of national culture.

Contextualist Art in Practice: Pameran Seni Rupa Lingkungan - Proses 85

After *GSRB* disbanded in 1979, several of its members continued working together. At that time, FX Harsono was living in Jakarta and worked with graphic design companies, later opening his own graphic design business. He completed his art degree at the *Institut Kesenian Jakarta* (Arts Institute of Jakarta) or IKJ in 1991.⁸

⁸ IKJ, located on the grounds of TIM, was founded in the 1970s and places emphasis on craft and design alongside ‘fine art’. Harsono taught as a lecturer in graphic art and design between 1983 and 1984, and attended the school as a student between 1988 and 1991. As part of his exit exam, he

Between 1982 and 1987, he worked with fellow *GSRB* members Gendut Riyanto and Haris Purnomo, also living in Jakarta, and Bonyong Munni Ardhie on further developing a process-oriented critical approach. Younger Institut Seni Indonesia (Indonesia Institute of Art, formerly ASRI) or ISI student, Moelyono (1957), joined them around 1984. At that time, the group added an element of collaborative, pseudo-scientific research as one stage in a procedural approach.

They took up various issues related to development and attempted to formulate an artistic approach that served to ‘educate’ the public regarding these and related issues. While the New Order and its emphasis on development schemes did bring about a decline in poverty according to the national average, better education standards, as well as needed foreign investment and the rapid growth of a new middle-class, it also resulted in widened economic disparities, mass displacement, and other negative effects. In 1984-85, Harsono and his cohort embarked on a project designed to call attention to these issues, via an examination of the damaging effects of industrial waste and deforestation on the environment and the local poor communities. Such projects were still keenly embedded in the province of art and culminated in *Pameran Seni Rupa Lingkungan, Proses 85* (Exhibition of Environmental Art/Art in Local Context, Process 85) in Jakarta at the Pasar Seni Jaya, Ancol (Art Bazaar) (Figures 5.1 and 5.2).

produced the large assemblage work *Digemari* (Targeted). The subject of his *skripsi* or required thesis was the tradition of socially engaged art from Persagi (1930s) to the present (1991).

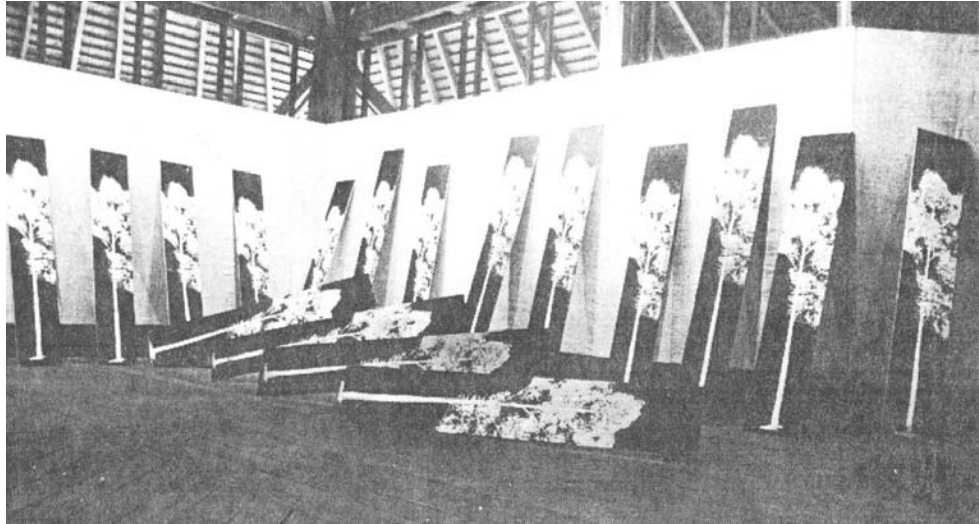


Figure 5.1 FX Harsono, *Mengimbau (Appeal)* installation in *Pameran Proses 85 Seni Rupa Lingkungan*, 1985 (Courtesy of the artist).



Figure 5.2 Gendut Riyanto, *Daur Ulang (Recycling)*, installation in *Pameran Proses 85 Seni Rupa Lingkungan*, 1985 (Courtesy of FX Harsono).

For this event, putting his graphic arts skills to use, FX made *Mengimbau* (Appeal), a series of long ply boards upon which were printed a negative image of a single tree. Most of the boards were leaned vertically in the corner of the gallery. He placed some one on top of the other on the floor to resemble fallen trees. Similarly, and typical of his 'frontal' or forthright manner, Bonyong fenced off an area of the gallery and filled it with a ton of soil, upon which he placed an amputated trunk of a dead tree (Wright 1992, 215). In *Daur Ulang* (Recycling) Gendut placed grocer's wooden crates into a massive pile, with several placed in what appears to be a precariously balanced apex. In each case, the concrete material for the piece consisted of the end-result of deforestation. The message behind it was fairly unmistakable and, according to one of Supangkat's reviews, presented "so many clichés" (Supangkat 1985).

Moelyono's work (Figure 5.3) for *Proses 85* was in fact his exit exam from the academy that had been rejected because it was thought not in keeping with aesthetic expectations of his teachers and did not fall under his painting major. This work was part of his *Kesenian Unit Desa* (Art in the Village Units) or *KUD* project begun in 1982 when he visited the hamlets of Brumbun and Nggerangan, in the village of Ngrejo, district of Tulungagung.⁹ Moelyono had grown up in this district and was apparently drawn to the plight of the landless communities who had moved there over the past two decades either because they were landless to begin with or the land they held had been over farmed. Others had settled there as failed transmigrants (Moelyono 1997b, 131). The government, according to Moelyono, had allowed the

⁹ For the artist's version of the project and series of events, see Moelyono, "KUD atau Kesenian Unit Desa (KUD or the Village Arts' Unit)," *Seni Rupa Penyadaran*, (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Bentang Budaya, 1997a).



Figure 5.3 Moelyono, *Kesenian Unit Desa* (KUD) (Art in the Village Units), 1985, installation and performance, detail of artist's exit exam at ISI (Courtesy of Cemeti Art Foundation).

community to occupy the land but with no ownership rights and with the obligation of cultivating so many coconut trees.

Moelyono carried out research there and included his empirical data as a didactic element in his installation piece. The work was simple and 'low' in its materials, consisting of a folded banana leaf on each of twenty-three woven sleeping

mats. Banana leaves, mundane in themselves, are still used in many parts of Indonesia as basic plates as well as the ground upon which ritual offerings are placed and wrapped. Upon his plates/offerings, Moelyono placed small mounds of soil and seeds for corn and other vegetables of the local diet. A small temporary hut typically used in the agricultural fields was erected on one of the mats along with a book of drawings.

The lengthy and costly *Proses Lingkungan* art project required institutional support, which the group apparently received from the WALHI (Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia) NGO and Ciputra, a highly influential businessman, and owner and director of the Ancol entertainment and shopping complex that had an ‘exhibition’ space open to all sorts of events. The project was also sanctioned by the then popular Minister of Population and Environment, Emil Salim (Wright 1994, 215). Apparently, the project found support from parts of the corporate and government sectors for the way the critical issues were raised and framed. In their data and explanatory notes, the artists stressed industrialization in Indonesia as something carried out mainly by multinational corporations whose extractive processes they saw as a form of neo-colonialism. The root cause of the evils of modernization was thus located abroad. However, although indirect, the implied message that members of the New Order government allowed such things to happen and took an active part in them also cannot be overlooked.

Seni lingkungan and its culmination in *Proses 85* was something of a first post-*GSRB* effort at further developing and pursuing a more collective mode of artistic production, and one in which the art object was only the last in a series of procedures. The ‘work’ of art itself consisted of several stages beginning with some kind of sociological research and working with individuals and groups outside the art world.

Astri Wright has likened *Proses 85*’s process to “the *sanggar* pattern of artists who shared similar views about life and art, living and working together” (Wright

1994, 215). The *sanggar* or kind of ‘art commune’ or ‘art association’ dates back to at least the 1930s, and has associations of collectivity, one whose ideological basis prior to the New Order was the main glue that bound memberships and fellowship that often spanned across ethnic, racial, and religious divides in favor of socialist egalitarianism, humanism, and social mission.¹⁰ By the 1980s, the *sanggar*, which had declined a great deal since the beginning of the New Order, was seen mainly as a space for non-academically trained artists.¹¹

In as much as the notion of *sanggar*-like associations helps in providing more cultural context to the matter at hand, I feel that *Proses 85* was more of an artists’ collective. Arguably the *sanggar* can be seen as an artists’ collective, but the artist collective is not necessarily a *sanggar*. Firstly, unlike the collective activity I have in mind here, *sanggar* were fairly permanent with a fluid membership. Secondly, culturally and socially, the *sanggar* is a modern institution combining a traditional sense of communal organization and social relations, various pro-democratic, social-egalitarian ideologies, and a modern expectation of the cultivation of individual artistic subjectivity and personal expression (Holt 1967, 216-225). The latter aspect was typically held paramount to artistic development in the ‘new age’. It is precisely this that the procedures of *Proses 85* were supposedly designed to curtail. The activities or events such as *Proses 85* and art practices based on pseudo-scientific sociological methodology underscore the artists’ ideas of establishing an artistic

¹⁰ Many of them were affiliated with or outright arms of certain political parties; others gave shelter to those who did not wish such affiliation. For a discussion of the different ideological and artistic projects of the *sanggars* in Yogyakarta, see Claire Holt, “The Great Debate,” 1967: 211-226. For a list of other *sanggars* and their members, see for example, Kusanadi, “Sedjarah Seni Rupa Indonesia Diterjemahkan Oleh Kusanadi Pada Seminar Ilmu Dan Kebudayaan Ugm Yogya, 1956,” *Budaya* 9.4/5 (1960).

¹¹ *Sanggar Bamboo* is one such commune of artists. It consists of both academically and non-academically trained artists. It maintained an ideological standpoint underlining experimentation for the sake of art’s social engagement. Alternative artists, such as ISI graduate, Dadang Christanto have been members.

practice capable of dispersing the personally expressive, a more direct means of communicating real 'extra-art' issues. Thirdly, their project is also different from the *sanggar* in that the artists did not necessarily live together nor was there a specific leader as much as they worked as individuals in a group working with LSM's and with local communities. In this regard, *sanggar* have a tradition of representing 'the people' in imagery but often are not associated with collaborative efforts with the communities of the people they represent.¹²

Proses 85, and other similar projects the artists worked on together, is arguably an artists' collective. To better situate what I mean by this term, I find Weiss' description of similar collectives with comparable agendas in Cuba during the 1970s and 1980s useful. She describes the artists' collective as a group of artists brought together under the banner of friendship rather than a central figure or overarching ideological foundation. The artists' collective:

[E]nabled an artistic practice based not only on cooperative, rather than competitive, social structure but one that also was characteristically process-oriented, gestational, discursive, and investigative rather than product-oriented – a fact that can be attached quite directly to the condition of not depending on their artwork for economic survival. These conditions were propitious for collective-based working processes that are, among other things, notoriously time-consuming and

¹² It has been suggested that the idea of the modern artists' collective in Indonesia was imported by the German artist Walter Spies along with the Dutch artist Rudolf Bonnet who, along with several other European and Balinese artists, began the artists' collective Pita Maha (Grand Ancestors) in 1936. The majority of its members were Balinese. The group met once a week and Spies and Bonnet organized traveling exhibitions of their works in Bali and the Netherlands. Spies and Bonnet changed the way how works of art were traditionally produced. Pita Maha supported the idea of the individual producer for exhibiting individual works of art. See, Anke Weihmann, "Walter Spies und Die Künstlergruppe "Pita Maha" Auf Bali (Walter Spies and the Artist Group "Pita Maha" in Bali)," *Südostasien und Wir: Grundsatzdiskussion und Fachbeiträge* [Southeast Asia and Us. Principle Contributions and Discussion], eds. A. Borman, A. Graf, M. Meyer and M. Voss, vol. 1, Austronesiana (Münster and Hamburg: Lit, 1992); Michael Hitchcock, "Walter Spies and Dresden: The Early Formative Years of Bali's Renowned Artist, Author and Tourism Icon," *Indonesian and the Malay World* 35.102 (July, 2007).

therefore difficult to maintain under the pressures of a market-driven production (Weiss 2007, 119).

The idea for the *Linkungan* projects apparently began in early 1984 with a discussion held at the culture center Seni Sono in Yogyakarta about how creative works could be vehicles for spreading knowledge about environmental issues (Miklouho-Maklai 1991, 91). The timing is of course consistent with the other discussions of contextualist work discussed above. The Seni Sono discussion involved intellectuals and activists from the University of Gajah Mada, and artists from the visual arts, literature and theater. Another discussion in July of that year centered on the position of art in Indonesian society and the role the artist should take in the path to social change. One of the ideas that surfaced in these discussions was how artists could better educate themselves about the social issues they take up in their work in order for their works to serve as more than mere reportage or personal responses to events. One solution was for the artist to treat art as part of a sociological study: "in order to make art's representations of social issues more objective and less sentimental, artists must make use of scientific research methods, and work in ways related to methodologies of scientists, competent intellectuals and social activists" (Moelyono 1997c, 10).

I have already discussed changes to the role played by the intelligentsia due to the combined cultural, institutional, economic and religious policies of the New Order government.¹³ Students and anti-communist urban intellectuals who fought to bring

¹³ For different perspectives on new intelligentsia and their role in the cultural debates during the first two decades of the New Order, see for example, Arief Budiman, "Peranan Mahasiswa Sebagai Intelligentsia [the Role of Students as Intelligentsia]," *Prisma*.11 (1976); Arief Budiman, "The Student Movement in Indonesia: A Study of the Relationship between Culture and Structure," *Asian Survey* 18.6 (June, 1978); Ariel Haryanto, "Beyond Authenticism and Academism: Priorities for Future Indonesian Studies," unpublished paper, Association of Asian Studies Conference (Honolulu, Hawaii: 1996). See also, Richard Robinson, "Indonesia: An Autonomous Domain of Social Power?" *The Pacific Review* 5.4 (1992); Richard Robinson, "Culture, Politics, and Economy in the Political History of the New Order," *Indonesia*.31 (April, 1981).

down Sukarno's regime found their ideals of democratic reforms in the country soon pushed aside by the incoming New Order government. Very few of them were given positions in government until the 1980s. This was in part due, ironically, to the military's distrust of the civilian movements and also Javanese cultural resistance to conferring responsibility on people below the age of 40 (Hellman 2003). Although often aspiring to directly intervene in the political process, the intelligentsia faced a gap between political awareness and weak political base. In this context, a new, and what some have called a 'subculture' intelligentsia (Denny 1989, 75), Muslim and Christian-Catholic, emerged in the 1970s with a particular rise during the 1980s.¹⁴ They were the driving force behind the LSM in Indonesia.¹⁵ They generally did not fight against the state, nor did they openly challenge state ideology. Instead, they took up those issues of development and modernization that were relatively ignored by the state, focusing on their sociological and cultural effects (Akhmad 1989, 91-92; see also Istiadah 1995, 3 and 4).¹⁶

¹⁴ For a discussion of specifically Muslim intelligentsia as activists see Effendi, "Emergence of the New Islamic Intellectualism: Three Schools of Thought." According to Effendi, it was already in 1973 that a new generation of Islamic activists and intellectuals emerged to challenge former methods of political Islam carried out by an older generation who had fought for an Islamic state in the 1950s and was subsequently isolated by the New Order state. The new generation of Islamic intellectuals felt that they could intervene in the social and political fabric of the state if they took on more substantial issues of Islam rather than symbolic demonstrations of Islamic devotion. They did not fight against the state, nor did they challenge the state ideology of Pancasila as did some of the more orthodox groups of their parent's generation. For a discussion of the new Islamic intelligentsia in relation to the formulation of a "liberating discourse on women", see Istiadah, *Muslim Women in Contemporary Indonesia: Investigating Paths to Resist the Patriarchal System*, vol. 91 (Victoria: Center of Southeast Studies, Monash University, 1995).

¹⁵ Because of the connotation behind the "non" in "non-governmental", the English-language acronym NGO came into disfavor in the late 1970s. This was replaced with *Lembaga Swadaya Masyarakat* (LSM, Self-Help Organization). LSMs operate on the socio-humanitarian fields at both the local and national levels. They operate on their own initiative and are not governmentally sponsored. LSMs such as LP3ES had strong ties to the international academic discourse and began publishing their own monthly journal *Prisma* including an English version. LP3ES, Bina Swadaya, WAHLI, Lembaga Bantuan Hukum, among others, were LSM pioneers comprised of former young activists who joined forces with other intellectuals who were involved in establishing the New Order.

¹⁶ This question of cultural modernization was particularly crucial in the state's relationship to Islam, in that the New Order regime aimed at not only depoliticizing Islam, but also modernizing certain

In part, the activities and premises of these LSM and the artists working with them were inspired by ongoing debates about Development Theory, Third World Developments, and economic Neo-Colonialism, and student movements taking place throughout the 'Third World' (Bodden 2002, 10). Many LSM concerned themselves with local realities and histories in the face of development policies and processes of modernization. In Indonesia, the rise in LSM and the particular social activism associated with them also can be seen as partial substitution for the loss of the political Left after 1965, and the depoliticization of the campuses and the extracurricular activities among the students since 1978.

It is perhaps no coincidence, then, that a surge in sociological methodology and methods of interpretation came to influence criticism of art and literature in the 1980s, coupled with a particular reading of structuralism (Foulcher 1987). At this time, *Proses 85* artists joined together and began collaborating with WALHI (Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia), a non-profit environmental organization founded in Jakarta in 1980, with people from various professions and backgrounds, such as medical doctors, sociologists, as well as former student activists. Collaborating with WALHI, *Proses '85* artists began learning about the socio-economic effects of development and modernization on local communities. They carried out interviews with local residents and recorded their stories, and gathered other pertinent data to later be included in the exhibition as concrete facts.¹⁷ While such elements assume a

elements of Islamic culture that it perceived as backward and underdeveloped. As a means of 'correcting' this situation, the New Order provided an economic and educational system that made it possible for all Muslims to pursue a higher education. Many of whom were then given opportunities to obtain PhDs in Western countries to return with new ideas and visions for Islamic development. As 'modernized' Muslims, they became crucial agents in changing the antagonistic relationship between Islam and the state.

¹⁷ Actually, *Proses 85* artists were not the first to include such 'data' as part of the final display. In 1981, fellow *GSRB* member, Hardi, held an exhibition in which he included photocopies of social data and statistics of environmental loss.

kind of emotional detachment – a crucial element in displacing the ‘sentimentality’ of the individual expression – the works were rather polemical in intent and the poor and oppressed remained objects, this time rationalized through scientific methods.

One of the outcomes of this had been artists engaging in their own practice of activism in an attempt to affect some kind of change in the social fabric via raising the public’s awareness and consciousness.

Looking Back: Pasar Raya Dunia Fantasi

In June of 1987, several members of *GSRB* (Bonyong, Harsono, Gendut, Haris, Siti Ardyati, Priyanto S., Dede Ere Supria and Jim Supangkat) came together for one last exhibition called *Pameran Seni Rupa Baru Proyek I, Pasar Dunia Fantasi* (New Art Exhibition, Project I, The World Fantasy Market).¹⁸ The group was joined by *Proses* ’85 member, Moelyono, as well as fellow ISI student, Dadang Christanto, two foreign artists studying at ISI at the time, and professionals from outside the art community, such as geographers, sociologists, and doctors.

The idea and rhetoric behind *Pasar Dunia Fantasi* were in many respects a restaging of *GSRB* ideals, namely the redefinition of what signifies as art, and again showing particular interest in urban popular culture. The premise as stated in the introduction to the exhibition catalogue was to elevate the art of the people living in Jakarta to a status equal to that of ‘high’ art, thereby trying to do away with dominant notions of and perhaps even the category of ‘art’ altogether (Supangkat and Yuliman 1987; see also Yuliman 1987c and 1987d). The ‘manifesto’ of this reconstituted *GSRB* resounds with the five points of the group’s 1975 manifesto, but also ideas of

¹⁸ By then, Supangkat was not particularly active as an artist, having become a lecturer at IKJ, the same institution from which FX Harsono eventually graduated, and also art critic and science writer for *Tempo* magazine. This was also one of the last times that Bonyong, Haris, and Gendut participated in a major group exhibition. Haris Purnomo will have a major career comeback beginning in 2007.

contextualist art discussed above. In this regard, *Pasar Dunia Fantasi* incorporated similar strategies as those enlisted by *Proses 85*, particularly developing works of art in stages and collaboration with non-art professionals in carrying out pseudo-scientific research.

Objects from popular culture became fodder for ‘aesthetic design’, considered as samples supposedly representing the different social strata of the city in which popular culture is universally consumed.¹⁹ The group gathered myriad of urban popular culture, such as posters, car stickers, and t-shirts, and assembled them into works that were meant to resemble an anthropological display of artifacts and modern mall and supermarket displays (Figure 5.4). Wright (1994a) provides an apt description of one such work titled *Malioboro Man* (Figure 5.5):

The billboard advertising Malioboro cigarettes [...] shows a muscular Western male model (your typical ‘Marlboro Man’), confidently leaning back with a cigarette in his mouth. However, this Western-looking ‘he-man’ is dressed in a *lurik* jacket, batik wrap, and *blangkon* head-dress, traditional Javanese court attire. The wall he is leaning against is made of bamboo, and the cigarette in his mouth is the home-rolled, trumpet-shaped kind smoked by villagers. ‘Malioboro’, the brand name on the cigarette pack, is the name of the main thoroughfare in Yogyakarta. [...] In recent decades, Malioboro has become the city’s main tourist area [...]. Finally, under the pack of cigarettes we read ‘No.1 ing Amriki’, a play on the English ‘No. 1 in America’ and the Javanese *ing mriki*, meaning ‘here’ – erasing the boundary between ‘here’ and ‘there’ (Wright 1994, 213).

The above passage underscores the allegorical nature of such works. However, such visual/textual/linguistic puns can also be read against Wright’s assumption of ‘erasure’. Instead of erasure of boundaries, such allegorical structures also present a

¹⁹ Around the same time of the exhibition, the journal PRISMA (the journal of the LSM Lembaga Penelitian, Pendidikan dan Penerangan Ekonomi dan Sosial (LP3ES)) devoted its May 1987 issue to the topic of Pop Culture.

collision of heterogeneous elements, revealing one world hidden beneath another. On the one hand, the exhibition and its various works therein are aimed at the denunciation of high art's elitist isolation via the introduction of the mass produced objects into the gallery. On the other hand, its critical gesture is in its demonstrating how the signs and conditions of modernity take on different features and contours between and across different contexts, and take on new attributes 'here' that challenge a universal concept of modernity as conceived of over 'there'. As such, it does not erase the boundary; such would imply an impossible equality that does not seem present in the work itself.



Figure 5.4 Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru (New Art Movement) installation view, exhibition Pasar Raya Dunia Fantasi (Fantasy World in a Supermarket), 1987. Illus. in "A Different Modern Art," *Art and Asia Pacific* 1, no. 1 (1993): 20.



Figure 5.5 Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru (New Art Movement), installation view of in *Pasar Raya Dunia Fantasi* (Fantasy World in a Supermarket), 1987 (Courtesy of FX Harsono).

While the criticisms of expectations of modernity are obvious in the visual and textual pun, the game of exchanges between art and non-art in relation to art's self-criticism does not seem to have been founded on a critical engagement with the significance or ideology behind the popular culture imagery and icons themselves. Instead, *Pasar Dunia Fantasi* – its 'works' of 'art' and the exhibition's rhetoric – promoted an idealistic assumption of popular culture of the urban mass as the great leveler by which the category of 'art' and its forms would somehow dissolve; high art would enter the realm of the everyday, not commodification. Instead of risking the dissolution of the category of art, however, the project served as an expansion of what could possibly signify as art. In addition and similar to the *GSRB* events of the 1970's, *Pasar Dunia Fantasi* did little to involve the public except as observers of their own products and culture within a new and unfamiliar context of 'high culture' (Moelyono 1991, 45).

In retrospect, Harsono acknowledged that no barriers had been torn down by the project and that “to just rebel against convention was not enough to change the structure and field of art.”²⁰ After *Pasar Dunia Fantasi* he began to think that art needed to proclaim its commitment even more, and this through more than reading about social and development issues. He wanted to take artistic research into ‘the field’, to those places discussed in the mass media in order to better understand the issues first hand. Supangkat rejected this move toward orienting art in the direction of overt social investigations and commentary. For him, art had to remain autonomous from such determinants as these would impinge on artistic exploration. If not, art would move close to clichéd political rant that, like making art for the market, meant the impoverishment of artistic experimentation. As the differences on the social dimension of art intensified, *GSRB* permanently split after this exhibition.

The late 1980s and early 1990s were, according to Harsono, a lean time for art events such as those discussed above, as money was increasingly diverted to the art market. Nonetheless, for roughly the next seven years (1987-1994) he would continue to develop his concept of a contextualist art based on a similar set of procedures.

Voice / Voiceless

In the beginning of the next phase in his work (1987-1994), FX Harsono continued to team with Moelyono. They began studying sociological theories through the *Asosiasi Penelitian Indonesia* (Research Association of Indonesia), which based much of its ideology and methodology on the work of Javanese sociologist Alois Nugroho and Brazilian Marxist sociologist Paulo Freire, particularly the latter’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressors* and *Cultural Action for Freedom* (both 1972). Moelyono explains that

²⁰ Interview with FX Harsono, Jakarta, January 2002.

they took up Freire's premise concerning education as a form of 'emancipation' or *pembebasan* in Indonesian, in order to "bring people from an ignorant attitude to a critical one" through art as a form of self-empowerment (Moelyono 1991, 47).²¹ In order to affect changes in their own lives, to author their own historical process, people first would have to be made aware of their situation. Moelyono and Harsono took such ideas in somewhat different directions.

It was particularly Moelyono, with his *KUD* project introduced above, who put such ideas into practice as a way of life, going to live and work in a village school to teach the children art as therapy and empowerment.²² His idea of *seni penyadaraan* or 'art of conscientization', or what he also called 'dialogic transformation' through art is that which assists the local community recuperate and develop their "popular artistic aesthetic" through which to express their experiences of being marginalized by development and uneven modernization (Moelyono 1997a, 128). By extension, art requires redefining as a non-hierarchical practice, something that involves no special training and can be made by anyone, and hence is not an activity isolated from society. 'Art' would be made according to the values and visual languages of the local

²¹ Freire's basic premise was a dialogical education process as a means of elevating not only the literacy levels among the poor, but to also educate them about their cultural and political disempowerment as a consequence of their economic poverty. The role play and different modes of communicative and performative acts as crucial elements of his pedagogical theory, was to allow students to voice their own experiences to their 'tutors' and create role plays and other forms of expression as a changeable narrative. For Freire, the successful consequence of the advance in literacy, was an end to what he called the "Culture of silence", or the "condition of cultural disempowerment linked to economic impoverishment and political disenfranchisement". {Craven, 2002 #869@ 82}

²² The project to which he has devoted himself for the last twenty five years has been discussed by others. For instance, Astri Wright (1991 and 1994) provides possibly the first English-language study of his work during the mid-1980s when he embarked on his KUD project. Moelyono has also written on his project as it changed over the years. See Moelyono, "Seni Rupa Dukuh Brumbun Nggerangan," *Dialog Seni Rupa* 2.1 (1990); Moelyono, "Sebuah Proses Seni Rupa Kagunan (a Process of Kagunan Art)," *Dialog Seni Rupa* 5 & 6.11 (1991); Moelyono, "Agenda Seni Rupa Pembaruan (the Agenda of Art of Renewal/Innovation)," *Kompas* 3 Jan. 1993; Moelyono, "Seni Rupa Kagunan: A Process," trans. Paul Tickell, *Imagining Indonesia: Cultural Politics and Political Culture*, eds. Jim Schiller and Barbara Martin-Schiller, #97 ed., Monographs in International Studies, Southeast Asia Series (Athens, OH: Ohio University Center for Intl Studies, 1997b).

community, “as a means of expressing their aspirations for communal autonomy, social justice and democracy”. In order to encourage such creativity and to cultivate it as an emancipatory action necessitates the help of an artist in the field who is committed, partisan and empathizes with the people: “The role of the arts worker is to assist in the regrowth...by aiding in the creation of art forms of high quality rooted in traditional culture, the environment, and everyday life” (130).

There is conceptual affinity between Moelyono’s positioning the village poor with certain previous conceptions of art, such as Yuliman’s in “Dua Seni Rupa”. The village poor are identified as the site and locus of traditional culture, nature, the irrational, and the spiritual. Ironically, this also implicitly places the artist as the ‘rational’, modern subject who acts as ‘guide’ leading the socially and politically disenfranchised to their own emancipation. This is in no way meant to diminish the importance of Moelyono’s project and its positive impact on the lives of the people with whom he works.²³ It is however to underscore that in as much as artists may desire a dialogic art process, dialogue in this sense still entails the tension and potential conflict between the different positions and discourses that make up the dialogue, his as a trained artist/tutor and those of the ‘marginalized people’.

Different from Moelyono’s conception of *seni penyadaraan* that worked to raise the consciousness of the local people regarding their own plight and to then help them change it, Harsono’s conception of critical work argued that a given community is usually already aware of its situation but is underrepresented or has no voice at the

²³ For discussions of some of the group’s exhibitions and their effects, see, Astri Wright, “Soul, Spirit, and Mountain: Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Painters,” Dissertation, Cornell, 1991, 461; Moelyono, “KUD Atau Kesenian Unit Desa (KUD or the Village Arts’ Unit),” 134. Moelyono attempted to create a similar project among factory workers and their families in Surabaya. Their collective exhibition in 1988 was banned by the local authorities. For a discussion of Moelyono’s exhibition and its banning, see Julie Ewington “The Exhibition That Never Opened”, *Art and Asia Pacific*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1994).

national level. As such, Harsono argued that art should be able to raise awareness about the plight and suffering of a given community to the art going public through aesthetic means (Rath 2007, 82). Hence the idea of ‘consciousness awakening’ or ‘conscientization’ takes the point of emancipation almost completely out of the hands of the community and makes the artwork the locus of change and the artist and viewer the potential agents of change.

The following discussion takes up his contextualist work produced shortly before and during the period of internationalization of Indonesian contemporary art. Some of these same works were exhibited in the BJIX in late 1993 and in his first solo exhibition in 1994. This body of work produced between 1992 and 1994 demonstrates a distinct move toward a more frontal approach in contextualist work.

Harsono’s first solo exhibition, *Suara* or *Voice*, in July of 1994, consisted of eight installation/multi-media works.²⁴ A number of the included works had been exhibited previously, such as in the First Asia Pacific Triennial in Brisbane, Australia (1993), and the BJIX. The metaphor of ‘suara’ (voice) and/or lack thereof ties the works together under the theme of what the artist described as the ‘culture of violence’:

Killing and violence is still being carried out by those with political power and in my society there is a continuing problem with the imbalance of power between those with power and those without. We are all part of a culture of violence. I am not against my culture but against the violence in my culture and the suffering it causes (FX Harsono quoted in McGregor 1993, 31).

²⁴ In addition to the works discussed below, the exhibition included *Voice from the Throne/Power and Oppression* (1992), *Monument of Reflection/Voice of Culture of Violence* (1993), *That Woman Said* (1993-94) and *Portrait of Nature, The Victory of Technology* (1994). For reviews and general descriptions of the works, see *Kompas*, "Harsono Pamerkan Budaya Kekerasan (Harsono Exhibits the Culture of Violence)," *Kompas* Jul. 22, 1994; Hendro Wiyanto, "Pameran Tunggal "Suara" Harsono: Instalasi Sosial Politik (Solo Exhibition of Harsono's 'Voice': Socio-Political Installation)," *Kompas* Jul. 27, 1994.

In this body of work, the artist places emphasis on oppression via the metaphor of voice and the absence of voice. Many of these works were inspired by specific events again involving the less than beneficial, if not brutal, aspects of development and displacement for the sake of those in power.

The timing of this solo exhibition is important in that just one week prior, the Ministry of Information began cracking down on those who publicly and directly criticized the government, its policies, and the military. On 21 June, 1994, the news magazines *Tempo* and *Editor*, and the tabloid *Detik*, were shut down. This marked the end of a short period of ‘political openness’ in New Order Indonesia which was supposed to provide more open avenues for freedom of speech in the press.²⁵ FX Harsono was one among many artists to respond to these crackdowns, about which many of the works in the exhibition refer. It was also a period of tense political wrangling and power struggle between Suharto and leading fractions within the military allying themselves with prominent leaders of the democratic movement. In this at times confusing situation, the Ministry of Education and Culture (Departmen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, or Depdikbud), under Director General Edi Setyawati, allowed the display of these provocative pieces in its own exhibition space (Gedung Pamer Seni).

For the purposes of the present study, Harsono’s installation works *Suara dari Dam* or, variously, *Suara dari Dasar Bendungan/Ziarah* (Voice(s) from the Bottom of the Dam/a Pilgrimage) (1994) and *Suara dari Kekuasaan Teknologi* (Voice(s) from the Power of Technology) (1992) serve as examples through which to further unravel

²⁵ This period of ‘openness’ began around 1988. For activists’ and journalists’ accounts and responses to the banning, see Aliansi Jurnalis Independen Indonesia, *Banning Tempo* (1994). For a history, see Kurniawan Junaedhie, “Majalah Berita: Mereka Yang Resah [News Magazines: The Restless Ones],” *Rahasia Dapur: Majalah di Indonesia [Kitchen Secrets: Magazines in Indonesia]* (Jakarta: Penerbit PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1995).

his concept of *seni kontekstual*. These works were produced employing a similar pseudo-scientific methodology the artist had begun using around the time of *Proses* 85, and serve as Harsono's interpretation of local occurrences of development.

For *Voice(s) from the Power of Technology* and *Voice from the Bottom of the Dam* Harsono again worked with LSM to not only learn about the local issues in question, but to also gain access to areas and populations that otherwise would have been inaccessible to an urban, contemporary artist working alone. The artist also had to gain support from local religious leaders who then served as a crucial point of entry into the community.²⁶

The site of *Voice(s) from the Power of Technology* (Figure 5.6) is the effects of the proposed building of a nuclear power plant in Lembah Abang, Jepara, Central Java. Land slated for the project had been used for a large tea plantation that dated back to the colonial period, and upon which a large number of plantation workers and their families still lived. After the fences had been erected around the site, the local inhabitants were barred entry. Harsono, along with his local LSM contacts and the local *ulama*, interviewed a number of people from the community about what they knew of the nuclear power plant and how they felt about being pushed off the land. In addition, the artist asked the community to provide him with objects that for them represented their past, present and future. As the final stage of the project, the artist produced two installation works, one to be viewed by the local community, the other for the art world back in Jakarta. For the community object, he wrapped the community's selected belongings *cum* artifacts in gauze and placed these bundles on the edge of the beach close to the building site. For his Jakarta piece, he created a scale model of the tea plantation, as well as several semi-identical objects consisting of

²⁶ Interview with FX Harsono, Jakarta, November 22, 2002.

small amounts of soil contained by a fence made of twigs. This was to emphasize soil as a not just a symbol of the farmer but as a metaphor of their fate. The repetitive form was to symbolize the many lives that would be disrupted if construction were to carry on. From ceiling, he hung television monitors showing recordings from the interviews with the local inhabitants as well as appropriated media clips from Chernobyl.



Figure 5.6 FX Harsono, *Suara dari Kekuasaan Teknologi* (Voice(s) from the Power of Technology), installation, 1994 (Courtesy of the artist).

He followed similar procedures for *Voices from the Bottom of the Dam* (Figure 5.7), an installation that retells the narrative of the village Nipah in Sampang, Madura (East Java) slated for relocation to make room for a dam to supply the region's water. The government explained the dam and the consequential displacement of the community was necessary for national development, yet also reportedly paid the farming community extremely low prices for their land.²⁷ Harsono was first drawn to

²⁷ Unless otherwise noted, my discussion of this work comes from Amanda Katherine Rath, "The Conditions of Possibility and the Limits of Effectiveness: The Ethical Universal in the Works of FX

the story after the media reported the killing of three people by the military during an ‘illegal’ demonstration staged by the community to protest against the taking of their land. For this dam project, Harsono again recorded a number of villagers as they described their experiences in the local language, Madurese, instead of in the national language of *bahasa Indonesia*. Again, he worked with the community in selecting the concrete objects as material for the finished piece. The objects were chosen based on their significance regarding issues of wealth in the form of land, water, and chili plants. The land gave them not only their own supply of this expensive commodity of water but also extra income, as at that time the sale of chilies had reached peak prices. The artist also selected objects from the community that represented general aspects of the Madurese local culture, including examples of its typical black woven-cloth shirt and a reproduction of the community’s mosque window.

With this motley collection of objects, the artist created an allegory of the potentially destructive effects of development and demands for sacrifices in this endeavor. “For them,” explains Harsono, “land is not understood merely for the sake of producing rice, but it is also a part of their entire cosmology. This is not always understood by those who make policy.” In other words, by displacing the community and taking over their land, development policies could potentially disrupt entire cultures, as it also means the potential destruction of mythical and cosmological places of community identity as well.

Harsono," *FX Harsono: Titik Nyeri*, ed. Hendro Wiyanto (Jakarta: Langgeng Icon Gallery, 2007, republished 2010).



Figure 5.7 FX Harsono, *Suara dari Dasar Bendungan/Ziarah (Voice(s) from the Bottom of the Dam/a Pilgrimage)*, installation, 1994 (Courtesy of the artist).

A series of clay water pots and large water basins typically found in rural areas were placed on the floor. He placed small speakers in the clay jugs, the sound from which was transmitted through plastic tubing buried beneath water and twigs in the large basins. Out of the jugs came the recorded voices of the community. In as much as it can be said that the people of the village somehow have a ‘voice’ through the recordings, *Voices from the Bottom of the Dam* also underscored the community’s lack of representation and silenced ‘voice’ suggested by the microphones placed before other ‘silent’ artifacts from the community.

In relation to the role played by the community, the idea of collaboration that the artist suggested had taken place in such projects remains problematic. For there is a distinct difference between being actively involved in one’s own representation, in this case deciding what stories to tell the artist and what objects to provide him as materials for the artwork, and being represented in an artwork in a rather fixed and

enduring way. It becomes doubly problematic when the representation of the poor and displaced is produced by someone else. Collaboration in these works was limited to the community acting as informant whose identity is reconstructed by the artist.²⁸ These reconstructions or representations were shown in an arts institution in Jakarta to a different group of people. A question arises: what kind of new knowledge do the above works impart to the urban middle class audience of mainly like-minded artists and supporters? The investment each side - the community and the art going audience - puts into these objects and in the artwork is most likely different. Are the two gazes equal and compatible, or unequal and fraught? Such questions are particularly important to projects which claim a degree of democratization in their practice.

FX Harsono's earlier explanation of contextualist work suggests that images and objects and their meanings are culturally grounded and categorized according to certain social norms which 'bind' them to a place and which 'binds' a community together. As such, things and objects perform a prescribed role in society. By taking these objects out of their local context, their biographical and ideological role is also changed; the way they perform is altered and the object is transformed, in this case as both artifact of a community seen from the outside as well as material for 'art' (see Hoskins 1998; Kopytoff 1996). Like the above projects of *Pasar Dunia Fantasi* and *Proses 85*, one of the basic strategies of such 'collaborative' operations is the erosion of the arbitrary divide between art and life, which was sought through the introduction of the quotidian artifact from life into the field of the art object-event. In their cultural move from existing as something in daily life to something that 'represents' that life,

²⁸ The irony of this relationship is not lost on the author, her own writing is largely based on interviews and given images.

do the objects that comprise the above works serve as surrogates or representations of the community, or do they instead come to serve as a representations of something beyond the community and its specific experiences?

Figure of Oppression and the Oppressed as the Site of the ‘Work’

FX Harsono’s work during the period discussed is more issues-based, taking the narratives of the marginal and the oppressed as the primary site and content of his work. In a way, Harsono’s ‘contextualist’ works function as site specific works, works that aspired to expand art into culture as part of the ‘work’ involved in the process, even though the final work of art was exhibited in galleries and museums. In this, Miwon Kwon’s mapping of the different paradigms of site-specificity in American art after 1960 serves a helpful frame. Here I am interested in her notion that such operations of expansion can include or involve different paradigms of site-specificity operating concurrently, all of which go against the grain of art’s cultural confinement. Borrowing from Kwon, it can be argued that Harsono’s “site of intervention” in the community of the marginal and his “projected site of effect” of the gallery going audience are distinct (Kwon, 2005/1997, 38 and 39). For his collaborative, contextualist work for *Suara*, he went to specific sites marked by issues of displacement due to development, collected objects from those ‘sites’, and these were then assembled for and in another site, that of the gallery and the solo exhibition. The final site in this matrix is the site with which the artist aspired to promote a lasting discourse regarding the inhumane effects of certain aspects of development among a broader audience not of the initial ‘site’ of the displaced.

In moving among these concurrent sites, the context changes and, therefore, certain aspects of the criticality of the ‘work’ shifts to take on yet another and more abstract site of the ‘oppressed’. Arguably, in his works from *Suara* Harsono used the

local event and object from daily life as pretext to his main aim of encouraging *universal empathy* and raised awareness concerning the issues of development. As such, it can also be suggested that the community's ability to assume their own identity through the objects they offered up is subsumed under a larger figure, that of the 'oppressed' 'the marginal' or the 'little man',²⁹ which is present mainly in suggestions of the conditions of 'oppression'. In order for this general figure to be more recognizable, in order to bring the urban viewing subject to a supposed new awareness of the problem, and for the objects to 'speak' to this larger purpose, the latter must also lose their specificity; they must be shorn of their "interior life", the individual specific context" to be "flattened into cliché" (Kuspit 1988, 111).

In a paper on the occasion of the *Binal Seni Eksperimantal* (1992) or Experimental Art Exhibition in Yogyakarta, Harsono defined or described what he called a *pembaruan* artist, a label under which he includes himself, Dadang Christanto, Semsar Siahaan, and Moeolyono as the main 'agents' of such art, namely as one with a profound and committed concern for "the marginal people." In such a project, art cannot be a solitary activity created by an individual, but must be produced in collaboration with the 'local community'. This 'group' of artists:

[M]akes this sector of society a part of their artistic production. In seeing problems of poverty, oppression and suffering of the people, the artists must act as agents in creating a new social awareness about the problems facing them, who then will be able to change their circumstances themselves. This means that the artists and art are able to effect social change together with the people (Harsono 1992a 70).³⁰

²⁹ This is a term used by Hatley in describing a similar tendency in theater during roughly the same period. See, Barbara Hatley, "Constructions of Tradition in New Order Indonesian Theater," *Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia*, ed. Virginia Matheson Hooker (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1993), Barbara Hatley, "Cultural Expression," *Indonesia's New Order*, ed. H. Hill (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).

³⁰ Kelompok yang mempunyai kepedulian terhadap kelompok masyarakat marjinal mempunyai sikap yang menempatkan masyarakat sebagai bagian dari penciptaannya. Dalam melihat masalah kemiskinan,

Like the works discussed above which depart from specific events regarding land tenure, several of Harsono's other installations/assemblages made between 1992 and 1994 suggest the political landscape as the site of the voiceless, of oppression, a condition experienced collectively. This includes his *Rights/Those with no Voice*³¹, *Voice without a Voice* (1993-1994), and *The Voices are Controlled by Powers* (1994). However, these works are not based on 'field work' but the artist's personal response to recent political events.

Voice without a Voice (Figure 5.8) is a series of photographic screen prints on canvas, each panel with an image of a single hand entering the frame from below. Each hand in turn forms the letters spelling 'D-E-M-O-K-R-A-S-I', the Indonesian spelling for 'Democracy', in universal sign language.³²

penindasan dan penderitaan rakyat, seniman harus bertindak sebagai agen an mencitakan kesadaran baru masyarakat tentang permasalahan akan yang dihadapinya, kemudian mampu merubah keadaannya sendiri. Artinya, bahwa seniman dan kesenian mampu menciptakan perubahan sosial bersama-sama masyarakat.

³¹ It was first exhibited in mid-1993 Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art as *Just the Rights*, and a few months later in the BJIX, along with *Digemari* or *Targeted*.

³² It was shown again in *Tension/Traditions* at the Asian Society in New York, 1996, and is now in the Fukuoka Art Museum collection.



Figure 5.8 FX Harsono, *Suara Tanpa Suara* (Voice without a Voice), 1994, Photo etching and stools, 9 panels (Courtesy of the Artist).

If reading left to right, the last sign, the ability to ‘speak’ is constricted and bound by rope. The use of sign language is a crucial element here in its relation to the silencing of freedom of speech. This was the artist’s response to the press banning. Originally shown in Indonesia as just a series of images, in the two international group exhibitions in which this piece was subsequently shown, Harsono placed stools in front of each image. On each stool was placed a stamp with one of the sign letters for ‘democracy’. The audience could move from stool to stool and spell their own words by stamping the signs on pieces of paper. Structurally this work has something of its twin in *Rights/Those with no Voice* (Figure 5.9).



Figure 5.9 FX Harsono, *Rights/Those with no Voice*, 1993, installation view at the BJIX (Courtesy of the artist).

Rights/Those with no Voice (1993) consists of a series of six identical assembled objects. He wrapped six torsos made from bed pillows in white cotton sheeting, evoking the idea of the color of mourning and burial shrouds typically used to wrap corpses. The ‘hands’ of each figure were wrapped in photocopied pages of the International Declaration of Human Rights. Using coarse rope, the artist strapped each torso to planks of wood made from vertically cut pieces of doors that also had been painted white. The door is a symbol of both safety and forced entry. These figures lean against the gallery wall, a banana leaf placed behind and beneath each one. Banana leaves are used for various forms of shelter such as umbrellas. They are also traditionally used to cover corpses on the side of the road or when no other covering is available. Harsono explained the impetus of this piece as his personal response to a universal humanitarian problem: “Human rights for poor people are almost dead and buried. Development and multinational industries often increase their

[the poor] suffering. There is a lack of meaning to human rights. And this is not only limited to the Third World” (Quoted in McGregor 1993, 31).

Rights/Those with no Voice was one of the pieces the artist submitted to the BJIX, along with his *Digemari* (1992). *Digemari* or *Targeted* consisted of a series of life-size black and white photo-screened prints on canvas depicting singular images of Indonesian workers. These images of men and women were hung within bamboo-pole frames, each facing different directions within a claustrophobic and labyrinthine space. Also hung from various heights from the ceiling were long wooden spears as if suspended by some invisible hand and pointing directly at one of the workers. *Digemari* was made at a time when the question of workers’ rights and working conditions were making headlines not necessarily only in Indonesia but also in those countries whose corporations use cheap factory labor in third world countries whose governments kept strong grips on potential unrest among factory workers.³³

³³ Interview with artist, January 2002, Jakarta.



Figure 5.10 FX Harsono, *Digemari (Targeted)*, 1992-1993, installation, BJIX (Courtesy of the Artist).

Both *Rights/Those with no Voice* and *Digemari* (Figure 5.10) would have resonated well with other works in the BJIX such as Semsar Siahaan's *Penggalian Kembali* and Dadang Christanto's *For Those Who Have Been Killed* already discussed. The themes in these works are basically the same: democracy, social justice, and human rights, articulated again through the concept of the absent, whether in voice or body, as metaphor for 'oppression' and 'violence', and the oppressed and victimized.

By the time of the *Suara* and BJIX exhibitions, FX Harsono could no longer afford the time consuming and costly field-work-based projects, and had also left behind direct collaboration. Over the next few years, Harsono used primarily computer manipulated imagery in his typically political works, appropriating images from the internet and other forms of mass media. He perceived them as found objects, items for recycling and re-signification.

In treating his images as ‘found’, Harsono attempted to displace the authorial position and importance of its point of ‘origin’, in this case the person who made the image, placing authority over it with himself. This has critical potential as the images he often took possession of were those of the military, the President, and other icons of power. Hence, while during the 1980s and early 1990s, the artist’s concern was with creating works of art from within the context of the local community by utilizing objects to represent that community, the reproducibility behind the appropriated image goes somewhat in the opposite direction by conscious deterritorialization. These two strategies, the montage of objects and memories from a local community and the montage of found images, have behind them different intentions. In the former instance, the artist put forward the ideal that in appropriating the objects from the community and rearranging them as a work of socially engaged art, they would somehow retain their context. On the other hand, in the case of the appropriated, reproducible image (meaning an image with no or at least no apparent origins but can be reproduced indefinitely) the artist is keen to decontextualize and resignify it. However, he does not challenge sediments of meaning in such powerful icons. Instead, he often reaffirms them to make a political statement.

As in most of his work up to that point, Harsono is not one to leave much room for doubt as to his meaning. He has suggested that at that time he deliberately went for forms, imagery and structures in his work that in Indonesia might be called *verbal* or *frontal*. According to official aesthetic tastes, art works had to be subtle, vague, ambiguous. ‘Verbal’ then is a kind of resistance within the visual structure; something blunt and clear to the point. Astri Wright (1999) has argued that such types of work are a form of ‘activist art’ as distinct from other modes of contemporary art in Indonesia. Activist art, according to her, should not be seen from its ability or lack thereof to also synthesize the aesthetic impulse into the work. At stake in such works

is one of a felt urgency and exists outside established expectations and boundaries of the art world:

It is art with a socio-political message, that aims to further heighten and stimulate awareness about important and problematic issues both on the individual and system level, and to increase people's will for active participation in social, political and personal transformation. Activist art points to problems usually connected with a regime's or ruling group's breaches of basic human rights...and [its] main issue is voicing unspoken/unheard truths...

Despite the wide range in forms of Indonesian activist art, aesthetic and formal choices generally contribute to presenting the message in a focused and serious manner. This style of urgent visual or multimedia communication...distinguishes activist art from art of cultural and political critique and satire, which, although it philosophically may share much of the critical basis of activist art, is generally layered with much more complex ambiguities (Wright 199a).³⁴

Still maintaining the usefulness of Wright's category of activist art, it could also be tempered with a more critical approach, particularly regarding such art's claim to some kind of action rather than reflection. In discussing activist art in America in the 1980s, a time of increasing conservatism in arts institutions and funding bodies, Donald Kuspit suggests that much activist art does send a clear message, just not the one intended: "Often, this art's call for social change and/or social unity relies on familiar codes, with just enough overlay of allusion to some topical situation of event to suggest political urgency" (Kuspit 1988, 111). The artist's intention was to bring the viewing public to a new awareness of, on the one hand, the plight of a particular community and, on the other, of the political situation in the country. Yet this was a

³⁴ Elsewhere, Wright suggests that in the turmoil of the 1990s and the highly plural field of artistic practices, "the two groups with the most tenuous position have been activist artists and women..." Astri Wright, "Lucia Hartini, Javanese Painter: Against the Grain, toward Herself," *Studies in Southeast Asian Art: Essays in Honor of Stanley J. O'Connor*, ed. Nora Taylor (Ithaca: SEAP, Cornell University Press, 2000a) 97. See also Astri Wright, "A Taste of Soil: Dadang Christianto on Systemic Violence," *Art Asia Pacific* 3.1 (1996).

pretext to get the public or viewer to become more aware of the injustices wrought by the conditions of development and militarism in general. Borrowing from Kuspit, it is possible, then, that Harsono's activist work, aiming at representing a person's or group's life or existence with objects as 'facts', in the end shaves away the interior life such that the individual or group is flattened into a cliché such as the oppressed poor.

Concluding Remarks

Beginning in the early 1980s, after *GSRB* had disbanded and many of its members had gone back to more conventional modes of art making, FX Harsono was one of the few to further develop his ideas of a possibly interventionist mode of art and ethical practice. In this, he advocated a contextualist approach, itself a part of the larger discourse of artistic activism. A main aspect of this approach were a constellation of methods and procedures designed to transgress from the strictly art field to that of cultural production and, ideally, social intervention. This entailed first the study of poverty and development from the sociological vantage point. It also meant the artist taking on the role as anthropologist.

FX Harsono and in relation to the 1980s discussion of contextualist art demonstrated how the artist conceived of the marginal people and the role the artist was to play in relation to the 'authoring' of that marginality for a different context. For him, the engaged artist is profoundly dedicated to telling the stories of those whose narratives have been dismissed and displaced. His work largely concerned those people who had been displaced by the projects of development during the New Order. The 'marginal' served as the primary site of artistic intervention, rendering the artist as pseudo-sociologist-anthropologist, 'his' empirical studies becoming a key aspect in the overall structure of the new visual art. Yet, in as much as new structures were created, the artistic practice also stripped the specificity of marginality for the sake of

a universal and essentialized metaphor of the ‘oppressed’. This figure of the oppressed took as one of its main features the condition of human suffering. This of course has been an international phenomenon within global contemporary art, but one that takes on different contours depending on the context. As was also stressed, FX Harsono’s projects demonstrate just some of the diverse ways the critically engaged artist works the tension between and degrees of desire for subjective autonomy, self-determination and cultural and social agency.

FX Harsono has been one of a minority of artists to have dedicated his work to those he and his like-minded colleagues claimed as a site of inquiry, namely the ‘marginal’ and ‘oppressed’, the disenfranchised. Having constructed his site of dedication and having spoken for it for years, the artist was also confronted with a profound loss of purpose as the anti-Chinese racial riots and rapes of unknown numbers of Chinese women, as well as religious violence unfolded with the downfall of Suharto in May of 1998.³⁵ The issue of Chinese-Indonesians is an issue that dates back to the colonial period and the Dutch race policies, but it was especially after the failed coup of 1965 that Indonesians of Chinese descent were cast as the ‘stranger among us’ in Indonesian society. FX Harsono, although still quite young at the time, was traumatized by the violence during the purge of the Communists. The Chinese changed their names to Indonesian ones (usually Javanese sounding), and the Chinese language and culture were driven underground. The ‘Chinese question’ had been a perpetual problem ever since.

The unfolding events of 1998 left many artists paralyzed and devastated. They were left wondering how to respond to the traumatic events and whether there were

³⁵ Much of this discussion of the artist’s shift in practice in post-Suharto Indonesia is taken from Amanda Rath, *Taboo and Transgression in Contemporary Indonesian Art*, Exh. Cat. (Ithaca: Herbert F. Johnson Museum, 2005) 72-73.

any artistic practice and form adequate enough. The larger question was, however, whether art (a typically moderate, secularist, and non-ethnically motivated arena) mattered anymore at all. Many artists, including Harsono, stopped making art for a while. As he explains:

[A]fter Suharto's regime fell, the culture of violence appeared clearer before our eyes. Ignorance towards the fate of the people on the one hand, and the overt emphasis on group interests on the other made me sick. This nausea and pessimism is what made me turn away from social themes. I felt a loss of moral, ethical and national orientation. I feel I have lost my ground, and am an alien among my own society. This society once was something I fought for through art. Yet reality has been stripped bare and I suddenly was forced to ask who they really were (Harsono 2003 48).

Following a yearlong hiatus, Harsono went back to making art, this time without his former ideals but still with a profound empathy. He now explores the world beyond the figure of the 'oppressed' and the specific context of the 'suffering' to reconstruct and reclaim his own identity as a racially Chinese artist in a democratizing Indonesia, as well as quite cosmopolitan art world.

CHAPTER SIX

A STUDY OF THREE PERFORMANCE ART GROUPS\COLLECTIVES IN BANDUNG

In his curatorial essay, *Pengantar*, Supangkat contended that performance art was one of the mediums taken up and developed by certain *seni rupa era 80-an* or post-GSRB artists. He also implied that this was an indication of a kind of postmodern in *seni rupa kontemporer*. A postmodern type of art was work that could not be classified according to existing categories, and therefore frees the artist from the burden of the tradition of modernism and its forms. Seemingly representatives of such art and recent art at the national level, four artists carried out performance works for the opening night of the grand exhibition: Arahmaiani in *Four Faces* (Figure 8.3), Dadang Christanto in *For Those* (see Figure 3.5 above), Marintan Sirait performing *Sound of Body* (Figure 8.1), and Agus Joli with his *Migraine*. In each case, the performance was carried out within or in response to a work of installation art, which during the performance served as the setting and stage for the body as object to perform. After the performance, the installation became *the* work of art. The tendency to create an installation work with performance being only one and fleeting component of the work was common in Indonesian contemporary art during the 1990s. Often the performance sutured other seemingly incongruous parts into a larger and more comprehensive whole. After the performance had ended and the installation came to stand alone, its once present coherency sometimes dissembled with the absence of the artist's body. In other installation-performance works, the performance was a separate work of art in itself, using the installation as its stage.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Supangkat's version of the postmodern seems to be in the form that art takes, in this case the theatrical ritual space, which is indeed one of the fundamental aspects in performance art, and the artist's supposed move from the sphere of art to that of culture by way of blurring arts boundaries with non-art operations and codes. While Supangkat's arguments are compelling, what he does not suggest, but which is key to understanding performance art in Indonesia, is that what is now called performance art emerged from within the academies and avant-garde or 'new tradition' theatre groups as a kind of collective, but not cohesive, anti-mainstream movement as well. It began as a space through which artists were free to experiment in ways not encouraged within the regular curriculum. In addition, in his concept of a postmodern in *seni rupa kontemporer*, he does not account for the different types of projects in relation to artists' assumptions of the body as a site and conduit of resistance and reconstruction.

What interests the present discussion is the development of performance art in Bandung as an alternative and at times quite critical mode of artistic practice aimed at not only releasing the work of art from the confines of convention, but at also relieving the artist of the burden of institutional framings in her or his attempts (at times more ideal than real) to go beyond the confines of art to expand into cultural and social production. Performance art has successfully existed on stage and in galleries, but during the 1980s and early 1990s, it was most critical in its modes of attempted direct intervention in public spaces. In addition, the present discussion explores further the critical position of the art group or collective as a fertile ground from which to contextualize contemporary art, in its diversity and heterogeneity. This subtext takes on two concerns in this chapter: the concepts of performance art as these developed among short-lived artists' groups or collectives (implying different kinds of artistic

labor); and artists who produce works both within and outside of the paradigm of individual authorial production.¹

The artists whose projects and concepts are discussed here have been arbitrarily selected from the fact that it was their roles as early instigators of performance art in Indonesia that connect BJIX participants Arahmaiani (1960, Bandung), Andar Manik (1959, Bandung), Marintan Sirait (1960, Braunschweig, Germany) and Isa Perkasa (1964, Majalengka, West Java). Arahmaiani, Manik, Sirait, and Perkasa share an important connection as key figures in performance art in Bandung, and are historically linked with visual art performance groups and collectives.

I have already discussed *Crackling*, the work of Andar Manik, who views the construction of his time-based installations as a kind of ritual act, as well as Marintan Sirait's dance/movement *Sound of the Body* (performed January 21, 1994) (Figure 6.1 and 6.2) carried out in response to her husband's work. Covered completely with mud, in this performance she made her way slowly around a ring of fire that had been set around the piece. Coming to know the body and to feel the body in motion and the aspect of duration are central concepts and elements to both of their works.² In *Sound*

¹ My discussion of and focus on such aspects as a key stream in Indonesian critical contemporary art practice has been informed by Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2004), Miwon Kwon, "Sittings of Public Art: Integration Versus Intervention," *Alternative Art New York, 1965-1985*, ed. Julie Ault (New York, Minneapolis and London: The Drawing Center, New York and University of Minnesota Press, 2002). Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette, eds., *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945* (University of Minnesota Press: 2007)..

² *Crackling* was restaged twice after its debut at ITB. For his exit exam, a fellow male member of *Sumber Waras* spontaneously reacted to the piece, interacting with it. Marintan Sirait, Andar Manik's wife, carried out her own mode of dance/ritual performance for the closing ceremonies of both the Cemeti Gallery exhibition (12 Jan., 1993) and for the BJIX. For the Cemeti staging in Yogyakarta, January of 1993, experimental musicians Jose Haryosuyoto, Asep, Fataji and Rumhadi from ISI created an experimental music piece in direct response to the work.

of the Body, sound becomes a performed image, in this case the body's internal rhythms into which Marintan folds as she glides slowly around the circle of flame.



Figure 6.1 Marintan Sirait, *Sound of the Body*, 1994, TIM, aprox. 30 mins. (Courtesy of the artist).



Figure 6.2 Marintan Sirait, *Sound of the Body*, 1993, Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta, aprox. 30 mins. (Courtesy of the artist).

During the BJIX, Arahmaiani (hereafter, Iani) performed a similarly esoteric dance, using her installation *Four Faces* as a stage (Figure 6.3).³ Dressed in a long sleeved, white top and Javanese-patterned sarong, and wearing a white, expressionless mask, she moves within a circle that she has etched into a square mound of white sand with a black umbrella. The composed expression of the mask is in stark contrast to the personal expression conveyed through her body's gesticulations. Accompanied by a single cymbal, she weaves together a number of gestures from the vast repertoire of traditional dance from Java and Bali. In this case, she employs many movements associated with male roles, recognizable by their wide and bold, yet controlled

³ This piece was restaged in March, 1994 at the Bintaro Shpping Plaza. It was shown in a group exhibition with Bandung artists Agus Suwage, Isa Perkasa, and Hedi Haryanto from Yogyakarta.

gestures. The performance piece ends as it began, with the artist lying in the middle of the circle, her long white sash wrapped round her body.

Behind her are symbols of 'korban', which can mean victim and sacrifice. Regarding the latter, the term refers to the transformative regenerative powers of sacrifice – that through subjugation, or the submitting of oneself to an external force, can also come empowerment. This is implied in the fertile patch of soil in the abstract form of a human body/cross. The seeds which had been planted prior to the Biennale's opening were lightly watered for the duration of the event. By the time of Iani performance in January, the seeds had grown into a patch of young bean shoots. The work also refers to victim in the sense of a coercive external power that subjugates but gives little space for empowerment. According to the artist, this aspect of 'korban' is present in the pained expressions of the four faces in paint that have been hung as a backdrop to the ritual space. *Four Faces* is both an offering of healing as well as a commentary of what the artist has often suggested are the pathologies of development, and the sacrifices the people of Indonesia, in this case, the 'rakyat', have been expected to make in the name of development. In this latter sense of the word 'korban' the idea of regeneration from loss is absent.

Acknowledging that art cannot directly change society, Iani nonetheless does posit the possibility that when performing, her body/self in some way acts as a conduit for transformative energy and that change can happen in that moment of connectedness between herself and her audience. In *Four Faces* Iani experiments in bringing together a number of the concepts centering on what would become iconic signature-style emblems in her work from roughly between 1994 and 1997: namely, those relations that she proffers in various artist statements once were whole entities. According to the artist, due to negative influences of capitalist structures, such wholeness, oneness, completeness had been ripped asunder, to exist merely as

shadows of one another in a binary, rather than whole (complete), state. The relations she has constructed as themes in her work include: an im|balance between nature|culture, female|male, feminine|masculine, local culture|globalization (American imperialism), and authenticity|capitalist obsession. Certain aspects of Iani's installation-performance work are the topic of the next chapter that deals with her issues-based work in relation to gender in the construction of critical modes of art practice. The aspect of her work that I want to register for now is the similarity between her 'dance' and Marintan's and Isa Perkasa's ritualistic, ambient gestures.



Figure 6.3 Arahmaiani, still images from *Four Faces*, installation and performance, BJIX, 1993 (VCD courtesy of the artist)



Figure 6.4 Isa Perkasa, *Dunia Menjadi Sempit* (Narrowing World), 1992, paint, silk screen on canvas, installation (Courtesy of the artist).

Isa Perkasa, newly graduated from the Graphic Arts Department at ITB, was represented in the BJIX by his *Dunia Menjadi Sempit* or *Narrowing World* (Figure 6.4), for which he painted the ground and adjacent walls to resemble torn edges of paper and placed a series of large silk-screen prints depicting his self-portrait in silhouette. The work indirectly indicates the two fields in which the artist works – graphic arts and performance art. Here he is shown in a pose synonymous with what the artist called *gerak gaya Perengkel Jahé* or *Perengkel-Jahé*-style movements; i.e. ‘images’ of the unfolding of the ginger flower and the twisted forms of the ginger root (see below). A web of twine crisscrosses the space, further adding meaning to the gesture as a human

puppet being manipulated from an unseen puppet master(s). This notion of human beings as puppets, as suggested above, had particular resonance at the time in Indonesia with the depoliticized public discourse. The piece *Gerak* had been submitted earlier that year as the artist's exit exam in graphic arts from ITB. Isa was selected to participate in the BJIX after Supangkat consulted with ITB faculty, inquiring as to which of its students were currently working in unconventional modes.⁴ While it can be said that at the time of the Biennale Isa Perkasa was little known at the national level, he already had a strong reputation in Bandung as one of the core of influential visual artists producing performance art.

The above BJIX participants, Iani, Andar, Marintan and Isa, are important to the present discussion not only as individual artists whose work was represented in a pivotal exhibition, but as members who are interconnected or linked in a series of groups or artists' collectives whose attitudes, ideas, and methods proved influential in the development of experimental body art/performance art in Bandung beginning in the 1980s. I take as my case study the artists' groups and collectives *Sumber Waras*, *Perengkel Jahé*, and *Jeprut*. Because memberships of these groups or collectives overlapped, projects and concepts of artists who were not participants in the BJIX are also included in the present discussion.

As suggested above, artists' groups in Indonesian contemporary art have often been formed out of a shared anti-mainstream, anti-establishment attitude. Their collective contributions initially derived from a sense of frustration with academy expectations and constraints, and were thus driven by a desire to experiment and construct new types of works and practices. As Iani suggests, experimentations within these groups were carried out as such, without a conscious assumption of formulating

⁴ Interview with Isa Perkasa, 13 Sept. 2002, Bandung.

something more substantial than somehow achieving artistic freedom from prevailing values, norms, market driven expectations, and surveillance:

[A]ctually when we formed a group at that time we never talked about starting from and going somewhere. It was more like a free space [in which] everybody just let it flow in looking for those possibilities. We didn't know exactly where we started, we only knew that we were just [getting] around ITB's art faculty, that's all ... [However,] there would come a time when artists would be required to re-question what they were doing: 'what am I doing here and for what'? (Quoted in "Performance Art, Speculating the Background" 2000, 36 and 40.)

Although artistic production had largely been oriented toward the individually creating artist, the tendency for artists to form into small groups and collectively work together had been a strong stream in Indonesian contemporary art. This type of group activity, as I have stressed throughout this dissertation, differs from that of the *sanggar* or artist's communes, most of which formed out of sheer necessity as a means for artists to gain experience, training, access to materials and paid jobs. The *sanggar*, while a modern organization of self-searching modern subjectivities, is still deeply rooted in traditional notions of collectivism. The collectivism and group activity under consideration here must be seen from this side of the New Order and the rebellions of the 1970s.

Positing the Performing Subject

In *Body Art/ Performing the Subject*, Amelia Jones (1998) differentiates theoretically between the terms 'body art' and 'performance art', preferring to deploy the former in order to:

Highlight the position of the *body* – as locus of a 'disintegrated' or dispersed 'self,' as elusive marker of the subject's place in the social, as 'hinge' between nature and culture...The term 'body art' thus emphasizes the implication of the body (or what I call the 'body/self,' with all of its apparent racial, sexual, gender, class, and other apparent or unconscious identifications) in the work (Jones 1998, 3).

Here, Jones prefers the term ‘body art’ to highlight a specific moment “in which the body emerged in a particularly charged and sexualized and gendered way” in specifically Western art from the 1960s to the mid-1970s. This was to differentiate this fertile period of women’s art from the broader conception of ‘performance art’ that seeks its historical trajectory with “dada and encompassed any kind of a theatrical production on the part of the visual artist,” as well as any performance that takes place in front of an audience.

Elsewhere, Jones further underscores the strategic use of ‘body art’ over ‘performance art’ by suggesting (following Henri Lefebvre) the body is “the means by which we produce ourselves as social beings, by which we produce ‘social space’” (Jones 2000, 19). In its insistence on individual genius and experimentation, modernism suppressed the social context, and by extension repressed the presence of the body, thereby marking modernism’s “refusal to acknowledge that all cultural practices and objects are embedded in society, since it’s the body that inexorably links the subject to her or his social environment” (20). The creative potential of that social space is not egalitarian since the body is also a gendered site inscribed with norms and values. Adding to the definition of ‘body art’ then is “the artist’s choice of the body as a means of expression [as] an attempt to deal with something *repressed* that subsequently returns to the surface of experience...” (19).

Thomas Berghuis (2006) points out in his survey of Chinese performance art that the genealogy of body art or performance art in a Western context, particularly in its relation to the Cartesian subject and its dislocation or displacement and decentering in the neo-avant-garde/postmodern 1960s and 1970s, is not necessarily applicable to non-Western contexts. As such, he rearticulates Jones’ notion of ‘body art’ in more general terms as those works in which “the human body, if not *any* [italics his] body suddenly becomes seen as the primary means for expression, both as the subject and object in arts

practice...” (Berghuis 2006, 25). In such an analysis, works are related by the *role of the mediated subject of the acting body in art*” (16). Berghuis’ conception of ‘body art’ helps to situate performance art elsewhere within a global discussion without having to succumb to, adopt or be cast out of the Euro-American-centric historical trajectory, which typically locates this shift towards the body becoming subject and object as a logical progression from action painting to artist’s using their bodies as art in performances.

Both Jones’ and Berghuis’ conceptions of ‘body art’ as a more precisely defined performance art are helpful in temporarily situating the works and propositions discussed in this chapter. As the following discussion will show, performance art in Bandung between the late 1980s and mid-1990s, from within or without artists’ collectives, acknowledges the body as a site upon which power relations are played out and, as such, also as a site of resistance. In much Western theory on the body, the body is “the physical agent of the structures of everyday experience..., the *boundary* between biology and society, between drives and discourse, between the sexual and its categorization in terms of power, biography and history” (Richard 2000b, 244-245). As such, it is the ultimate site “for transgressing the constraints of meaning or what social discursivity prescribes as normality” (245). While the performance artists whose concepts and projects are mapped below might agree with the idea of the body as ‘boundary’, there are other ways in Asia, and in this case, West Java, to locate the body that equally offers a site of resistance and a transgression of constraints.

On one hand, the artists whose projects are discussed below argue that their projects and practice are in resistance to external controls placed on the body by social and economic systems, most notably within conditions of an authoritarian and oppressive state during the New Order. On the other hand, they also suggest that through the performance, resistance to such external controls might be enacted by submitting the

body and self to other external powers, in this case, to those considered beyond human influence and perception (Hellman 2009, 59). It is something like a double process, in which bodily practices and systems or norms interact “to establish both empowerment and subjugation.” J  rgen Hellman’s study examines the ritual practice of fasting, its position in the subjugation of the body, and in relation to the eventual empowerment of the individual through their ability to tap into a special type of energy. This energy “must be collected and stored in objects or the body” as prerequisite to empowerment (Hellman 2009, 59). According to traditional pre-Islamic, Saiva Hinduism in West Java, this energy is known in West Java as *kesaktian* (in Central and Eastern Java, it is referred to as *kejawen*), which was then incorporated into Sufist practices. As I articulate below, many of the projects designed to resist or at least bring attention to the fact of external controls in an authoritarian state, they do so by attempting to tap into these forces and energies as a means of constructing new social relations capable of helaing, transforming and constructing new social relations. Yet, such energies cannot be tapped without the proper control and subjugation of the body in ritual to serve as a proper conduit and gateway to imperceivable forces. As artists, such as Marintan Sirait, have expressed, for the body to become the proper conduit, it must first be transformed, honed, disciplined and educated. It is through this process of subjugating the body’s baser impulses that it can serve as a vessel or container for *sakti* or the primordial consciousness. The mind, spirit, psyche, are expanded, enabling the artist and, through them, their audience or collaborators in ritual, to transgress bodily and psycho-spiritual boundaries. In so doing, the ritualized body in performance art projects under consideration below often entail exercises designed to help the body transgress the limits or borders of everyday bodily sensations.

Certain types of performance art practice as modes of cultural resistance are often enacted and acted out through the ritualized body. In this sense, the body is at once

“the *boundary* between biology and society, between drives and discourse, between the sexual and its categorization in terms of power, biography and history” and a conduit, vessel, and gateway to imperceivable energies thought to be concrete entities in themselves. The energy and concept of *sakti* and the ritualized body as crucial to understanding performance art in an Indonesian context are delineated in general terms below, but in more depth in the following chapter, in which *sakti* is discussed in relation to the feminine.

Terms and Claims of Performance Art in the Indonesian Discourse of Contemporary Art

The term ‘*seni performan*’ or ‘performance art’ officially entered into the Indonesian art lexicon in 2000 when Jakarta hosted its first international performance art festival. It was then retroactively employed to label a variety of actions and events that generally had been called *seni eksperimental* and *seni pertunjukan* or experimental art and art performance, and *seni alternatif*. Before engaging these terms, it must be kept in mind that the performance art as a different kind of practice, emerged from within the visual arts as new structures in the work of art and the work that art does. As such, the term ‘*seni pertunjukan*’ or art performance presents problems in conveying the types of work produced by *visual* artists who use their body as the primary medium and physical action as the work. As ‘*pertunjukan*’ contains the root ‘*tunjuk*’ (to show), it in this sense places performance art more in the general realm of theatre and any performance that takes place in front of an audience.

Associating performance art with *seni pertunjukan* also lacks the connotations of an avant-garde impulse and an anti-mainstream position suggested in the term *seni eksperimental*. Such connotations are crucial to an understanding of performance art in Indonesia because, in part, the actions that would later come to be called ‘performance

art' are to a substantial degree rooted ideologically and conceptually in the art rebellions of the 1970s against the established orders and categories of artistic production. This includes the emergence of groups of artists that explored the body as a primordial and essential medium.

A number of collectives, artists' groups and so called study clubs emerged in the 1970s that became a crucial element in experimental and performance art in Bandung, many of which indeed have deep connections to avant-garde or 'new tradition' theatre. This included Studiklub Teater Bandung (STB) founded by ITB student Suyatna Anirun in the late 1970s.⁵ It was an off-campus study club and brought together students from not just ITB, including visual artists Tisna Sanjaya (1958), Marintan Sirait, Andar Manik, Arahmaiani, and Diyanto, but also from UNPAD (Universitas Padjadjaran) and the Teacher's Training college IKIP (Institut Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan).⁶ It was largely designed as a type of 'acting class' wherein the group learned staging and blocking. Anirun's methodologies also placed a great deal of emphasis on the cultivation of the body and an embrace of the primordial unconscious, similar to *kesaktian* briefly discussed above. In addition to these extra-curricular clubs in Bandung, the influence of the 'new tradition' innovators in theatre such as Rendra, Putu Wijaya, Ikranegara, and Arifin C. Noer in Jakarta and Yogyakarta cannot be denied.⁷

⁵ STB was immensely influential in experimental, contemporary theatre in Bandung and set the standard by which many actors and theatre performances were gauged during the 1970s and into the 1990s. It placed primary emphasis on the actor as a moving and acting body, while dialogue and setting were typically minimal. One cannot rule out the influence of 'performance' or body art on Anirun's concept of theatre and acting. For a list of other such 'study clubs' in experimental theatre see, Ipit S. Dimiyati, "Pemetaan Kelompok Teater Di Bandung (Mapping Theatre Groups in Bandung)," *Teater Bandung: Gagasan Dan Pemikiran (Theatre in Bandung: Concepts and Thinking)*, ed. Ipit S. Dimiyati (Bandung: STSI Bandung, Theatre Dept., 2004).

⁶ One of the more well-known figures to emerge from IKIP as main forces in the development of performance art in Bandung include Yoyo Yogasmana. He has been a major figure in a cosmopolitan circuit of performance art festivals throughout the world for the last decade.

⁷ During the early 1970s, they promoted a method that sought to release theatre from its perceived literariness, to bring it back to 'its basics'. They experimented with the critical use of non-linear

This is especially true in their mutual aims and respective means of blurring the boundaries between disciplines and cultural registers (Mohamad 1974). Yet, in as much as performance art in Indonesia shares, and has been informed by, some of the experimental strategies in avant-garde theatre, to claim performance art for theatre would be also inaccurate. Performance art in Indonesia derives specifically from concerns within the *pemberontakan* in the visual arts (Hajutnikajennong (2002); Dim (2004).

The work in question can be seen as a nod to a similar work produced by Joseph Beuys and his notion of ‘social sculpture’, aspects of which have been woven into the discourse of alternative art in Indonesian art. Some of the salient features of this reference to Beuys’ utopian notion of ‘social sculpture’ for the Indonesian context was his insistence on the ‘work’ that art does to be interdisciplinary and participatory; that as society is itself a work of art in progress, then so too is every member of society (writ general and broad) an artist. Art was, according to Beuys, the last bastion of hope in dismantling outdated and detrimental social systems. In order for society itself to act artistically in reforming and building a new kind of society, the repressive effects of an outdated social system had to be dismantled. In order for this to happen, in order for art to be both destructive and reconstructive, each individual person must be free creatively:

[To] dismantle in order to build ‘A SOCIAL ORGANISM AS A WORK OF ART’... EVERY HUMAN BEING IS AN ARTIST who –

narratives, and unscripted plays, with non-word action, and appropriation and pastiche of local popular theatre and dance forms. The aim of which, according to Putu Wijaya, was to present the audience (urban and middle class) who was accustomed to modernist theatrical realism with a form of mental terror, or the use of devices designed to shock them into a new mode of thinking, to disturb ‘normal’ thought processes. See Putu Wijaya, "Tradisi Baru [a New Tradition]," *Jurnal Seni* II.1 (Jan., 1992); Cobina Gillitt Asmara, "Tradisi Baru: A "New Tradition" of Indonesian Theatre," *Asian Theatre Journal* 12.1 (Spring, 1995); Ellen Rafferty, "The New Tradition of Putu Wijaya," *Indonesia* 49. April (1990); Phillip B. Zarilli, Putu Wijaya and Michael Bodden, "Structure and Subjunctivity: Putu Wijaya's Theater of Surprise," *The Drama Review: TDR* 31.3 (Aut., 1987); Putu Wijaya, "Tradisi Baru," *Interkulturalisme (Dalam) Teater*, ed. Nur Sahid (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Untuk Indonesia, 2000).

from his state of freedom – the position of freedom that he experiences at first-hand – learns to determine the other positions of the TOTAL ART WORK OF THE FUTURE SOCIAL ORDER (Tisdall 1974, 48).⁸

Cutting through Beuys' mythologizing of the artist and utopian rhetoric regarding the potential agency of artistic practice, his aim was to effect a revolution in human consciousness. This revolution would be reflected not only in art, but also in the way art moves beyond the boundaries of a bounded subject toward one of intersubjectivity requiring participation. His conception of "Social Sculpture" and "Total Art Work", then, is quite apt to certain of the arguments discussed in this chapter. This is not to say that these were in direct terms part of the operative strategies of this kind of work. However, several artists, including those involved in the *GSRB*, as well as post-*GSRB* artists such as Arahmaiani and Tisna Sanjaya, have acknowledged the impact of such ideas on their own practice that takes the street as the site of intervention (Figures 6.5 and 6.6).⁹

⁸ This was Beuys' artist statement dated 1973. Capitalization in the original.

⁹ Iani began investigating the possibilities in Beuys' ideas, particularly his notion of "social sculpture" while studying in Enschede, The Netherlands, 1991-1992. While there, she created the installation and performance "From Pieces to Become One-Homage to Joseph Beuys".



Figure 6.5 Tisna Sanjaya, at the time a student of ITB, discussing his work that he has propped up against the lamp post with a passerby, 1982, Jalan Braga, Bandung (Courtesy of the artist).



Figure 6.6 Arahmaiani, *Kecelakaan I*, installation, performance, pamphlets, 1980 (Courtesy of Cemeti Art Foundation, Yogyakarta, Indonesia).

Arahmaiani's early actions outside of the academy and studio demonstrated her initial attempts at an issues-based 'dematerialization'¹⁰ of the object into human physical action. She began making 'performances' as early as 1980 with her outdoor action *Kecelakaan I* (Accident I) (Figure 6.6), carried out during her second year as a painting major at ITB. She tied red ('blood soaked') strips of cloth to street poles along Jalan Dago in Bandung and drew on the street with chalk a series of body outlines in poses suggestive of victims of road accidents. With the aid of friends, she handed out sheets of statistics to passing drivers about the number of fatalities on that dangerous stretch of road. To borrow a phrase from Nelly Richard, works such as *Kecelakaan I* demonstrate an attempt to "alter the codes of urban movement" (Richard 1998, 147). However, because this work was carried out without permission and outside the confines of the campus, her action was taken as both an affront to the faculty of ITB and as potentially subversive in nature.¹¹ She was suspended from ITB for a brief time. Nonetheless, *Kecelakaan I* has come down to us as one of the pioneering outdoor body actions of Indonesia's 'first' female performance artist.¹²

¹⁰ The term and concept of 'dematerialization' of the art object comes from Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972; a Cross-Reference Book of Information on Some Esthetic Boundaries*. (New York: Praeger, 1973).

¹¹ Student activities, even if on campus, were always a site of suspicion and several ITB students were arrested or detained during the 1980s, Iani being one of them (as discussed above). On the 5th of August, 1988, for instance, a number of students were detained, expelled from school, tried and imprisoned, accused of orchestrating a demonstration against the Minister of the Interior who was on his way to visit the ITB campus. Enin Supriyanto, "Reformation, Changes and Traditions," *Indonesian Contemporary Art Now* (Singapore: SNP International Publishing, 2007).

¹² I hesitate to use the term 'first' without the quotation marks. As Flauvette Datuin points out in her review of the 'groundbreaking' exhibition *Indonesian Women Artists: The Curtain Opens* (Jakarta: Yayasan Seni Rupa Indonesia, 2007): "The consequence of this mechanical 'add women and stir' approach is double-edged. First, it merely inserts these 'firsts' into an untouched and unreconstructed canon of male masters, and second, these insertions can potentially open up the ground to another canon, this time of female artists – which the authors implicitly and inadvertently endorse, but do not reflexively acknowledge and confront. In the process, they leave intact a conventional art-historiography, the turning points of which are hinged on male-led movements." Flaudette May V. Datuin, "Remapping Our Terrain," *C. Arts. Asian Contemporary Arts and Culture*. 2007: 21.

Aside from arguing against claiming performance art for theatre, but retaining the cross-border experimentation, Agung Hajutnikajennong (2002) and Herry Dim (2004) would also caution against claiming visual art performance as a form of traditional culture or ritual. I concur in part. Above, I argued that performance art as a practice of cultural resistance often takes recourse in the ritual and ritualized body. Yet, it would be inaccurate to reduce performance art to ritual or to locate it in direct continuity with traditional culture and the past. This does not mean, however, that visual art performance is not informed by, or does not borrow and appropriate structures, forms, and gestures from traditional performance and dance. Much of life in Indonesia remains surrounded by and acted out in such stagings and rituals, festivals, and dance. Claire Holt (1967), Astri Wright (1992), and Julie Ewington (1996) have separately underscored this in relation to artistic production as well.¹³ Yet, Claire Holt also called attention to the delicate balance between tracing something to its past and maintaining a realistic relationship to the present: “It is possible to recognize the transformation they [cultural forms] have undergone to discover that the content and function of certain [forms] are reinterpretations of older concepts and to follow the secularization of ritual” (Holt 1967, 104). Secularization of ritual, as some of these visual art performances can be seen to be, “do not necessarily [imply] the disappearance of preceding beliefs and practices” (103). Nor can these works necessarily be seen as direct reenactments or expressions of them. For example, underlying some experiments in performance art is the appropriation of structures of ritual, not necessarily as the actual mystical act of renewing social bonds and relations, but to construct new ones.

¹³ Holt and Wright give more sustained treatment to the relationship between traditional cultural practices and modern ones.

While Wright underscores the spiritual and genetic connection between imagery in mainly modern art and modes of traditional arts of dance (Wright 1994, 105-106), Ewington would extend the “immense importance of the performative mode” in Indonesian cultures to “all public forms of theater and debate” (Ewington 1996, 59). In this regard, she is concerned with those aspects of traditional Indonesian performance that contain within them key modes of criticism and social commentary, which the artist then incorporates into his or her work.¹⁴ As Ewington points out, “Indonesian artists still insist on social issues as their legitimate concern and the public arena as their forum, in a direct adaptation of [these] traditional uses of performance. This is central to understanding Indonesian contemporary art” (61). One such public forum that has received much attention is the *wayang* and its inherent ability to read contemporary social and political issues through ancient epics. I discussed in the previous chapter some of the contemporary uses to which *wayang* form and mode of criticism have been put by Heri Dono, particularly in his *Wayang Legenda*.

However, in as much as it is true that there might be a continuation of past signification in the use of certain strategies and structures, one is also cautioned not to impose past meanings on the present moment without revision. “[W]here performance art resembles elite, popular, folk, mass, or exotic spectacles [from historical precedents], it does so not for genetic reasons (that is, because it is descended from them) but for strategic reasons (that is, because it alludes to them, either to criticize them or to explore aspects of them in a different context)” (Banes 1998, 8).

¹⁴ See also B. O. G. Anderson, *Mythology and Tolerance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Modern Indonesia Project, 1965), Benedict O.G. Anderson, "The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture," *Language and Power; Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia*, 3 ed. (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1992), Astri Wright, "Painting People," *Modern Art of Indonesia: Three Generations of Painters*, ed. Joseph Fischer (Jakarta: 1991), Astri Wright, "Artists Role and Meaning in Modern Indonesian Painting," *Modernity in Asian Art*, ed. John Clark (Sydney: University of Sydney East Asian Studies, 1993).

The above discussion was designed to suggest that ‘performance art’ in Indonesia cannot be claimed by either modern theatre or traditional culture. Yet, it also cannot be claimed wholly by visual art as it emerged precisely as a mode of artistic practice that is difficult to ‘capture’ as well as the production of a new artistic practice and structure of work. It is a stream of conceptually oriented work that incorporates all mediums without favor or discrimination (Goldberg 2007, 13). Hence, the use of the term ‘visual art performance’ will be used here with the acknowledgment that it too is inaccurate and inadequate.

Visual Art Performance Groups and Their Members

I approach visual art performance in Bandung through a series of shifting groups that involved a perceived need for a self-determined space for artistic production away from the institutions and the studio. These groups are generally characterized by a passionate attachment to the idea of art as ethical practice.¹⁵ In this regard, performance art has been regarded among its practitioners as the most relevant medium to convey ideas. The activities of these groups often bypassed official circuits. Their performances often occurring as unregistered, difficult to capture events in parks, streets, and people’s homes. Yet, they also often performed in state and governmentally owned cultural centers and campuses. As such, these groups were not categorically dissident as much as taking up the challenge of opening up a space for critical work while constantly negotiating with state power. Although often producing work that touched on taboo subjects for public discussion in these venues, the audience for visual art performance at that time was quite intimate, often limited to the

¹⁵ Except where otherwise noted, information regarding the performance art groups in Bandung has been derived from interviews with some of the artists involved, including Arahmaiani, Andar Manik, Isa Perkasa, Marintan Sirait, Nandang Gawe, Tisna Sanjaya, Wawan Hussin, and Yoyo Yogasama between Sept. 2001 and Feb. 2003, and in late 2007 and early 2009.

artist's peers. At first, these groups were separated by the existing boundaries between the visual arts and theatre, as well as the academically and non-academically trained artist. As time passed, more of these groups found themselves collaborating, creating something of a collective of collectives, a situation akin to Heri Dono's general notion of 'pocket cultures' discussed in the previous chapter.

In the following sections, I am interested in three of the main and influential visual art performance groups that were active between 1988 and 1996/97: namely, *Sumber Waras* (1988-89), *Perengkel Jahé* (1991-roughly 1994), and *Jeprut* (around 1994 to the present). While the first two were small groups working from a similar ethic, *Jeprut* is much broader, being both the term used for more or less spontaneous performances of a loosely connected network of artists, and a term for an attitude and action of various artistic techniques that helped to create complex, new structures, including visual art performance.

Sumber Waras

In 1988, current and former students from the department of the Fine Art and Design at ITB founded the experimental art group *Sumber Waras*. Although coming from different perspectives in terms of what they wanted to express through their work and the types of propositions they offered, the artists in *Sumber Waras* can be said to share similar gestures and movements. Its members included former painting student Arahmaiani, recently back from additional studies at the Paddington Art School in Australia, current students Andar Manik, Diyanto, Indra Suria, Isa Perkasa, and recently graduated Marintan Sirait. It was an extra-curricular group that grew directly out of the 'Creatif Eksperimental' art course in the Fine Arts Department at ITB, and the students' shared sense of frustration over the state of arts education. Although comprised mainly of visual artists, *Sumber Waras* was an interdisciplinary experiment and its members

often performed/collaborated with friends in other fields, particularly theatre and music. They gathered most afternoons and their activities were confined to the campus. It has been suggested that one of the reasons why the group disbanded after only one year was at the advice of an ITB faculty member who feared the group would come under suspicion for subversion.¹⁶ Although short-lived, its members and their performative experiments were influential and pioneering in the history of visual art performance in Indonesia.

The group took its name from a mental hospital in Jakarta. The term '*sumber waras*' literally means 'source of wellbeing' or 'source of soundness' but can also mean 'source of sanity'. The name then suggests that this artistic provocation is to enact or set in motion a kind of therapy, aiming to disrupt normal mental processes through physical intensity. This was, for that time, highly experimental. In their almost daily practices, the artists interacted and experimented with whatever came to hand. They especially stressed the expressive qualities of the body in its particularity and in contact and interaction with other bodies, including inanimate ones, aiming to discover ways the body/self can interact with the physical object in a different way, often treating the material world and objects as extensions or parts of the body/self (Figures 6.7-6.9). For members such as Marintan and Andar, this enabled and extended the artists' use of the 'found object' in relation to the body/self in making their installation work.

¹⁶ Interview with Arahmaiani, August 2002, Bandung.



Figure 6.7 Sumber Waras experimental session (Courtesy of Andar Manik and Marintan Sirait).



Figure 6.8 Isa Perkasa and Dyanto in a Sumber Waras action, ITB Campus, 1988 (Courtesy of Isa Perkasa).

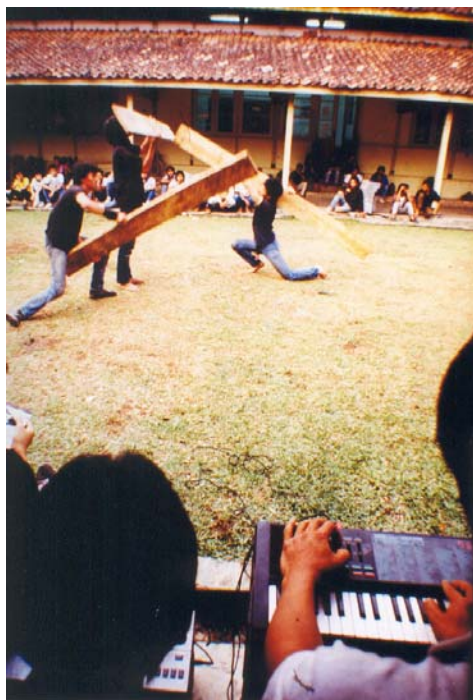


Figure 6.9 Sumber Waras experiment, ITB Campus, 1989 (Courtesy of Andar Manik and Marintan Sirait).

The actions of some in the group also focused on the role of the body as a marked site of control, a social organism. Their performances were examinations of the body and its movements as the subject of social regulation, a normative system determining how people are expected to act, move and behave.¹⁷ Also, explorations with the body in motion were a means of distancing practice from linear thought and discursive formations. One point of reference was apparently Augusto Boal's work on 'raising consciousness' through theatre.¹⁸ Based on Paulo Freire's pedagogical method of 'raising consciousness' by empowering the poor through education, Boal created a method of conducting theatrical work that aimed at liberation through performance techniques of a group or individuals from their own restrictions or burdens, social,

¹⁷ Interview with Andar Manik, October 16, 2002, and Marintan Sirait, October 22, 2002, Bandung.

¹⁸ Interview with Andar Manik, October 16, 2002, Bandung.

cultural, economic, psychological or political. Boal's approach to the 'theatre of the oppressed', as he called his practice, was meant to provide the tools by which people can better understand and even experience the possible means by which they can improve their victimized circumstances situations (Taussig, Schechner and Boal 1990, 61-62). Accordingly, such systems of regulation and oppression were seen by *Sumber Waras* as causing a widespread 'mental illness' and deep wounds to the soul. If in the rituals of the everyday, people are expected to act convincingly according to these norms, *Sumber Waras*, as a new source of sanity, attempted to realize another way of being within the group.

It required the individual, alone and/or in a group, to engage her surroundings more intensely and with more intent, and a willingness to loosen the reins of normative behaviors. It was to "exercise the total person",¹⁹ which "like a tree, is in a constant process of becoming."²⁰ Performance of this type, of slow, oozing gesticulation and improvisation with the incorporation of the 'visual', the object, the installation, and found object is replete with images from a variety of places, cultures, and registers strung together in complex layers.

As suggested above, a myriad of influences and cultural formations collide and combine in performance art in Indonesia and in this case visual art performance collectives in Bandung, much of which takes the social and the body in the social as its site, performing it in a spiritually charged and ritualistic manner. In this case, the group's approach of course has certain antecedents in the Sundanese culture of Western Java, an area influential to their development from early childhood. However, their work should mainly be seen from this side of the art rebellions, as a provocative

¹⁹ Interview with Wawan Hussin, November 6, 2002, Bandung.

²⁰ Interview with Marintan Sirait, October 22, 2002, Bandung.

means of appropriating the ‘primordial’ and the ‘traditional’ for a new purpose and necessity. Aside from the combined points of reference (traditional culture, concepts of liberation through theatre, and European-American oppositional and neo-avant-garde/postmodern performance art) mentioned above, there is also at least a visual and ideational similarity and affiliation of *Sumber Waras* and other similar groups, with the likes of butoh, a post-war Japanese avant-garde mode of dance-performance that at base aims to take the body out of the social realm (which is the site of trauma and resistance) into the extra-ordinary and spiritual realm by way of a “nonrational collision of images and sounds” (Schechner 2006, 306). Butoh is international and intercultural in its horizons, taking from and combining the performance styles and philosophies of “Japanese martial arts and classical dance, German expressionist dance, Shinto, shamanism, and Zen. At present, butoh is both very Japanese and part of the global culture of experimental performance” (Schechner 1993, 16). Physical attributes of butoh include naked or nearly naked white powdered bodies (suggesting the unmarked, ‘pure’), as well as contorted and liquid gesticulations.²¹ Butoh was apparently popular among theatre and dance circles in cities throughout Java since at least the 1980s.²² Much of the actions carried out by butoh dancers would not have been acceptable in Indonesia even as a form of *pemberontakan*. However, its physical gestures and it being “an anti-traditional tradition seeking to erase the heavy imprint of [a] strict society and offering unprecedented freedom of artistic expression” (Stein

²¹ One can see their early influence in the standard white wash of the nearly naked body of the performer that became a staple of performance/body art in Indonesia by the late 1970s and remained so into the early 2000’s.

²² A number of butoh performances took place in Jakarta and in other major cities on Java during the 1980s and butoh performances by Japanese ‘masters’ were staged in the 1998 Jakarta Arts Summit. Interview with TitaRubi, Yogyakarta, 10 May, 2002. See also Adang Ismet, “Fenomena Seni Pertunjukan Non-Konvensional (the Phenomenon of Non-Conventional Performance Art),” *Teater Bandung: Gagasan Dan Pemikiran (Theatre in Bandung: Concepts and Thinking)*, ed. Ipit S. Dimiyati (Bandung: STSI Bandung, Theatre Dept., 2004) 40-44.

1986, 111).²³ A butoh, much of the beauty and critical nature of performance art in Indonesia stems from its search for corporeal universals amid local roots.

From the beginning, the methods and types of actions within *Sumber Waras* and the works created by the individual artists outside of the group point to a need to tap into a kind of knowing beyond or outside of ‘rational’ experience, thus elevating certain aspects of ritual and spiritual traditions in cultivating their ‘performance body’. Yet they combined these empathic and what one artist has called a kind of telepathic energies with a keen sense of and critical stance toward current events in society.²⁴

Sumber Waras was an on-campus experimental performance art group comprised of visual art students from the academy in Bandung. The basis of the experiment was to cultivate the body as a tool and conduit to concentrate key energies and tap into primordial consciousness. The group aimed to instigate new structures in their visual art by experimenting with ways in which the body/self interacts with the physical object in a different way. Marintan Sirait continued to further develop these ideas after the group disbanded, and incorporated them into her practice that combined installation and performative operations, often treating the material world and objects as extensions or parts of herself.

Marintan Sirait (1960) entered the Fine Arts Department at ITB in 1980, majored in ceramics and graduated in 1987, one year before she co-founded *Sumber Waras* in 1988. Her long-standing interest in theatre and experimental body action was focused on investigating the relationship between the body, the body in motion, and its

²³ Against prevailing values and concepts in a rigid Japanese society, as part of its declaration of self-determination and emancipation, butoh’s first performance (1959) consisted of a young, nude male dancer covered in white powder performing without music, enacted having sex with a chicken by strangling it between his thighs. The lights then went out and a man could be heard and barely seen approaching the boy.

²⁴ Email communication with Arahmaiani, February 12, 2003.

environment as the core of a visual artistic practice. She was not interested in becoming a ‘performance artist’, which she associated with concepts such as the artists’ body as the sole material and her actions as the ‘work’ itself. Instead, she was more interested in body movement as integral to the production of installation and other types of visual art. Her ‘Sound of Body’ demonstrated and enacted gestures and movements that she had been cultivating and honing prior to *Sumber Waras*. Such movements had, by the BJIX, become something of a personal style, one which she continued to explore further in her own installations, in this case, *Membangun Rumah* or *Building a House* (1994-1997 and 2002). Marintan began conceptualizing *Building a House* while working with *Sumber Waras* and later with experimental dancer Margie Suanda. It went through many incarnations in different venues both in country and abroad, and like her idea of the process of constructing the self and reclaiming the body, the piece was always in the process of becoming.²⁵

In the statement below, Marintan establishes the crucial relations set in motion that the viewer will encounter in the work in her Artist’s Statement (1994):

The land is invisible

Enter...

You hear me? Is that your pulse? How far does it go?...

With my breath, I build the house,

The land is wet,

Exploring the corners, spread the lanterns, you can see the world above,
also the one under, in the middle, we found ourselves speaking in tongues,

²⁵ In its various restagings, this work has had a variety of names, all around the root concept of ‘Building a House’, and has included a number of collaborators as musicians and fellow dancers. It has been (re)staged at the Taman Budaya in Surakarta, 1994; Cemeti Art House, 1994; Zeebelt Teater Den Haag, The Netherlands, 1995; *Exhibition of Non-Aligned Countries*, Jakarta, 1995; the Third Asia Pacific Triennial in Brisbane, 1996; the 23rd Sao Paulo International Biennial, 1996; *Cities on the Move* in Jakarta; various European cities, 1997-1998; the French Cultural Centre, Bandung in 1998; and the Kuangju Biennale, 2002.

The land is round,
 Tremors in the chest cavity, warmth, moist, smoke, flicker, fever, flood,
 flow, drain,
 The land is disowned,
 Wide open the windows, dust finding ways to the sky, entering the earth,
 speaking in different languages, with everybody, with everyone,
 Alienated body, alienated self, alienated feelings,
 The owner said that changes are good for you; the occupant replied, do
 you know who I am?
 Does the body w(holly) belong to me? Not just a personification of the
 banyan tree or tomato plant...Are we sitting within ourselves or floating in
 this make believe TV like entertainment?
 Do we have the chances, courage, will and strength to choose and define
 space and at the same time be aware of the intervals of the beats. There is
 an existence of a body before this flesh. Yet the flesh is stained with a
 trade mark[...]
 In building this house, the process evolves to define the space within the
 cracks. Neither flowing with the raging river, nor sitting in silence.
 A house built not of mirrors, yet mirroring the process. The roots of the
 tree anchored within the center of the tremor,
 From where the branches grow to find nurturing places, in which we are
 the occupant not the owner (Sirait 1994).

Such is Marintan's artist's statement for her work *Building a House* (1994),
 produced/performed and exhibited not long after the BJIX. Prior to engaging the work
 about which it speaks, her text deserves pause in that it touches on key themes in her
 artistic and personal philosophy. In the above section of the artist's statement,
 Marintan immediately makes reference to the power of consciousness to act. It is the
 energy that brings the universe, in this case the ancient house-body-tree, into being. In
 the above, the artist creates a complex metaphor of house-body- tree. First, it presents
 a spatial relation in which the house-tree-body serves as a kind of bridge between
 earth and sky. Yet, this figure is not complete in herself, but has lost her roots, and has
 become the representation and embodiment of other things, bearing the marks of
 others. In this regard, Marintan seeks to play the tension, the space in between the

marked and the unmarked. Where she suggests the existence is always in a state of constant becoming and always shows the marks of its process of coming into being. If all is in flux, the metaphorical house-tree-body as bridge acts as the central stabilizing force amidst destabilizing forces. But the central point, the self or person perhaps, is never permanent nor in a permanent place, and identity can be displaced but also reclaimed, remade. These concepts of loss, contingency, and search in the continuous and nearly obsessive process of building and re-building, claiming and reclaiming are physically brought to bear in Marintan's *Building a House*.



Figure 6.10 Marintan Sirait, *Membangun Rumah* (Building a house), 1994, French Cultural Center, Bandung (Courtesy of the artist).



Figure 6.11 Marintan Sirait, *Membangun Rumah* (Building a House), 1996, Asia-Pacific Triennial, Brisbane (Courtesy of the artist).



Figure 6.12 Marintan Sirait, *Membangun Rumah* (Courtesy of the artist).

The artist begins with an empty space lit by one light source that, at least in one version, is embedded into a mound of coconut shell ash. In some of the versions

of this work she begins by pasting newspapers onto the walls, symbolic of surrounding the supposed non-contextual, meditative acts of repetition and duration taking place within the 'work' space with social context. Also in some versions, experimental music by the likes of Erik Yusuf washes the space in looped monotonous sounds, almost as if meant to avert mental distraction from the act of building. While the music drones on, Marintan bends low to the ground, and slowly and methodically weaves her way around and through the space creating a grid of ephemeral 'landscapes' that will serve as her 'house(s)', each in the form of a triangle, made variously of dark sand, ash, and newspaper, surrounded by three carefully traced circles of white or yellow sand. These circles she draws with the tips of her fingers as she rotates her hand along the ground and in unison with her body before moving on to the next 'house'. The 'house' or 'perfect landscape' as she also calls it expands out from its 'origins'. The spatial limits or boundaries of the gallery space mark the material limits of the fragmentation and multiplication of the house/body/tree. The 'finished' installation typically takes many hours to complete and often with the invited participation of the viewing public.

Marintan suggests that the repeated fragment took time to develop. Her body and mind had to be disciplined and attuned enough, be in control enough over the body's gestures, to allow such a 'perfect' form to emerge from her fingertips.²⁶ Without such control over the body as it improvises its path through space, there would be traces of imbalance.

For some, the sign of the triangle-circle might suggest aspects of a culturally and historically dense figure or sign. It can be found throughout regions in Southeast Asia that have experienced contact with Indic cultures. As such a sign, it connotes the

²⁶ Interview with the artist, Bandung, Sept. 2002.

lingga|yoni or the union and balance of the male and female sexual energies that bring the world into being and ensure its harmonious existence. It is the primordial navel of the universe that pegs the world in place surrounded by the deep cosmic oceans of creation. The triangular form alone also has many connotations among certain cultures in Indonesia. It can signify the first parents whose bodies have been dismembered and their limbs scattered to the various corners of the ‘world’, serving as the first site and ancestor from which the clan or family derive. It is a kind of cosmic Body, and a kind of sacred geography mapped onto the landscape of the world. The form in Batak tradition is also associated with the complex symbol mountain-as-house-as-body.²⁷ Wulan Dirgantoro has suggested that this work and particularly Marintan’s practice is invoking healing rituals of her Northern Sumatran cultural heritage (Dirgantoro 2008, 10). However, Marintan denies any conscious incorporation of the above connotations and symbolism in her work. The artist is the child of German and Batak parents and spent most of her childhood in Germany, moving to Indonesia in her early teens. She suggests that although there might be traditional points of reference to her ‘perfect landscape’, they are not part of her cultural background nor is she interested in recuperating their primordial meaning. For her, these are new and personal signs.

Her performance is one of actively constructing the space and the body/home in front of an audience. Instead of presenting ritualistic images of self-transcendence, her work is akin to a rite in which the body/self is continuously remade or perhaps

²⁷ The identification of the mountain form with the ‘house’ is prevalent in the Batak region of Sumatra, where Sirait’s father’s family derives. The Batak word for ‘house’ is the same word for the four ancestral mountains (*empat rumah* in the Indonesian translation) that are believed to be the sites where the dismembered limbs of the founding parents were located and which gave birth to the four main ethnic families in the region. This information was obtained in conversation with Prof. Dr. Rainer Carle of the Department of Southeast Asian Languages and Cultures, University of Hamburg, 1999. See also Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967); Paul Taylor, *Beyond the Java Sea*, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 1991; Roxana Waterson, *The Living House: An Anthropology of Architecture in South-East Asia* (Singapore, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 5.

even reclaimed each time. Such repetitious and slow focused movements concentrate intensity in the work without relying on narrative (Dirgantoro 2008, 7). In this way, the ‘work’ is akin to “the spirit for life that continuously grows and develops while the Self struggles for freedom and autonomy... It is a slow, gradual, day by day process that must be done in time, never rushed.”²⁸ In the process of ‘building’ she sometimes must step outside of the space she has created in order to know where she is in it and at what stage. She often alludes to the desire for a kind of ‘pure spiritual absorption’ through the process of ‘work’, an ‘unalienated’ experience between her Self and the materials she uses, including the rhythm of the music, the experience of time and the movement through space, the sand and other objects that go into the final installation. Yet, she also sees a danger in becoming obsessed with such an impossibility, with losing sight of or awareness of the ‘outer’ world. Uncomfortable in either position – absorption in meditation or mediation – she plays in the space between the two. As she states, “to understand a thing, you can’t always be part of it. You have to step out of it sometimes; you must be confronted with alienation, with the strange object that disrupts the continuous flow, with other souls.”

Traces of Marintan’s body that have been left behind, such as the imprints of her finger tips and foot prints through the sand, serve as ‘stand-ins’ for her physical presence. The absence of the real body in Marintan’s works, following Warr’s framing of ‘absent bodies’ in art, “evokes [] the transience of the human body in contrast to the more permanent forms of art” (Warr and Jones 2000, 162). The artist leaves traces of the self “redolent with memory, absence and the artist’s inner life.”

After years of working through the piece in its many incarnations, she stopped performing it, having grown wary and weary of “publicizing meditative acts as

²⁸ Interview with the artist, Sept. 2002, Bandung.

object's for another person's pleasure." She began to feel as if she was no longer constructing a new self but staging it for other people. This was not the optimal universal human relation for which she had hoped.

It might be argued that with this piece the artist placed herself in the position of self-othering, working through a personal agenda in a highly public space. Interestingly, however, as pointed out above in some length, she was invited to restage the piece again and again as the international curators usually requested *Building a House* instead of a new piece. This demonstrates the point made by Heri Dono that to a certain extent, the global circuit of exhibitions, catalogs and curators sometimes make it difficult for artists to develop different kinds of practice and works.²⁹

Perengkel Jahé

Isa Perkasa founded *Parengkel Jahé* in 1991. At the time, he was still a student in graphic arts at ITB, graduating in 1993. By then, Iani had left to study at the Academie voor Beeldende Kunst in Enschede, The Netherlands, and Marintan and Andar, while still making art and exhibiting, were busy with their school for developing children's creativity.³⁰ *Perengkel Jahé* consisted of male artists.

The term 'perengkel jahé' was apparently already in circulation during the late 1970s among new theatre groups, and according to some accounts derived from the audience itself in describing the performers' movements, which were said to resemble

²⁹ Interview with Heri Dono, Yogyakarta, 22 May 2002.

³⁰ Since the late 1990s, Marintan and her husband Andar have exhibited sporadically. They have spent much of the last decade or so establishing a number of organizations and groups designed to foster the creative expressions among children and non-art communities in representing their own narratives through creative means.



Figure 6.13 Isa Perkasa in *Perengkel Jahé* performance, c. 1992, Bandung Water Treatment Plant (Courtesy of the artist).



Figure 6.14 Isa Perkasa in *Perengkel Jahé* performance, c. 1992, Bandung Water Treatment Plant (Courtesy of the artist).

the twisting forms of ginger root and its undulating shapes.³¹ Initially, *perengkel jahé* was a method of practice for the body and in relation with the spiritual among certain

³¹ Interviews in Bandung with Wawan Hussin, Sept. 2002, Isa Perkasa, Sept. 13, 2002, Yoyo Yogasmana, and Nandang Gawe, Aug. 20, 2002.

theatre groups in Bandung, such as the Studiklub Teater Bandung,³² discussed above. Isa appropriated the name for his group project. Like its predecessor *Sumber Waras*, it began as a form of resistance to established orders and later took on more critical and socially relevant aspects. According to Isa, such resistance departed from the premise of freedom of the body to move without restrictions or norms. “*Perengkel Jahé* was always about the body; the idea of making something called ‘performance art’ was *not* what it was about. More important was cultivating the self vis-à-vis working through the body, the body as movement, a kind of transcendentalism.”³³ Although in large measure the activities and actions of *Perengkel Jahé* were improvisational once started, they always began from an idea, one that often dealt with expanding the possibilities for artistic creativity and current topics of the local environs.

Perengkel Jahé was one among several performance art groups to emerge in Bandung during a time (first half of the 1990s) of increased military action and interference from the state and local authorities regarding freedom of speech. Inherent in its actions, then, was a felt sense of urgency to construct the ‘street’ or ‘public space’ as a space in which acts are difficult to ‘capture’ but which can trigger change, with the body as the conduit of direct communication without words. A basic operative strategy in their work was the unexpected, absurd, shocking, and the act of defamiliarization or the act of ‘making strange’ (*bikin aneh-aneh*). It seems that *Perengkel Jahé* more than *Sumber Waras* took their experiments outside into public spaces, to parks, street markets and even waterworks plants (Figures 6.13-6.15). Yet, like *Sumber Waras*’ activities, an audience for such works was secondary and even unnecessary for these events. The performers interacted with the space, intervened in

³² The spelling of this group’s name varies between ‘Studiklub Teater Bandung’ and ‘Studi Klub Teater Bandung’.

³³ Interview with Isa Perkasa, Sept. 13, 2002, Bandung.

its normal activities, or attempted to make it ‘strange’, but rarely engaged the spectators who typically formed circles around them in bewilderment and amusement.



Figure 6.15 Isa Perkasa in *Perengkel Jahé* performance, Bandung, c. 1992 (Courtesy of the artist).

Along with their outdoor actions, *Perengkel Jahé* members also participated in ‘experimental art’ gatherings and art festivals in Bandung and other cities, which usually took place in cultural centers and on stage. These events often consisted of a series of interdisciplinary, or more precisely ‘transdiscipline’ collaborations presenting and/or improvising new types of work.³⁴

Whereas *Sumber Waras* was mainly a project among mostly ITB visual art students that at times collaborated with experimental theatre practitioners and musicians, *Perengkel Jahé*, particularly after Isa graduated from ITB, moved toward open collaboration with non-academically trained groups with the intention on all

³⁴ *Perengkel Jahé* in collaboration with other groups often performed at major events such as the Jakarta Jazz Festival in 1995 and other cultural events that blurred the boundaries between entertainment and ‘art’. Interviews with Isa Perkasa and Nandang Gawe.

sides to rupture through the boundaries and possibilities of creative exploration, but without claiming it for any one sphere, visual art or theatre. This is an important point because in as much as barriers had been breaking down between disciplines among academically trained artists for the last twenty years, and collaborations between and among the various campuses were common, generally speaking there remained a hierarchy within the art world that until the mid-1990s locked out non-academically trained artists.³⁵ Isa was among those who began to collaborate with non-academically trained visual artists and theatre practitioners who were also experimenting with performance art as a mode of cultural resistance.

One such group was *Gerbong Bawah Tanah* (Underground Railroad), with its driving force in *sanggar*-trained Nandang Gawe (1970), with *preman* or street kids as some of its members.³⁶ Like the ‘academy’ collectives, *Gerbong* also took its art to the streets; however this was often more out of necessity than out of ‘refusal’ of the established institutions. Nandang, for instance, in addition to his performances, made drawings, etchings and paintings to be exhibited and sold. Yet, not having access to galleries, he often exhibited his work in his rented flat, on side streets, in public fields, or in front of shops at night after business hours.

Perengkel Jahé disbanded around 1994 when the larger movement of *jeprut* began to pick up steam after one of its main *jeprutawan* or *jeprut*-ists and driving forces in visual art/theatre, Tisna Sanjaya, returned to Bandung from studies in Germany. As I discuss later, *jeprut* developed quickly into a kind of widespread attitude and constellation of strategies that pushed to transcend the boundaries of what

³⁵ Interview with Nandang Gawe, Bandung, Aug. 20, 2002.

³⁶ Nandang joined *Gerbong Bawah Tanah* in 1991 and changed its name at least twice to reflect its developing intentions and ideas of a socially egalitarian, non-categorizable practice. He also exhibits his two-dimensional drawings and paintings in Bandung. He has collaborated often with other performance artists, such as Yoyo Yogasmana.

signifies as art even further than before. It was considered a kind of artistic-cultural movement in Bandung and served as something like a collective of collectives, absorbing some of the smaller ones such as *Perengkel Jahé*.

Aside from performance art, Isa Perkasa is also an accomplished artist of two-dimensional works on paper in charcoal, crayon and pen and pencil. In this regard, he deliberately works in a medium that had been marginalized in the discourse of *seni rupa modern*.³⁷ Working across mediums, the artist generally does not combine them but makes separate series of works on shared or similar themes. What connects the seemingly disparate parts is his belief that art serves as witness to what he sees as the chaos of current political affairs and the psychological trauma left behind in the late 1990s. In most of his two-dimensional works, he presents a non-linear montage of recent events combined into one tableau, often using images from the press as well as characters from the *wayang*.

In this regard, his work of the late 1990s, during the economic crisis and directly after the racial riots of May 1998 and the ensuing ethnic and religious violence that broke out after Suharto stepped down, share a common constellation of personal icons. This includes the anonymous, typically male figure in a vast flooded landscape, the masses without direction and protection from some unseen but palpable source of power. Figures fly through the sky, with Superman representing the overblown heroism and blunt American intervention in the body of the IMF, and Gatot Kaca as the ancient hero of the *wayang* who in this case is an ineffectual player in the chaotic scene unfolding before him in which scapegoats are left to battle it out while those responsible for the terror go unpunished.

³⁷ Drawing had become a favored medium as an alternative to market-driven painting in the beginning 1990s. It was one of the main mediums of oppositionist artists taking up social themes, including Isa Perkasa, S. Teddy D., Agung Leak Kurniawan, among others.

In some of his work the artist represents himself as the figure of the ‘artist’, as one fated to carry the burden of witnessing. Such is the case in his 1995 solo exhibition *Bercanda dengan Cermin* or (Joking with Mirrors) (Figures 6.16 and 6.17) held at the French Cultural Centre in Bandung.

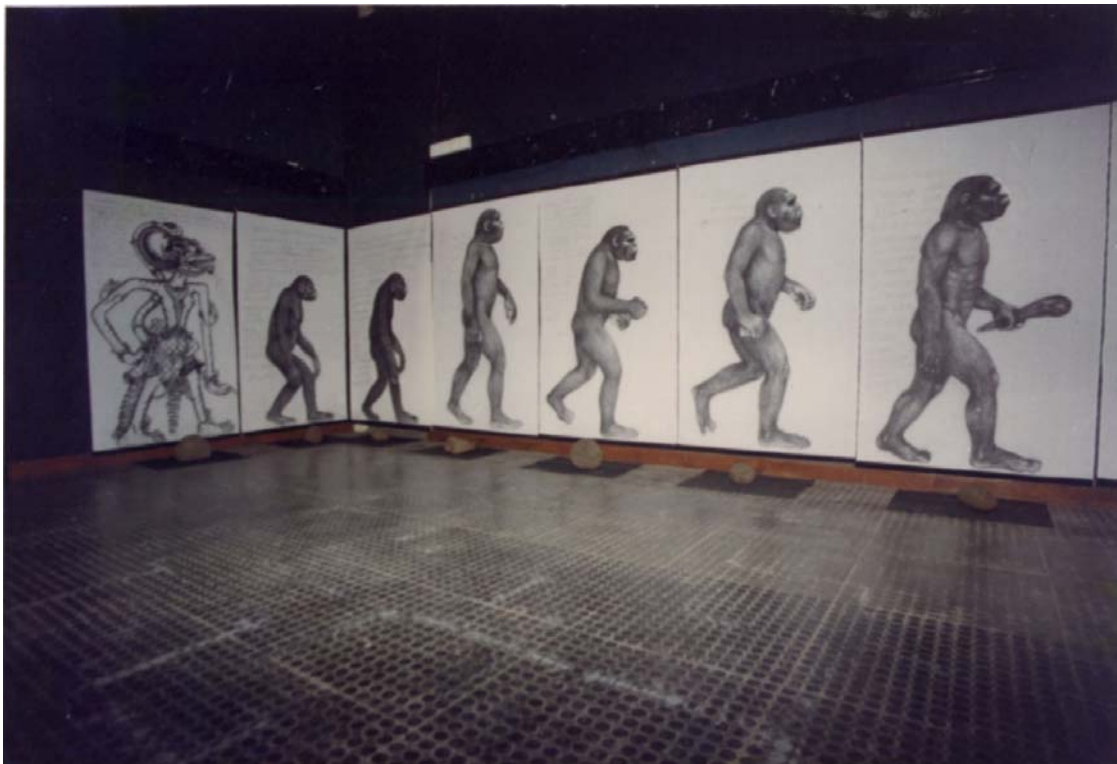


Figure 6.16 Isa Perkasa, *Bercanda dengan Cermin* (Joking with Mirrors), 1995, exhibition of drawings and performance, detail (Courtesy of the artist).

On one wall is a series of larger than life-size pencil and charcoal drawings that combine iconic images of the evolution of man with mythology or legend, and the burden of history and predecessors in the development of the ‘artist’. The artist handles such a legacy with humor, opening his ‘evolutionary map’ with Honuman, the monkey king from the *wayang*, who leads a monkey army into battle. The next drawings are the famous encyclopedic images of man along the evolutionary scale from ape to *homo sapiens*, with the sequence ending in man-as-artist. The evolution of the ‘artist’ and its implied relation to history and one’s forebears/ancestors is

represented by two well known figures to the Indonesian artworld, A.D. Pirous and Tisna Sanjaya, both former students of ITB and now part of its faculty. The series of panels ends with Isa himself, shown encumbered by the weight of his artistic ancestors and humanity in general, as well as being the creative genius capable of shouldering such a burden. The 'artist' as bearing the weight of the oppressed is a somewhat histrionic image that he would repeat in the time leading up to Suharto's downfall in 1998.



Figure 6.17 Isa Perkasa, *Bercanda dengan Cermin* (Joking with Mirrors), detail showing his portraits of senior artist A.D. Pirous and Tisna Sanjaya, and himself carrying the burden of art history and humanity (Courtesy of the artist).



Figure 6.18 Isa Perkasa, *Bercanda dengan Cermin*, performance, 1995 (Courtesy of the artist).

In his performance on the opening night of the exhibition (Figure 6.18), Isa dressed in simple, light green pajamas, sat on the gallery floor and manipulated two unadorned and headless puppets, one black, and the other white, and proceeded to move in typical *Perengkel Jahé* fashion (slow and deliberate, improvised and oozing movements). Only a few of those present watched him; others examined his life-size pen and crayon drawings hung on two adjacent walls and in rows from the ceiling.

Whereas Isa's headless *wayang* puppets in *Bercanda* serve as a metaphor for mindless action, his numerous drawings of body-less 'floating' heads hung in rows on the adjoining wall are symbols of the unknown masses who have fallen victim to an unseen 'puppet master' or *dalang*. As I have explained, during the shadow play, the puppet master manipulates and controls the seen and unseen forces of the universe symbolized in the *wayang* by light and shadow. In so doing, he brings the world into existence. While this aspect of *Bercanda dengan Cermin* was the artist's response to increased incidents of human rights abuses in and outside of Indonesia, in tandem with the overall exhibition it also demonstrates how the artist, perhaps self-ironically, suggests his important role and heavy burden in the history of artistic creation.

By the late 1990s, Isa left behind most of the esoteric movements associated with *Sumber Waras* and *Perengkel Jahé*, and developed a series of issues-based performances that took on a kind of realism not seen in his previous experimental body work. Much of his work between 1997 and 2000 (and beyond) dealt specifically with the monetary crisis that had spread across Southeast Asia but that hit Indonesia particularly hard. His performances of this period can be separated into two general statements on the same theme. Those which he performed in Indonesia typically pushed the image of a corrupt politician and businessman, himself playing the role of both as he sits down in front of a bowl of Rupiah or Indonesian money (Figures 6.19 and 6.20). He proceeds to force as much money as possible into his mouth without chewing or swallowing.



Figure 6.19 Isa Perkasa, performance, Langgeng Gallery, Semarang, 2002 (Courtesy of the artist).



Figure 6.20 Isa Perkasa, performance, Bandung, 2001 (Courtesy of the artist).

Such works push the limits of the body as well as trigger a visceral response from the audience. The piece registers the artist's disgust and is intended to trigger disgust in us.

During roughly the same period, Isa staged a series of performance art works in Japan, Bangkok, and a number of cities in Europe. With slight variations, in this series of performance works, called *Merah-Putih*, the artist walks into the space carrying a bucket of water, a crumpled map of the Indonesian archipelago, a stack of Rupiah, an atlas of the country, and sometimes an old-fashioned, colonial era iron (Figure 6.21). Sometimes he comes out wearing a costume resembling the traditional Sundanese dress, namely the *songkok* or fez-like cap, and a *kain* or cloth wrap worn by men typically during periods of relaxation and in the Mosque. However, instead of a woven or batik cloth, he wears the Indonesian national flag or *Merah Putih* (Red and White).



Figure 6.21 Isa Perkasa, *Merah-Putih*, performance, Japan, 2000 (Courtesy of the artist).

After fixing the crumpled map to the wall he takes off the flag, leaving him wearing a towel with the US five hundred dollar bill printed on it. He lays the flag on the floor and on it he proceeds to wash the bills of Rupiah in the bucket of water, placing each one on a different page of the atlas. The performance alludes to the fragility of Indonesian economic sovereignty and the ease with which natural and human resources are stolen and sold for profit. In other versions he tries metaphorically to ‘fix’ a broken country by ironing the wrinkles out of the map and national flag; on the iron he has written the word ‘*rakyat*’ or common people. For these series of performances, the site of his work is the collusion between the perceived neo-colonial policies of the IMF, a foreign body that many Indonesians see as invading Indonesia’s economic sovereignty (some even calling it the ‘International Mother Fucker’), and the corporate and governmental powers selling off Indonesia’s natural resources to the highest bidder.

Jeprut

Jeprut is another term used in Bandung to name body oriented alternative artistic practices and works that place emphasis on the body as conduit of communication and art as indefinable process. The term connotes an attitude and attributes of an anti-mainstream and provocative, at times activist, practice as well as a larger cultural movement in the Bandung art scene during the 1990s. A fairly literal translation of this Sundanese word would be something like an electric short circuit. It is the moment of ‘snap’ so to speak, and this moment is the verb form *ngejeprut* or *jeprut* -ing. It became a form and basis of artistic expression; one allegedly unmediated, free from any specific context or tradition. There are no rules to *jeprut*; the only objective being to distance oneself from the making of material objects, and instead move art toward process, for art to *be* process. It can erupt, happen, or take place anywhere and

anytime.³⁸ The point is that the ‘work’ be an enabling conduit of communication, even if the actions and objects therein are no longer comprehensible as ‘art’ or any other classifiable action. According to Tisna Sanjaya, *Jeprut* as artistic practice is akin to the moment at which rice turns from raw state into cooked rice, cooked rice into porridge; the moment when cotton turns into cloth, from cloth into clothes, from clothes to rags. In other words, it is the moment when something changes its state of being.³⁹ There are obvious genetic and spiritual connections between *jeprut* and the previous developments in body action or performance in groups such as *Sumber Waras* and *Perengkel Jahé*, some of whose members also considered themselves part of the *jeprut* movement.

Like the term *perengkel jahé*, *jeprut* came to name a series of characteristics and operative strategies already in play at the time, and was a term that initially derived from the era of *pemberontakan* in the 1970s and resurfaced in the 1990s with new contours. Remembering Iani’s passage above regarding artists’ reasons for entering into a group, many of the collectives and groups that experimented with performance art did so initially as a challenge to convention and status quo. They wanted to push the limits of what was permissible as an art object. In so doing, some artists invoked the idea of *jeprut* as an excuse for not thinking critically about why they do what they do. This does not mean that artists did not also approach art as a critical practice and a means of social commentary. Yet, artists typically engaged in issues-based work as individuals and experimented in groups. Yet, by 1994 a more explicitly political, critical, and, in some cases, more disruptive performance art was emerging; one aimed at reinscribing a space for critical culture within the current

³⁸ Interview with Wawan S. Husin, Sept. 20, 2002, Bandung.

³⁹ Interview with Tisna Sanjaya, Sept.20, 2002, Bandung.

conditions of a crackdown on political discourse and criticism of the regime.. It is no coincidence that the larger 'movement' of *Jeprut*, for instance, (re)emerged out of the heightened censorship and scrutiny of the press, of which the banning of the cultural and political magazines *Tempo*, *Editor* and *Detik* in 1994 was only one example.⁴⁰ It was within such conditions coupled with the profound economic collapse that began in 1996 that group- or collective-based artistic practices, including visual performance art took on new urgency to respond to and 'act on' the new situation. *Jeprut* was one such mechanism in the exploration of critical possibilities of the absurd and the nonsensical, the unconscious and spontaneous eruption of energy. It is thought to erupt when all other modes of expression have proven inadequate to give 'voice' to frustrations and feelings of being constrained by the present and chaotic situation.⁴¹

It should be underlined here that while the arts and press in general were under scrutiny, visual artists often did have it easier than the press, theatre and literature. Part of the reason for this is that visual art was not seen as equally important or as likely to be as widely disseminated as text based works. In addition, as has been stated above, many alternative and even highly critical artists have found sponsorship among certain elements of the government and have been able to exhibit in alternative art spaces and governmentally owned spaces.⁴² In this regard then, these groups were not principally dissident but rather constantly negotiating with state power.

⁴⁰ For a general and anonymous Indonesian account of censorship of the arts and press during the New Order, see editorial Board, "Tentang Sensor (Concerning Censorship)," *Media Kerja Budaya*. November (1994).

⁴¹ Interview with Yoyo Yogasmana, Aug. 16, 2002, Bandung.

⁴² However, as Tisna Sanjaya and others have pointed out, art was once again in danger of becoming embedded and even high jacked by politics during the era of *reformasi*, as artists and activism blurred to such an extent that art became mouthpieces for certain parties. Interview with Tisna Sanjaya, Sept. 12, 2002, Bandung.

One such event of protest was *Pentas Musik 24 Jam* at Café UNPAD (Universitas Padjadjaran), 25 July 1994. The 24 hour ‘jam’ session, beginning at four in the afternoon, was organized by artist-activist groups from UNPAD as an expression of solidarity and concern over the banning of the journals *Tempo*, *Detik*, and *Editor*. Understandably, most of those involved had already been active with activist groups and LSMs and had carried out clandestine activities and distribution of illegal media about the political realities of the country. This included visual/performance artists such as Arahmaiani, Isa Perkasa, Andar Manik, Marintan Sirait, Agus Suwage, Tita Rubiati, and Tisna Sanjaya. The event itself is a prime example of the wider notion and movement of *jeprut*, bringing together various groups and collectives of visual and performance artists, activists, musicians, theatre workers, poets, etc, for improvisational and ritualistic expressions of solidarity and outrage. The pivot around which the various acts took place was the continuous music played by visiting German musician and musicologist, Dieter Mack. His aim was for music to act as a catalyst for creative dissent, for artists to respond to the music in expressing whatever came to mind. The collective of fellow artists carried out simultaneous and improvised actions in tandem and in rhythm with the music. As the evening wore on, people came and went, each one leaving their mark on the event.⁴³ At one point, Isa Perkasa carried out a *Perengkel Jahé* improvisation by having his body bound with rope in such a way that as he struggled to free himself the rope’s grip tightened, cutting off blood supply and bruising and lacerating skin. Tisna allowed his body to be written on by fellow *jeprutawan* Isa and Christiawan without protesting such acts of ‘authorship’ on his (clothed) body.

⁴³ Unfortunately, I have found no images or documentation of this event except for one newspaper article and various renditions of the event in art blogs from Indonesia. The fact that it is repeatedly mentioned suggests that the event was important as a form of activism in art.

The basic theme of these and of all the improvised actions of the event *Pentas Musik 24 Jam* was *kebebasan* (freedom) and the right to a ‘voice’ or in this case pointing to the lack of ‘voice’. The above event of artistic activism has been called *jeprut*, but not because of the types of actions or to name a specific group. Rather it serves to name a widespread attitude, and felt sense of solidarity that was growing into a widespread movement in Bandung among the different areas of artistic practice, which were themselves becoming increasingly blurred and irrelevant. It points to both a kind of artistic activism as well as the construction of new social relations and structures in art; as artistic practice that defies categorization or that has no category ‘so to speak’.

Instalasi Tumbuh (Installation of Growth)

Tisna Sanjaya, a graduate and faculty member of the Fine Art and Design Department at ITB, was one of the driving forces behind this movement in visual art performance in the mid-1990s, and injected it with a profound spiritualism grounded in Islamic beliefs and social responsibility.⁴⁴ Tisna Sanjaya describes his interpretation of *jeprut*-ist or *jeprutawan* as “[S]erious people who look for the truth, always questioning, always careful where they tread...” (Sanjaya 1998, 30-31). For him, art, like life and spiritual cultivation, is a process, and artistic practice is something like a ‘long pilgrimage’ (*ziarah panjang*) that along the way may manifest in any medium. As such, he sees the making of art as a spiritual act, while artistic practice should be attuned “to taking care of/to preserve the oneness/unity between God, humanity, nature, and the soul...” (Sanjaya 1996a).⁴⁵ One example of such process as a kind of ‘pilgrimage’ is his *Instalasi Tumbuh* or Installation of Growth (1996- the present).

⁴⁴ Others who have been labeled as *jeprutawan* of *jeprut*-ists are known names from visual art, theatre, and music, such as Ging Ginanjar, Herry Dim, Harry Roesly, Iman Soleh, Isa Perkasa, Nandang Gawe, Wawan S. Kodrat, Wawan S. Husin, among others.

⁴⁵ “...menjaga kesatuan – Tuhan – Manusia – alam – arwah dalam kesenian...”

This is a long-term project that relies on large numbers of collaborators and which requires direct communication with and participation on the part of the community. The project has been carried out in various cities throughout Java with the aim of building a widespread and intercity community project with both practical and profoundly spiritual dimensions. As the artist explains, *Instalasi Tumbuh* or Installation of Growth is “the re-evaluation of the process of life” (Sanjaya 1996d). This work and Marintan’s *Building a House* series share a common notion of the tree cum body, in this case a kind of sacred body.

Each *Tumbuh* project has as its main action the planting of a certain number of trees in a specific city. The basic premise of the project is to plant as many trees as possible along the roads and highways, in vacant lots, and people’s gardens, in places that once were lush with indigenous trees but are now barren, industrialized, and dehumanizing. He invites people to rethink and “remember the rhythm of nature as a counter-balance to the rapid speed of modernization.” In his “Ballad of Mahogany and Melinjo Trees,” Tisna writes:

When I was a boy, I could hardly imagine that my parents’ garden – where banana trees and vegetables were planted near Nurul Huda mosque, a small mosque of my grandfather’s *pesantren* or school for Koranic studies – would be gradually replaced by the hustle bustle of industry development.

My parents’ garden – suitable place for playing and pondering or aspiring arts (sic) before *maghrib* prayer and reading the Al-Qur’an – has now become the Ledeng Terminal. My father’s plants and trees [have become] stores of oil and lubricant, gasoline, daily needs and food stalls for drivers, conductors and passengers...

[...] When I was a boy, my grandfather always planted any kind of plants... As if a possessed man, he planted, watered and manured (sic) them every morning while he prayed, whispering through his lips, shalawat for Prophet Muhammad... Robanaa yaa robanna... (Sanjaya 1996c).

His work is part religious ritual and ritual of the everyday, part sociological research and community action. Tisna's intent is to bring Islamic values and beliefs together with artistic practice and social responsibility to plant the seeds, as it were, for a sustainable and effective cultural action and movement. This is clear from the initial *Instalasi Tumbuh* in which the artist and his collaborators gave away 99 mahogany and melinjo saplings that had been planted in specially made bamboo-plaited pots (Figure 6.21).



Figure 6.22 Tisna Sanjaya, *Tumbuh* project, 1996. Here, Wawan S. Hussin carries out a kind of 'blessing' ritual while walking among the rows of 99 tree saplings meant to be dispersed (Courtesy of the artist).

The number 99 is significant in Islam for the number of sacred names of Allah. The chosen types of trees to be planted are also symbolic. The fruit (called *tangkil*) of the melinjo are edible, hence nourishing, and the wood of the mahogany is hard and strong, hence capable of providing protection. He also chose the two kinds of trees because, for him, they represent a symbolic union and dialogue between a woman and

a man, or what he likens to a ‘marriage’. Prior to their distribution, the saplings are prayed over, and a performance often takes place within a gallery setting. He tells those interested in the project about the origins of the trees, their traditional uses, and methods for caring for them.

Each project involves the help of a number of collaborators or what Tisna calls fellow *jeprutawan*, such as Nandang Gawe and Isa Perkasa, and who play a specific role in the division of labor in carrying out the piece (Sanjaya 1996b). For example, some of the collaborators are responsible for carrying the trees to their destination, to either give them away or assist in planting them in the location chosen by the person adopting the tree. The *jeprutawan* are to take saplings everywhere they go during their day, as well as to deliberately selected sites that could possibly present more of a challenge, such as police stations and red-light districts. With each tree planted, the person adopting the tree is asked to give a kind of message that is recorded and written onto discarded board or sheet metal attached to a pole. This task of recording is carried out by another in the group. These messages, memories, and poems are then planted alongside the tree, and some will be taken to be ‘planted’ elsewhere, as in the case of *Taman Syair* or *Garden of Poems*, to be ‘planted’ in a vacant lot overgrown with long grass (Figures 6.23 and 6.24). These encounters are, for Tisna, a form of ‘*wacana rakyat jelata*’ or common peoples’ discourse, and the material objects that serve as documents of that exchange (trees, memories, and poems.) produce “an installation of thoughts, and a space for *Dzikir* (remembering the Almighty)” (Sanjaya 1996d).



Figure 6.23 Tisna Sanjaya, *Taman Syair* (Garden of Poems), *Tumbuh* project, Bandung, 1996-1997 (Courtesy of the artist).



Figure 6.24 Tisna Sanjaya, *Garden of Poems*, 1996-97. The artist walking among the forest of poems in a lot that had been cleared for development (Courtesy of the artist).

Instalasi Tumbuh along with its distinct phases and procedures also reminds of Joseph Beuys' well known 7,000 Oaks Project, which he began for the 7th Documenta in Kassel in 1982. It is an example of Beuys' concept of 'social sculpture' or a 'total art work' and 'a social organism as a work of art' in which anyone could take part. In this case, it involved the local communities, local councilpersons, and other governmental and non-governmental agencies and bodies. His proposition entailed the planting of 7,000 oaks throughout the city. The places in which they were to be planted were first marked with a basalt stele. The stele was to remain after the tree was planted as symbolic of how two similar objects (both tree and stone are natural) opposite in character can co-exist. The project took five years, and was completed after his death for the 8th Documenta in 1987. He contended that this was the first stage in a global mission toward urban renewal. Projects such as *Instalasi Tumbuh* are certainly genetically related to this 'global mission', not least because Tisna first got the idea for his *Tumbuh* project in 1987 when his instructor at the University of Braunschweig, Germany introduced to him the custom of planting a tree to mark the birth of one's child. Upon the birth of his first son, Zico, Tisna and his instructor planted an oak together. He would also have come into contact with Beuys' work and ideas during his four years in Germany studying graphic arts between 1991 and 1994. Similar to Beuys' conception of "social sculpture" and 'a social organism as a work of art', as well as idea of urban renewal, Tisna's *Instalasi Tumbuh* places emphasis on collaborative work between artists and non-art communities, directly engaging the direct participation of people from all walks of life for its enactment and future life. It remains an ongoing project today.

Tisna Sanjaya, like many of his fellow contemporary artists, crosses between and transcends artistic boundaries, between two-dimensional graphic works, installations and performance, the latter of which he considers a kind of 'communal'

form of labor. Much of his performance work differs greatly from that of others in that the majority of his work depends on the direct participation from the audience or community. Part of the point of such collaborative works is to investigate community and public involvement in artistic expression.

Concluding Remarks

What today is called performance art in Indonesia began as a series of provocations and experimentations initiated by visual artists, but with deep connections to theatre, particularly experimental theatre of the 1970s and 1980s. It often combined tactics of cultural rArtists, often from within temporary groups or collectives, gave their experimental practices different names to describe a particular force that was organic in nature, which must be harnessed. This provided the basis from which artists proposed different projects of resistance, some of whom proposed cultivating the body/self as a conduit of energy. It was, in some respects, aimed to rethink the ways in which the body interacts with the world of objects and others, to rethink the possibilities of and instigate new social relations. Part of the aim of this critical artistic practice was to effect social and cultural change through immediate interaction. These early events often took place below the radar of the local authorities, deliberately difficult to capture. Increasingly, collectives crossed over and combined, making the different groups redundant.

CHAPTER SEVEN

APPROPRIATING AND REWRITING THE CODE: ARAHMAIANI'S PROPOSITIONS OF ENGAGEMENT

This chapter in this extended study of a heterogeneous critical contemporary art in Indonesia concerns certain works and art practice of woman artist, Arahmaiani Faizal (hereafter Iani) (1961). In the previous chapter, I introduced some of the main principles underlying her installation-performance *Four Faces*. In that discussion on visual art performance in Bandung, her work was framed within what links a number of BJIX participants, namely the art collective or group. Yet, to situate her work further within a group and the concepts derived therein would prove untenable. For although working collaboratively throughout her career, she stands out as a singularly outspoken, independent, female artist in the history of a critical contemporary art in Indonesia. It would not be romanticizing or mythologizing to suggest that during the 1990s, her work typically brought an uncommon intensity and critical approach to issues not found in other women's art at the time. She stood out as one of Indonesia's most daring woman artists, tackling public issues typically claimed by men.¹ She took up issues of the pathologies of capitalism and tabooed subjects such as sexual subordination in Islam and its gender ideologies, producing what she claims were works based on her own experiences within both systems of subjugation as a Muslim woman.

¹ For more information on Indonesian women artists as read through certain frames of French feminism, see the groundbreaking exhibition catalogue and curatorial essays in Carla Bianpoen, ed. *Indonesian Women Artists: The Curtain Opens* (Jakarta: Yayasan Seni Rupa Indonesia, 2007). The series of essays also provide biographical data about Arahmaiani not covered in this chapter.

Certain of her works and the ways in which she asserts the body/self are the topic of the present chapter which takes up aspects of gender in relation to critical art practice. Astri Wright has written that, “the Indonesian art by women that most clearly distinguishes itself from art by men is that which shows women artists exploring and asserting the self” (Wright 2000, 98). She elsewhere suggests that women’s artistic approaches are located within those practices of “less empowered minority or majority groups and individuals [who] challenge the national motto of ‘Unity in Diversity’ in an attempt to gain control over the process of defining an identity for themselves” (Wright 1999b). This assertion, however, as Narayan explains in her critical reading of “double vision” introduced above, such assertions of the self also entails context, and the possibility of having to inhabit multiple contexts. Artists, such as Arahmaini, who critically engage the various contexts, have alluded to the possibility of further alienation and erasure in asserting the self. Nonetheless, Wright’s idea is a helpful beginning in situating the works under consideration in this chapter, namely Iani’s *Lingga/Yoni*, her installation/assemblage series *Coca Cola* (begun 1994) and *Nation for Sale* (begun 1996), and performance *Dayang Sumbi Rejects the ‘Status Quo’* (1998-99).

General Background

Iani’s upbringing was one of cultural compromise and negotiation, one of coexisting cultural and religious streams of thought and understanding. Whereas her father of Sundanese ethnicity provided a strict home embedded in Islamic culture and instruction, her mother’s Javanese family encouraged her to learn Javanese dances, songs, legends, poetry, and *adat* or custom. Her name readily demonstrates the coexistence of her family’s backgrounds. According to the artist, Arahma is Arabic for ‘loving’ and Iani is Sanskrit for ‘human being’. With a prominent *kyai* (leader of an

Islamic boarding school or *pesantren*) and Islamic scholar for a father, Iani “is experienced in religious and political discourse. She is also familiar with a number of debates and polemics on power abuses using religious and nationalistic symbols to repress dissidents or just for gaining political and economic power” (Marianto 2000).² According to the artist’s general account, she became disillusioned with her family’s relatively privileged social and economic position, and left home at the age of fourteen to ‘live as a street kid’, which she apparently did until she entered the Fine Arts Department at ITB as a painting major in 1979. She left in 1983.

Iani early on felt frustration with the arts education she was receiving. She claims that she already came with an attitude of anger toward society, religion and politicians, especially in relation to the confines of an Islamic culture and life.³ Like many students at the time, she looked to activism for a purpose, working with various ‘underground’ activist groups. Iani cut her activist teeth in the student demonstrations during the elections in 1979, when the military occupied the Bandung campus, and continued working with *Organisasi Tanpa Bentuk* or Organization without Form (OTB) into the 1990s. OTB was an underground movement “designed to spread reliable information to the public regarding what was supposedly actually happening politically in Indonesia. They networked with other activist groups in Bandung.”⁴

After basically failing painting class, she began making assemblages from recycled trash and ‘performances’ as early as 1980, finding some inspiration in black-and white images from Western books on installation and happenings. One of her

² Iani’s father, Yusuf Amir Feisal, is also a former board member of the powerful *Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia* or Indonesian Islamic Scholars Association (ICMI), and under President Abdurrahman Wahid’s government he was a deputy in the People’s Supreme Assembly Body representing one of the major Islamic parties that emerged after Suharto was forced down.

³ Interview with Arahmaiani, January 2002, Bandung.

⁴ Interview with Arahmaiani, July 5, 2002, Jakarta. This underground activist group had as one of its primary headquarters the home of experimental musician Herry Roesli.

early outdoor actions was in commemoration of national Independence Day, August 17, 1983, for which she and friends apparently wrote one of her poems on a street.⁵ It remains unclear as to what actually happened, whether she or someone else added something to the content regarding President Suharto after the fact. Nonetheless, she was detained and questioned for close to a month. After her release, she was not allowed to exhibit her works in public for a number of years. Having been effectively shut down in Bandung, she left for Australia on a drawing scholarship. She was exhibiting and publicly performing again when she returned to Indonesia in 1987.

Until the late-1990s, she was one of only a handful of women artists to use their body as the main medium of their work and to stage it in such public ways. She stands out as one of its most outspoken women artists in Indonesia regarding gender and sexual inequality, particularly where invocations of Islam and *adat* or traditional custom by a patriarchal society in relations of gender are concerned. She is also known for her social and equally gendered commentary on issues regarding what she perceives as the negative effects of modernization and economic neo-colonialism in capitalism.

Tackling such sensitive and taboo issues in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the artist has been ‘hounded’ out of cities more than once, and until recently her artwork was patronized more internationally than in country. At that time, male artists such as those discussed in previous chapters were dealing with socio-political issues related to the military, state and government. However, there is little evidence to suggest that they dealt with these issues in relation to religion. Iani was, as far as the record shows, the first artist to take up the question of religion in relation to gender and from a woman’s perspective. To touch on the sensitive issue of Islam was a dangerous thing

⁵ The details of this event differ among certain people in the art world in Indonesia.

to do, particularly as a woman. This was the case in her solo exhibition at Seni Ancol in Jakarta in 1994 in which she knowingly combined a number of cultural and religious icons and symbols, some of which are considered sacred in Islam. This angered some of the more conservative elements in the Islamic community. After four days of public talks trying to negotiate and discuss the issue with those who found her work offensive, she felt that to work in Jakarta or Bandung was not a safe thing to do. She moved to Yogyakarta and then spent between 1996 and 1998 living and working in Thailand. She also traveled widely, becoming a member of that ‘floating tribe’ of artists discussed above in relation to Heri Dono, “whose work is greatly admired abroad, but hardly collected at home” (Pat Hoffie summarized in Morell 1996, 53). Although a perennial in the biennials and triennials of the world, she continued to be somewhat at odds with her own society. However, her international position has helped her in Indonesia in that she has not been dependent on the Indonesian art world for her survival. Because of this, she could be even bolder in her artistic and written statements than she perhaps would have been otherwise. Her work was recognized nationally in 1999 with a solo exhibition in Jakarta. Although in the written discourse, hardly any of her works are discussed in-depth for their ideas and significance, the Indonesian art world acknowledges the major impact her work has had on the overall discourse of a critical mode of contemporary art practice in Indonesia, particularly her influence on the discussion of women’s art.

The Figure of the ‘Woman Artist’

On the one hand, as an artist who spends most of her time abroad, she is part of what has been called a transnational feminism that calls into question notions of ‘home’, ‘belonging’, ‘nation’, and ‘community’. Arguably, Iani’s feminism, if it can be called such, stems from her conception of the relations between gender, capitalism

and its unfettered mobility (globalization), and what she views as the accompanying erosion and reconstitution of the local and national economic and political resources.⁶ Not only did she take on issues of global industrialization by transnational corporations and the New Order programs of development, she was one of the earliest to associate these conditions of modernity with the plight of women. Yet, the terms ‘feminist’ and ‘feminism’ are not without their problems in an Indonesian context. On the one hand, to be called a ‘feminist artist’ is a condescending term used in Indonesia to dismiss critical works of art by women about women, as well as a form of cultural hijacking by the Western discourse:

[F]eminism in Indonesia is also strongly associated with an unconditional transferring of a Western ideology that is regarded as the adversary of ‘Eastern values’ (*budaya ketimuran*) which are synonymous with an ‘Indonesian identity’ that is still strongly espoused by Indonesian society. Thus feminism as an ideology clashes with the ideologies of nationalism and patriarchy which are still powerful in Indonesian culture. Indeed, many women artists argue that the ongoing debate about the definition of feminism in Indonesia is in fact seen as counter-productive to achieving feminism’s goal of gender equality in Indonesia (Dirgantoro 2008, 3).

Iani’s practice and works highlight such supposed polarized dominants in that she makes artwork in a manner associated with the male artist, meaning sharp social criticism, at times aggressive, straight forward and/or depicting or even reproducing violence (such as hacking the heads off chickens), and this has been seen as inappropriate to proper female character.⁷ “This means that feminism here will not get very far, as women step out of their traditional roles of thinking and behaving they are

⁶ Iani has rejected labels such as “Muslim woman artist” and ‘feminist artist’ in the past. She suggests that both labels misrecognize her work. However, her work has since been exhibited in the acclaimed *Global Feminisms* (2007) in New York, and she too has taken up the term ‘feminist’ in discussing her work.

⁷ Based on comments made during a women’s forum I organized at Benda Gallery, Yogyakarta in June 2002, in which ten women artists discussed their experiences as women in a male-dominated field.

not considered to be acting properly as women. [As such,] they are seen as taking on masculine attributes.” This creates a subject position that cannot be categorized and hence remains invisible. Iani further suggests that “if we are allowed only two categories of gendered behavior and thinking, once you step out of those frames, you enter a zone of limbo, an in-between space that has no foundation.”⁸

As I discussed in Chapter Three, Sudjojono was one of the first to construct in print a concept of the visual artist as what I believe is a particularly male subjectivity. First and foremost, the artist is associated with the *nabi*, or Prophet bringing the truth of Islam. Women cannot occupy the position of *nabi*. It is the male artist who can serve as prophet in the construction of a just society of the future. He is then destined, if he paints the truth from within, to commune with the Goddess of Art. One cannot help but sense the sexual connotations in Sudjojono’s suggestion of the artist transported to ecstatic heights by the Goddess herself. Yet, again, she carries the hero to his destiny but does not create destiny herself. In his formulation, there is no room for any subjectivity but the male protagonist.

Sudjojono’s was not the final word in the matter, but it does suggest that the idea of artist as a male acting agent dates back at least to the first manifestations of an Indonesian ‘advanced guard’ or avant-garde. It is also the case that, until recently, women were expected to forego their own artistic careers in order to fulfill their supposed ‘natural function’ as wives and mothers. It is perhaps no coincidence that after they had graduated from the academy and after *GSRB* disbanded, the two women involved in the movement, Nanik Mirna and Siti Adiyati, basically ceased making work after they married. Hence, when Arahmaiani emerged from the academy in 1983

⁸ Interview with the artist, Jakarta, 13 Dec. 2001.

and was arrested for allegedly making subversive art in a public place, she was and remained something of an anomaly.

Appropriating Signs: Lingga/Yoni, Coca Cola, and Nation for Sale

Beginning in 1993, Iani began working with a complex of ideas and icons that would then serve as the basis, structurally and ideationally, of much of her work throughout the 1990s. It is here that she started to experiment with ways of mapping sociological and social commentary onto highly spiritual and religious composite symbols such as the Hindu *lingga/yonis*. In this case, while in her writings she stresses its traditional associations of the balance of male and female sexual energies, she also inverts and often rewrites these initial codes and connotations. This is the case with her *Lingga/Yoni* painting of 1994 (Figure 7.1), as part of her controversial solo exhibition, *Sex, Religion and Coca Cola*.

Here, the artist has painted the generalized forms of the female and male genitals as symbols of the cosmic womb and phallus, the female *yonis* with its yellow jewel or seed and the male *lingga*.⁹ Although interested in imagining a cosmic balance, she rearticulates the sign by reversing its traditional order in which the *yonis*

⁹ The piece has been exhibited several times, the first as part of her solo exhibition as *Seni Aneka*, and again in *Traditions and Tensions* in 1996.

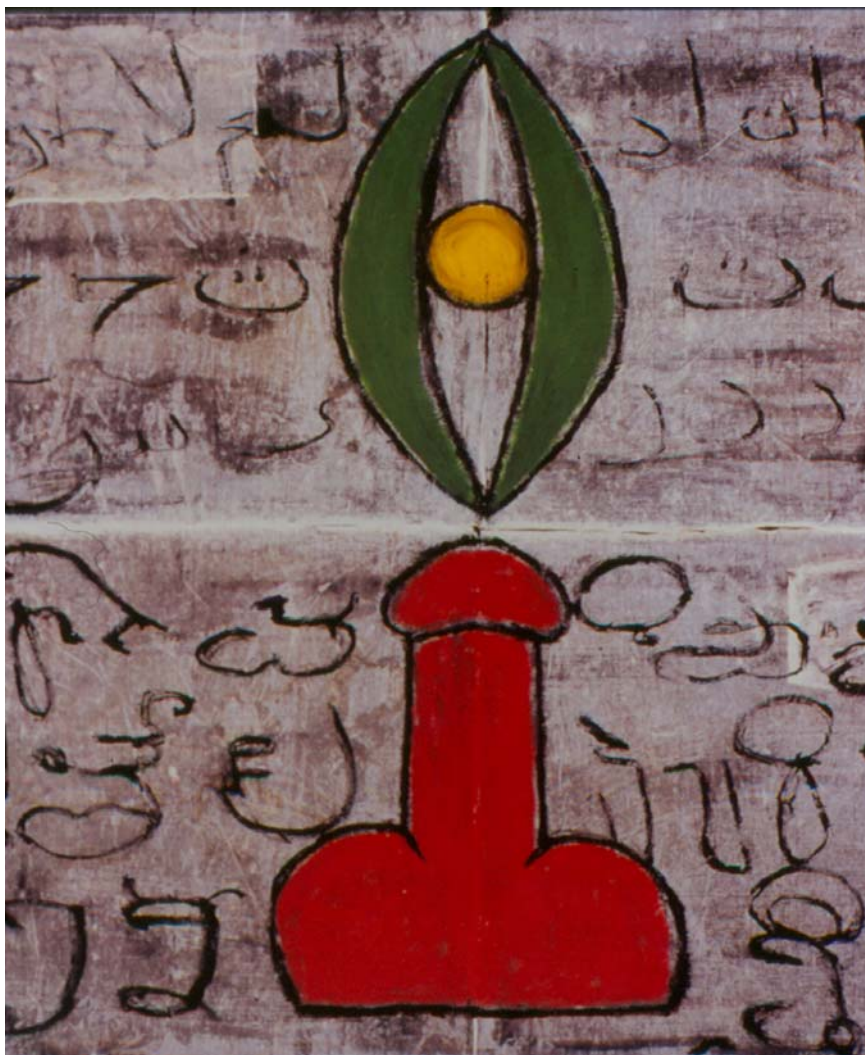


Figure 7.1 Arahmaiani, *Lingga/Yoni*, 1994, acrylic on board (Courtesy of the artist).

typically surrounds the *lingga* from below. This piece is in part about a desire for the potent complimentary union that animistic and Hindu elements of Javanese culture presume. She has surrounded such a union scrawled *Palawa* and *Kawi* or Arabic script – the latter commonly associated with Islam and the Al Qur'an, as an indirect way of pointing to what the artist sees as an imbalance of psychic and spiritual energies, as well as religious constraints on the human body.

When *Lingga/Yoni* was shown in Jakarta at Studio Onkor in 1994, certain Islamic groups threatened to close the exhibition and report her to the Muslim press

(Jennifer Gampell quoted in Datun 2000, 68).¹⁰ Those who condemned the painting “consider Arabic script an inseparable element of the verses of the sacred Al-Quran,” even if the script within the painting spelled out the letters alif, ba, ta, tsa, which for Iani were merely the first three letters in the Arabic script (Arahmaiani 1994). However, in as much as she claims innocence in her use of such symbols, being a Muslim woman she surely would have been familiar with the connotations of the sacred in Arabic calligraphy. As such, her work can be seen as a deliberate attempt to undermine the relationship between the script and what it signifies by both pointing to the former as mere letters, as well as further scandalizing assumptions of their sanctity by combining them with suggestions of human genitalia and sexuality, or the profane. In the end, negotiations were held and resulted in several days of afternoon discussions between the artist and other members of the art world with certain aspects of the Islamic public. The entire event, demonstrated “how art can disturb the most entrenched value systems” (Datun 2000, 68).

The ideas behind the above work were something that the artist had been developing over the past few years, and which have been publicized as well in her various artist’s statements during the 1990s. In what follows is an exposition of some of the main points of her artistic agenda, which connects a series of concepts which then serve as the foundation for her further reversal and rewriting of the complex sign

¹⁰ A similar and more potentially dangerous situation emerged when her performance *Kata* in Kuala Lumpur in 2005. It was brought to an end after someone in the audience reported her actions to the religious police. In this performance, Iani wrote the name of ‘Allah’ on a plate and proceeded to smash it against a wall. The audience member who reported her argued that her actions were blasphemous. The religious police agreed and shut down the performance, but not the entire event. However, as Ray Langenbach has pointed out, Arahmaiani was technically in accordance with Islamic teachings in its iconoclasm. In this case, the written name of Allah had come to serve for the offended audience member, and perhaps for others, as a true representation (script as sacred). See Ray Langenbach, “Iconoclasm,” http://www.casca.org.au/cvapsa/2007/9_bs_36_3/Bs363_langenbah_arahmaiani.pdf. *Broadsheet*, vol. 36, no. 3 (2007): 176-81 2007. (accessed 5 May, 2008).

of the *lingga/yonis* by approaching issues of gender and disequilibrium in terms of economic, political, cultural, and social inequalities.

Writing in 1993, Iani stated that “we are in a state of imbalance,” in which the energy of the feminine is ‘oppressed/repressed’ by the energy of the masculine. Here she essentializes the feminine as ‘spirit’, ‘nature’, the ‘weak’, and the ‘oppressed’ and the masculine as ‘matter’, ‘culture’, the ‘strong’, and the ‘oppressor’. “God is on the throne and the goddess in the cell. There is no equality. The ‘weak’ have been manipulated by the ‘strong’, they have been oppressed economically, politically and culturally.”¹¹ Her first concern is that the world is in a state of imbalance due to gender inequality. She also evokes Hindu concepts of cosmic partners in the figures of the god and goddess, the one sitting in a position of power, the other imprisoned. This is a universe out of sync. In another move, she then suggests a ‘feminine’ or the ‘weak’, a category that not only encompasses women but also the ‘we’ writ ambiguously large, that has become overwhelmed and utterly colonized by capitalism:

[W]e have sold and prostituted our soul for the sake of profit and scientific atrocities... In such a state we easily fall into a consumer oriented life style, which further weakens our self reliance and autonomy. This life style in fact demands dependence. But unlike the nurturing dependence of a child on their mother, it thrives on alienation and lack of solidarity, creating a society obsessed with profit, personal gain, and mutual jealousy.

The ‘spirit of civilization’ has been corrupted and taken over by ‘matter’ or materialism spread by the masculine force of blind capitalism. Such themes were common enough at the time. This of course is not surprising, as Indonesia was undergoing rapid development and experiencing what many saw as pathological

¹¹ Unless otherwise noted, all quotes in this section are taken from the Artist’s Statement, 1993, trans. unknown.

effects of economic and social modernization. In the end, the collective, communal, social bearings that once seemed capable of supporting a society appear to be crumbling around her.

Yet, Iani's is not a position of resignation. Her work serves as indictments to the above state of affairs, as well as envisages a better future, sharing with other artists discussed in this dissertation the ideal of a global community of humanity based on social justice, with art helping to construct new social relations. Iani has suggested that she views her performances as a means through which to channel her energy to the spectator, as a kind of healing ritual: "I believe that art as ritual has a healing capacity and that the artist as healer will give valuable contributions toward the future."

Here the artist refers to the power of art to heal, but through the artist's own embodiment of that healing force. In this, it is possible that she refers to *sakti* and in this case *sakti* as the power of the consciousness to act. As discussed in the previous chapter, *sakti* is cosmic energy, and precedes action. *Sakti* is both a philosophical category and goddess, forming a single entity. While associated with the dual and combined nature of both female and male energies, in Saiva Hinduism, *sakti* is referred to as *she* as in "she is the cause of the whole universe. She is the unthinkable, unrepresentable. But from her comes all matter."¹² As goddess, *sakti* takes on many forms, and appearances – beautiful and terrifying, for she is both generative and destructive energies. This relation of creation and dissolution suggests that in the creative energies of the feminine is the dual nature of sacrifice in bringing about cosmic change. Change and creation emerge from the self, from the power of the body. In this case, the artist embodies the dual nature of the goddess, in offering the

¹² Email communication with Lalita Singh, May 23, 2010.

body as the conduit of healing power. Iani's aim is to try to assist in the restoration of that which makes us free – our humanity, our creativity. In other words, the aesthetic, art, nature – the feminine of humanity – is poised to help bring humanity back from the brink: “There is no more creativity, all remains is poverty or mere survival, in an environment stripped of its beauty and natural power...Any creative act can be considered as both a service and an act of wisdom, which will hopefully also bring positively (sic) into the world.”

I have spent this time pointing to some of the main points of Iani's artistic philosophy and imperatives that remained fairly consistent across her statements for other venues during the 1990s. It is not only characteristic of her typically expressionistic declarations, but also provides much of the ideational basis over the next few years for a series of installation and installation-performance works dealing with the combined issues of spiritual and sexual imbalance, gender inequality, capitalism and cultural imperialism.

In much of her work, then, Iani is concerned with the overarching effects of development and processes of modernization in Indonesia. In this regard, she tends to exploit the difference between what she views as an ‘Asian’ way of thinking and experiencing and that of the ‘West’ as a difference between concepts of duality, wholism, authenticity, and the human community on the one hand, and of rationalism, disintegration, and individuation on the other. The former is seen as continuously under siege from the latter. In much of her work she posits capitalism as primarily an insidious form of Western neo-imperialism. In this sense, capitalism is still seen as something ‘foreign’ to the local which then retains other ‘original’ values than mere exchange. This can be observed in her *Coca Cola* and *Nation for Sale* series of works in which she usually draws attention to the unequal relations between Western products and lifestyle, usually American, and the effects of such on local communities.

She is keen to underscore or expose what she sees as the uncritical acceptance and desire for such a lifestyle and goods on the part of Indonesians and particularly as it is supported and promoted by the government.¹³

The series of ‘*Coca-Cola*’ works takes the motif of the *lingga-yoni* and turns its traditional reading on its head. *Sacred Coke* (1995), for example, rearticulates the traditional complex form to construct a metaphor of addiction and capitalist greed (Figure 7.2).¹⁴ The piece consists of a large circle of white sand. In some versions, this is surrounded by a smaller ring of black pebbles. A coca-cola bottle, by now her idea of a global symbol of globalization (Americanization), has been placed in the center. She has covered the neck of the cola bottle with a condom.

¹³ As the artist states in her ‘Artist’s statement’ for *Nation for Sale* in 1996: “Developed (western) nations have become the ideal model (and as a result, whatever originates in the west is deemed to be high quality and thus worthy of imitation). So it is not surprising to find that many among the educated class and many of the intellectuals suffer from an ‘inferiority complex’ and so blindly follow western philosophies and western sciences (swallowing all theories indiscriminately). Society in general is suffering deep culture shock. People smear themselves with skin-lightening creams, bleach their hair, undergo operations to make their eyes appear more western, and wear leather jackets despite the tropical heat. In short, the style of Hollywood movie stars and pop stars are imitated in earnest. And so, too, with lifestyles (including food and furnishings), body language, gestures, and dialects. They are still all imitated. Without realizing it, people truly are living a contemporary nightmare, cultural imperialism is embraced with a smile.”

¹⁴ It was exhibited in the exhibition of *Contemporary Art of the Non-Aligned Countries*; the Indonesian sections were curated by Jim Supangkat. It was traveled several times, including to the Sixth Havana Biennale in 1996, and *Cities on the Move* in 1997, curated by Hou Honru and Hans Obrist.



Figure 7.2 Arahmaiani, *Sacred Coke*, 1995, colonial table, white and black pebbles, coca-cola bottle, condom (Courtesy of the artist).

While appropriating the traditional symbolic formation, the former connotations of the phallus and vulva are all but gone. In this case, the circle of white sand represents the ‘cocaine’ of capitalism: “The heaviest drug, most deadly, most fancy.” At the center of this wasteland is the symbol of the American lifestyle of consumption that acts both like a drug and is akin to drug addiction itself. Just as people use condoms as sexual prophylactics, so too should there be some means by which communities and societies can protect themselves from such obsessions. Arguably, such works essentialize more than they deal critically with such issues.

Beginning around 1996, Iani began her installation *Nation for Sale*, which was most often accompanied by the performance *Handle without Care*, at least on opening night of the particular exhibition. *Nation for Sale* (Figures 7.3 and 7.4) changed slightly with each reincarnation, yet remained fairly consistent in its concept and the basic structure and elements in the work. It is a prolonged criticism of the ideological uses of nationalism during the New Order in manipulating the discourse of

development. According to the artist, the government invoked a sense of nationalism as an ‘alibi’ to justify development projects that gave many concessions to transnational corporations and expected severe sacrifices from the population for the sake of the ‘nation’.¹⁵ The work registers her sense of betrayal by the idea of nationalism. In her estimation, the Indonesian people were the site of a painful experiment, as if “society were a laboratory” in the modernization and development process to test out philosophies and systems irregardless of the outcome.



Figure 7.3 Arahmaiani, *White Cases* (variation of *Nation for Sale*), 1997, installation, Contemporary Art Museum, New York (Courtesy of the artist).

¹⁵ Interview with Arahmaiani, Jakarta, 5 July 2002.



Figure 7.4 Arahmaiani, *Nation for Sale*, artist in costume for *Handle without Care*, 1996, Third Asia Pacific Triennial (Courtesy of the artist).

Part of the development process meant, among other things, the valuation of natural and human resources such that the ‘nation’ was for sale in its fragmented parts within the frame of an extractive modernization policy. This becomes clearer when considering the contents of the rows of white boxes that comprise *Nation for Sale*. If read from front to back, the first and last rows contain toy machine guns, suggesting ways in which the military has been used to ensure and guard the progress of development. In the second row of boxes, Iani has placed a variety of images of women cut from fashion magazines. These bodies have been fragmented, cut into bits; the body viewed as a collection of gendered parts. This is to underscore what she perceives as a fundamental similarity between Islam and capitalism in the ways in which women’s bodies are made the sites of control, systemic violence, and traumatizing inscription.

Alternating jars of soil and water have been placed in the third row of crates to suggest how natural resources, the lifeline of the nation, have been exploited and

polluted. She suggests similar erosion in the contents of the following row, in this case the erosion of collective memory about nature and its healing properties by the replacement of natural, traditional remedies with modern pharmaceuticals. Iani's position is not one of an anti-modernization but wishes to point out how modern medicine has a kind of 'aura' about it in Indonesia, in which patients take pills given them without question or reservation. She also wants to suggest how it is possible to advocate and weave together two simultaneous systems of healing. In two of the boxes, the artist has placed a mirror, implying the spectator as commodity among the others.

Finally, at least in its 1996 guise, a sign *Nation for Sale* is hung above the series of collected objects in crates, and below that is a sign in Arabic script that reads 'halal' or 'allowed' in regards to food and (in Indonesia) rightful acts according to Islamic principles. In front of the series of 'goods' for sale is the composite sign of *Coke Circle* discussed above. To the left and right of the space are video monitors that project the sprawling slums of mega cities such as Jakarta and Bangkok, representations of the people on the fringes of development, who have not benefited but rather have been disenfranchised from it (Figure 7.5).



Figure 7.5 Arahmaiani, stills from *Handle without Care*, video component in *Nation for Sale*, 1996 (VCD courtesy of the artist).

At base, what is important is modernity in the artist's imaginary. Arahmaiani brings an ideal of a supposed un-alienated existence in opposition to what she perceives as the wounded and traumatized, fragmented and sundered body. She desires the balance between the material and spiritual, a balance between what she sees as similar problems emerging from both capitalism and religious fundamentalism. In as much as she takes a strong stance against what she views as Western imperialism and neo-colonial behaviors, she is also wary of the authority of other discourses that argue an 'un-alienated' society, such as the assumed authority of religious and local traditions that people are apt to cling to in times of rapid change and cultural upheaval.

The above themes can also be seen enacted in Iani's *Handle without Care*, which she often performed in conjunction with the various versions of *Nation for Sale* or as separate works recorded on video (Figure 7.6). In cases where she performs in a gallery, she begins by laying first within the installation as an 'object for sale' amidst the other objects on display. The artist plays the dual role of 'exotic Balinese dancer' and as 'female warrior' perhaps akin to Durgesha, the destructive aspect of Laksmi, consort to Visnu.



Figure 7.6 Arahmaiani, *Handle without Care*, video stills from performance, Bandung, 1996, approx. 14mins. (VCD courtesy of the artist).

As in *Nation for Sale* and *Sacred Coke*, the artist places emphasis on the relation of periphery and center, in this case occupying the periphery and dancing around the center of capitalism like a moth to a flame. Borrowing gestures from Balinese dance and wielding symbols of male domination, violence, and the Phallus in both the toy 'ray' gun' and *keris*, she twists and turns, making her way around the 'center' from her place along the 'periphery': "We are all obsessed with materialism and a taste for western goods that appear to us like 'sacred objects', which must be protected with guns and defended to the death" (Arahmaiani 1996). The scene is permeated by a cacophony of sound blaring from four boom boxes playing different kinds of traditional Indonesian music. The body/self in this case is surrounded or rather bombarded and marked by the highly marketable and invented traditions that have been packaged and sold as cultural representations of 'Indonesia'. Such rearticulations of traditional or local culture, inferring from the artist's statements, has been less than beneficial to those who still find these structures relevant but can no longer recognize themselves in their own signs.

Rewriting the Narrative in 'Dayang Sumbi Rejects the Status Quo'

Our body is loaded, I believe. It contains history and stories of the past and the present which will lead to the future...this past, present and future times will remain 'visible' on the body. ... I grew up in a society in which exposed flesh was taboo... there is a mystery and secret to be unraveled. It is also taboo to discuss matters related to the vital organs (genitals) along with their function... In other words there is strict control over the body and its activities, particularly the body of a woman and her sexuality... (Arahmaiani quoted in Huangfu 2000, 18).

In many respects, Yani's work, particularly in the symbols and icons she appropriates and dons during her performances, while cryptic in their visual relation to one another, presents her ideas in what she admits is often an essentializing manner in

order to stress the urgency of the situation in as uncomplicated way as possible. She is not interested in the aesthetics of the piece but rather the realization of the concept:

[W]hat becomes the focus of my attention is the situations and forces which move the body – that which is opposite of form [*sakti*, AKR]. These things push us to our emotional, mental and spiritual limits. That which causes us to cry, to get angry, violent, or to smile, laugh and celebrate...This is what I try to catch and crystallize with space and time. So the form or body in my creative process only constitutes a type of vehicle or medium for striving towards that which is formless. Consequently my art is not retinal, its objective is not to please the eyes. What is of primary importance is the actual process of creation. The final product exists merely as documentation of an intangible process, like footprints which remain as the sole evidence of the journey (Arahmaiani 1996).

The discussion that follows takes one of Iani's projects that acts as something of a precursor to the progression of a singular idea, namely the exposure of certain ideologies behind myth and the uses of the past in regulating women's place by denying them one except as passive in the social order. The series of works in question might be called 'male fantasies' in which she explores and attempts to rewrite the mythological narratives of and historical sediment and its logic of female sacrifice on the one hand and her erasure on the other. Such is interesting in regard to Iani's works in which she deliberately selects those texts in which she on the one hand offers herself up to inscription as symbolic violence, yet at the same time refuses the role of victim and instead sets out to actively rewrite myths in which women's social identity has traditionally been erased if ever given the chance to form as an active agent. She underscores the representation of women as fetishized object in which the male protagonist's desire is writ large while women's stories are silenced.

Involved in this is a mode of appropriation of culturally and historically laden images and icons, in this case that of female characters in legends and the relation of history as a narrative of male aggression, violence on and erasure of women in the

dominant narratives. Much of Iani's work of the late 1990s and 2000-2001 centered on the idea of the proper and improper wearing of skins, of visibility and invisibility particularly in relation to issues of *kodrat* or the alleged 'essential nature' of women as wives and mothers.

"One of the most important sets of meanings bodies are asked to bear in any given culture is the culture's gender ideology, its mythologies of the personal with special reference to men and women" (Errington 1990, 15). Regarding Indonesian women's art in which the artist uses her body as the primary medium of the work, Wulan Dirgantoro argues that:

To analyze the Indonesian body is to be presented with a different set of challenges than the existing analyses of works by Western women artists. For example, issues such as 'kodrat' ('nature' in the religious sense of predestination), home, family, sexuality, class, culture, economy, religion and spirituality, form layers of meaning ever present in the Indonesian female body. Certainly, the issue of kodrat alone distinguishes the Indonesian women's body from the Western women's body" (Dirgantoro 2008, 6).

Kodrat refers to the ideology of gender. *Kodrat* are religiously, socially and culturally constructed roles, behaviors and attributes given to females and males in social life that define womanly and manly 'natures'. They have been rendered natural and hence assessable in terms of whether or not they have been appropriately performed/reproduced, whether or not the person performs the body properly (Errington 1990, 41-42). What concerns this section is *kodrat wanita* or 'women's destiny' or 'women's essential nature' which is a founding principle of an ideology of gender Indonesia.

In Indonesian, there are two words for the term woman: *perempuan* and *wanita*. The term *perempuan* has as its root the word *empu*, which has great cultural value in Javanese traditional culture. The term *wanita* derives the Sanskrit root *wan*. In

Javanese, the term *wanita* means *wani ditata* or one who accepts willingly and is prepared to be ruled. In Indonesian, *wanita* is associated with *nafsu* or base desire (from the Arabic), such that the term has connotations of ‘irrational’, ‘being an object of another’s (man’s) desire’ or ‘sex object’. In Indonesian, *wanita* means a grown perempuan. *Perempuan*, then connotes a female old enough to marry and have children. (Subhan, 2004, 1-2). According to Toety Haraty Noerhadi, head of the Philosophy Study Program at the University of Indonesia, the term *wanita* is considered more elevated, *halus* (refined), and beautiful, in keeping with a woman’s *kodrat* of having to be simultaneously demure, enchanting, productive, ready to serve her husband’s needs, physical and otherwise (Subhan 2004, 5). The New Order government (1966-1998) tended to use the term *wanita* in women’s institutions (i.e., *dharma wanita*) which of course reinforced a certain stereotypical image of woman and women’s sexuality based on a patriarchal traditional notion of the gendered female. Whereas the term *wanita* is an elevated term for certain attributes expected of women, the term *perempuan* is associated with a position of low social class. It is also attached to ‘amoral’ positions such as *perempuan pelacur* or female prostitute, which is outside the accepted realm of *kodrat wanita*. However, the term *perempuan* is most often used as a general term for woman/women in Indonesian. Although Arabic terms are not used in the Indonesian discourse of gender, their religious associations with Islam are and have resonance with those attached to the two terms above, namely terms connoting physical weakness, weak minded, one who gives pleasure, demure, soft spoken, and the object of man’s desire (Subhan 2004, 6-7; see also Mernissi 1994).

Wieringa provides a helpful and succinct definition and defines the parameters of *kodrat wanita* (women’s destiny):

This moral code is legitimated by notions of women's nature and by reference to religiously-inspired symbols and norms. It is a set of values that has evolved over time and differs according to various ethnic groups, yet it can be characterized by certain common elements. As with any gender construction, it serves as both a regulating mechanism covering the social relations between the sexes and as an instrument of power. Struggles over the meaning and content of this code, or over the differing emphases aspects have received, have been constant throughout Indonesian history. Women's organizations themselves have been vocal actors in this arena, as have male reformers and nationalist and communist leaders (Wieringa 2002, 22).

Whereas Wieringa states that each cultural tradition in Indonesia has its own *kodrat wanita*,¹⁶ some have suggested that it was the Javanese court tradition and ideology of gender that has had a major impact on state ideologies of gender. In the past, young girls of the Javanese court were inculcated into their proper *kodrat* through 'good conduct' guides such as the early 19th century *Serat Wulang Putri* and late 19th century *Serat Wulangreh* written by court rulers.¹⁷ Through such texts, girls were taught the values of timidity, patience in all things, acceptance of one's fate, and the abstention from physical and mental passions. By the early 20th century, this Javanese court *kodrat wanita* had evolved into a combination of a Dutch petite-bourgeois morality and ethics with *Priyayi* (Javanese extended nobility and civil servant class) values (see Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis 1987).

¹⁶ For discussions of such concepts in non-Javanese cultures in Indonesia and Malaysia, see for example, Michael Peletz, *Reason and Passion: Representations of Gender in a Malay Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an out-of-the-Way Place* (Cambridge, MA: Princeton University Press, 1993).

¹⁷ Paku Buwono IV, the Sunan of Surakarta, and the late 19th century *Serat Candarini* by KGPAA Mangkunegara IV, respectively. These works were dictated and written down by court scribes. For a general analysis of these texts and their implications for understanding gender according to Javanese tradition, see Sri Suhandjati and Ridin Sofwan Sukri, *Perempuan Dan Seksualitas Dalam Tradisi Jawa* (Yogyakarta: Gama Media, 2001). According to Sukri and Sofwan, these texts were written as part of the court's attempt to overcome what was seen as a major economic, moral, and political crisis in the court with the advent of the Dutch and elements of modernization.

In scholarship on gender ideologies in Javanese society, much has been placed on the *priyayi* upper class assumptions of spiritual potency, the fact that men can acquire it and women forever lack it: “these ideologies of spiritual potency reinforce the superiority of *priyayi* class males in particular, while placing all females, regardless of social class, in a categorically inferior spiritual, moral, and social position” (Brenner 1995, 20).¹⁸ Maintaining that males are spiritually more potent than females has been used to justify that women should be subservient, obedient and dependent on the male members of the family and beyond. The assumption is that men are ‘naturally’ more spiritual than women, and women must therefore ‘naturally’ rely on and defer to men. There are many legends throughout at least Java in which women suffer terrible fates, such as insanity and death, because they failed to heed their father’s and husband’s words of guidance. At base, women “were the bearers of societal norms and values, including values related to sexual behaviour. If women failed in this task and did not educate their children in these values, social chaos might follow”(Wieringa 2002, 34; see also Suryakusuma 1996). One way of interpreting this awesome responsibility is that a woman, although considered to have no prestige, spiritual potency or an identity of her own, is considered potentially capable of bringing down social order and harmony through her own lack of self-control and

¹⁸ Brenner analyzes the body of scholarship around this concept. Her work is particularly helpful in presenting a counter-hegemonic analyses in which she contends that pan-Islamic notions of *nafsu* and *akal* or passions and reason challenge totalizing Java-centric scholarship which isolate Javanese concepts of power, prestige and male dominance in Indonesia. She challenges a male-focused gender ideology and, instead, focuses on “ideas about human passions and the ability to control those passions, and how these ideas underlie the negotiation of male and female identities and statuses within the broader social order” (21). Yet, Ward Keeler has suggested that women, because of such a lack of prestige, are freer to say things and talk about certain things in public, and in a lower register, than their husbands. This freedom is in turn associated with the question of self-control and the assumption that men are in possession of more self-control than are women and, hence, women must learn to be cautious in exercising their freedom. Communication is a public, hence male, activity. Ward Keeler, "Speaking of Gender in Java," *Power and Difference: Gender in Southeast Asia*, ed. S. Errington and J.M. Atkinson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

forgetting of her personal duties to husband, family, and surrounding milieu. Chaos ensues when the individual does not act according to her station and role in the whole of the community. As Brenner suggests, such *priyayi* notions of gender are not confined to the upper class but have spread to the more general population.

In the New Order, gender relations and gender roles were an important dimension of state control (Robinson and Bessell 2002 3). As was mentioned in previous chapters, the New Order state was integrationalist, seeing the family as part of the whole and hence not free from deep interference from the state, which was seen as a family with President Suharto as the *bapak* or father figure. This idea of an organic whole was heavily informed by strains of a Javanese political culture and paternalism (Suryakusuma 1996, 95). Of course, such values pervaded concepts of gender and sexuality. Traditional Javanese conceptions of gender in the 19th century were taken up by and legitimized by the New Order regime. It took advantage of the Javanese concept of women and her *kodrat* and placed emphasis on submission to the patriarch (in the guise of President Suharto as the meta-father). Juliana Suryakusuma has demonstrated how during the New Order there was a systematic effort on the part of the state to manage and co-opt the family through laws, policies and programs (Suryakusuma 1996; Suryakusuma 1991). In the process, New Order policies placed great emphasis on the ideal New Order woman's role as *ibu* or mother; an ideology of gender which Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis has dubbed 'ibuism':

As Ibu [mothers], women not only had to supplement their income as before, but in addition they had to ensure that the *priyayi* class charisma, no longer self-evident, was maintained. Thus the role of Ibu became more than that of a mother who feeds and looks after her children. But also the new Indonesian society called upon the "kaum Ibu" to put their shoulders to the task of building a new national state; and more than the men, they were expected to do this disinterestedly. The honour they could gain was that of being a good Ibu. Power and prestige remained the privilege of men. Thus an ideology developed in which the late 19th century and early 20th century Dutch values and

traditional Javanese ones were linked to the “mother” concept (Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis 1987, 43-44).

Suryakusuma builds on this concept of ‘ibuism’ by introducing the notion of “state ibuism” (Suryakusuma 1996). Women’s organizations such as *Dharma Wanita*, the civil servant women’s association, played a large role in reinforcing New Order gender ideology (Suryakusuma 1996, 99-102). In his 1991 autobiography, Suharto stated:

[I]t is their [the association’s, AKR] task to ‘to bring Indonesian women to their correct position and role, that is as the mother in a household [*ibu rumah tangga*] and is simultaneously as a motor of development... We must not forget their essential nature [*kodrat*] as beings who must provide for the continuation of a life that is healthy, good and pleasurable (quoted in Tiwon 1996, 59).

Suryakusuma (1991 and 1996) calls this ideology “State Ibuism,” in which the woman’s role as wife becomes as important as her role as mother. It thus “defines women as appendages and companions of their husbands, as procreators of the nation, as mothers and educators of children, as housekeepers, and as members of Indonesian society – in that order” (Suryakusuma 1996, 98). The insistence on wifedom and motherhood as the ‘essential nature’ of woman situates unmarried or not yet married women as incomplete as human beings, thereby “deny[ing] her social identity as a person in her own right” (Tiwon 59).

In her work and statements, Iani often refers to the above *kodrat* as a point of reference in her work which she sees as a counter-argument to such ideologies and categories. In this regard, it should be added to this matrix her upbringing among Sundanese culture and Islam, which is more strict and conservative regarding Muslim women and their behavior than that which has prevailed in Java, for instance. Iani has stated:

As a young woman artist I realize it [is] a difficult way I have chosen. The repressive government is operating on the basis of militarism in combination with Javanese Muslim feudalism and patriarchal system, which I believe, breed a culture of violence – physically and psychologically. The system never gave enough room for women to express themselves freely apart from being a good mother, a good wife, a good daughter or sister (her various roles outside of herself as a self), though she might also have a career at the same time (quoted in Datun 2000).

Kodrat and the lack of a woman's own identity are issues taken up and critically questioned by artists such as Arahmaiani who would construct a space in which women can express themselves outside of their identities as 'good mothers', 'good wives', and 'good daughters and sisters'. One of the ways in which she critically approaches these issues is through her attempts to rewrite myths, legends or other fundamental texts in which the heroine is, as Tiwon further explains, typically "depicted as a potential wife, a pathetic creature who can do nothing but weave and weep behind the walls of the palace courtyard as she waits for the hero to rescue her from 'the greatest possible shame' [of being unwed and thus incomplete]" (Tiwon 1996 59).

This notion of the patiently waiting heroine is particularly prevalent in the Sundanese legend of *Dayang Sumbi*. According to the legend, Dayang Sumbi refused to marry and as punishment for going against her parents' wishes, she is exiled to the forest to live alone in a tower. One day while she sits weaving, her loom falls from the tower. A dog finds it. She marries the dog and she gives birth to a son who eventually unknowingly kills his father and brings the dog's heart to his mother, who, mortified, casts him out. The son wanders for many years, becoming wholly as a hermit, and then seeks a wife. He came across a woman while in the forest and falls in love with her. The woman is Dayang Sumbi, his mother, and hence it is taboo for him to marry her. Yet, she agrees to marry him only if he is able to make a lake and boat in one

night. The son calls upon supernatural forces to help him. Yet she also uses supernatural forces so that the sun rises sooner, not giving him enough time to complete his task. Angry because morning has come too soon, the son kicks the boat over, which then becomes a mountain in Bandung.

For Iani what is important in this and other such legends is the primary importance that the role of men in these stories while the women are all but secondary characters to whom life happens but for whom there is little or no agency. They uphold the *kodrat perempuan* which is a representation of women as “weak creatures in need of protection [from men] because they are easily tempted, cannot live on their own, cannot be trusted, and in the end need to be saved.”¹⁹ For nearly twenty years, Iani has questioned such ideas and gendered roles as not natural but socially and culturally constructed roles and has worked to change these gendered positions in her art. One means of doing so has been the reversal of certain long held narratives regarding women’s role in society as told in legends and epics in which she makes the female character the agent of action. Beginning in 1998-99 with *Dayang Sumbi Menolak Status Quo* (Dayang Sumbi Rejects the Status Quo), Iani set out to begin rewriting the traditional role of women as they are rendered in legends, but also the lines of history by taking on the guise of a different kind of heroine (Figure 7.7). In *Dayang Sumbi*, she attempts “to work to subvert a local myth” where she gives “the woman in the story an active role where before she was presented in a passive role.” In so doing, she wants to “change the plot, the form and the nature of the story!” (quoted in Wright 1999a). As the artist further explains regarding her performance *Dayang Sumbi*:

¹⁹ “Gambaran mahluk lemah yang harus dilindungi sebab ia mudah tergoda, tidak bias dipercaya, dan akhirnya harus diselamatkan.” Arahmaiani, “Perempuan Dan Seni Rupa Masa Kini (Women and Art Today),” *Wacana Budaya* 07.May-July (2001): 44.

From the beginning until today, the story of Dayang Sumbi has been framed within the idea of ‘suratan takdir’ [destiny, AKR] and tied to women’s ‘kodrat’ that has never been in her favor. She begins with a foreign life not her own... Today, Dayang Sumbi rises to reject such ‘suratan takdir’ and ‘kodrat’, or in other words, change the path of the story (from a passive to an active role) and reject being dictated by those in power (Arahmaiani 1999).²⁰



Figure 7.7 Arahmaiani, *Dayang Sumbi Rejects the Statu Quo*, video stills from recorded performance, 1996, French Cultural Center, Bandung (VCD courtesy of the artist).

²⁰ “Dari awal hingga akhir cerita Dayang Sumbi ditempatkan dalam kotak ‘suratan takdir’ dan diikat ‘kodrat’ perempuan yang tidak pernah berpihak padanya. Mulai dari hidup terasing yang harus dijalannya...Kini Dayang Sumbi bangkit untuk menolak ‘suratan takdir’ dan ‘kodrat’ tadi atau dengan kata lain, mengubah jalanya cerita (dari pasif menjadi berperan aktif!) dan menolak untuk didikte oleh penguasa.” Her performance of *Dayang Sumbi Rejects the ‘Status Quo’* was in conjunction with her solo exhibition at the Centre Culturel Francias, Bandung, June 8 – July 12, 1999.

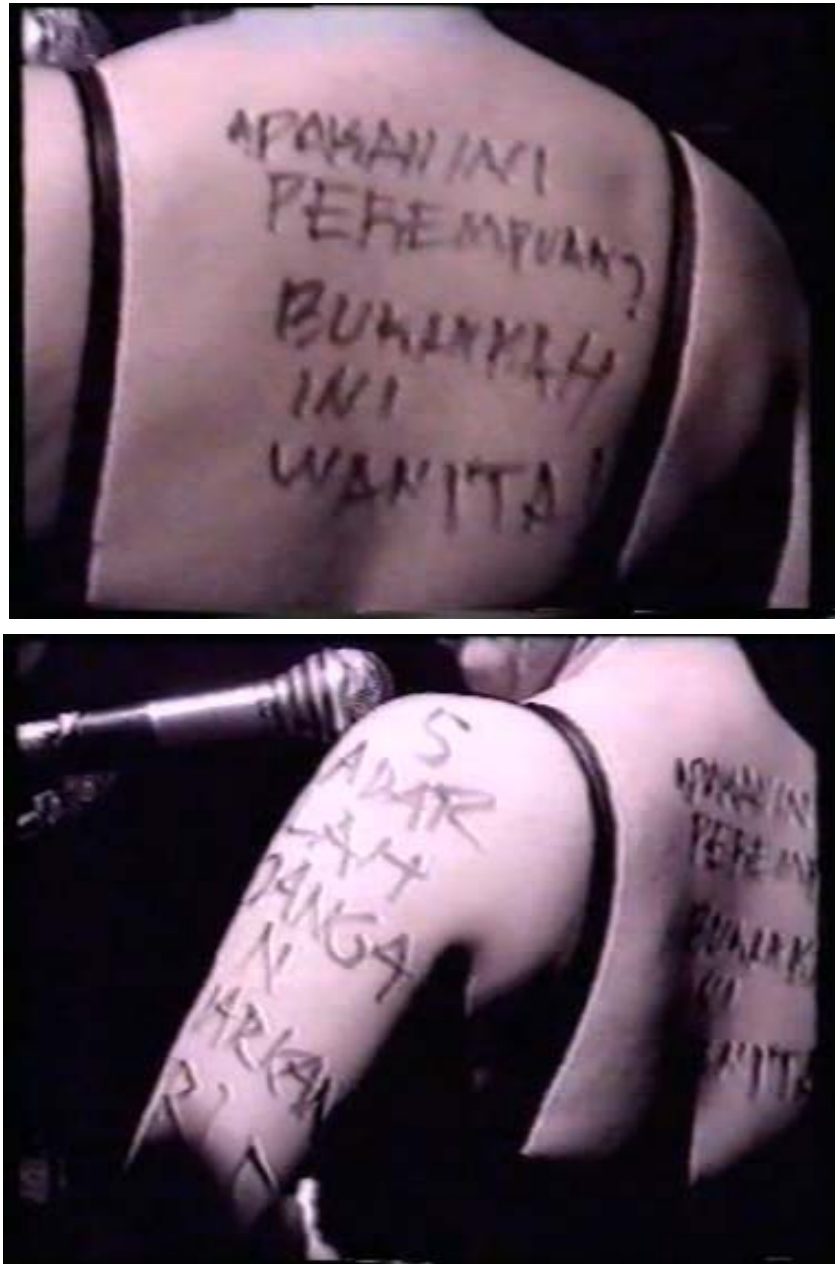


Figure 7.7 (Continued)

The performance opens with a wash of music performed by long-time friends Harry Roesli and Erick Yusof, whose multi-layered loops and sounds combined with gamelan and other forms of rhythm creates a mysterious and quieting scene, perhaps designed to bring the audience into a collective space of meditation. From the ceiling

are hung women's singlets. On the floor is placed a map of Indonesia made from soil. The music fades as Iani begins to speak. She is dressed in the traditional dress of *gaya ibu* or 'mother/wife style', consisting of the hair pulled back into a large rounded bun or a false hair piece called the *kondé*. A traditional *kebaya* or long fitted blouse with long sleeves, often lacy or transparent is worn over her black corset. The transparency of her red *kebaya* adds to the erotic appeal of the image, with the corset as the titillating barrier to what it promises to contain. A *sarong* is worn around her lower body. Typically the *sarong* would have been wrapped more tightly around the hips and legs, thus restricting the length of a woman's stride and further accentuating the female form as she walks.

Iani in traditional costume stands beneath a single spotlight and in front of a microphone. While playing a hand held drum in a monotonous rhythm, she begins singing, uttering syllables without meaning as if going into a meditative or trance state. Following several minutes of this, she recites from her poem "Tunjukkan Hatimu Padaku" or "Show Me Your Heart", which was written in response to the mass looting, racial riots and rapes that took place in May of 1998 and shocked the art world into silence. She then proceeds to put on makeup while casually speaking to the audience about what is expected of women regarding their outward appearance: "Women must make themselves up to appear beautiful. She must always use lipstick and the like."²¹ She says this while putting on makeup, looking into a hand mirror. She asks the audience if she is indeed more attractive. After which she states that such gestures are designed for the male gaze, as she draws on her face a moustache with eyebrow pencil. She drinks from a coca-cola bottle as if it were a magical elixir of beauty while saying "American dream, American dream, tasty. We've been sucked in

²¹ "Wanita harus tampak cantik dengan merias diri. Ia selalu harus pakai lipstick, dan sebagainya."

by the American dream.”²² Here she seems to suggest that it is not only traditional views embodied in *adat* that objectify Indonesian women, but also modern culture epitomized by the images from the American imperium, with coca-cola as the analog to excess and the impossible dream.

At this point, she removes her *kebaya*. In this regard, her work takes on associations with other performance works by women artists such as Yoko Ono’s *Cut Piece* (1964) and Marina Abramović’s *Rhythm O* (1974), in which the artist offers herself passively to the spectators. As with these works, Iani tries to critically engage the subject/object relationship, and posit a necessary complicity of both herself as subject and in the spectator in the artist’s subjugation and inscription. However, in as much as Iani’s work does share a genealogy with certain types of works by women performance artists elsewhere, her piece is highly specific in this case for its being performed by a Muslim woman in front of an Indonesian audience during a time of deep trauma in Indonesian society. In such a cultural context, it is one thing to hint at what lies beneath the boundaries established by the thin skin of cloth. It is another to open the *kebaya* and especially to remove it, thus revealing the corset and skin beneath to the public or, to be more precise, to men. Not surprisingly, she caused an immediate audible reaction from the audience. This is exactly what the artist was banking on as a means of opening up a controversial, tabooed subject with an Indonesian audience.

In a way, she reaffirms without really affecting certain ways in which the female body is seen and constrained as an erotic object. Such reaffirmation is clear in the way her action was reviewed in the Indonesian press by mainly male writers. For example, more than once her work is underscored as erotic, sexually titillating and shocking as she exposes her ‘white skin’ and ‘ample breasts’ to a room full of

²² “Impian Amerika, Impian Amerika, sedap. Kita diserap impian Amerika.”

‘strangers’ (Maulana 1999). Here, her male critics point to common assumptions underlying such actions as revealing a lack of morals and which occur for immoral reasons. In as much as it was sexually ‘exciting’ for at least the male critics in the audience, they seem to have missed one of the underlying points: to willingly and publicly expose her ‘white skin’ and ‘ample breasts’ immediately placed her in a potentially dangerous place as the object of a symbolically and possibly physically aggressive act.

After ‘exposing’ herself and the wave of whistles and whispers had subsided, Iani opened her body to further inscription by inviting the spectators to do whatever they wished with her; they could dress her, undress her, and write whatever came to mind on her skin with the pens provided. Several men were the first to line up, while women were initially more reluctant but also participated. Each person wrote brief thoughts or sentences and in some cases drew images on her arms, face, neck, chest and back. While men seemed more comfortable leaving their visible mark upon her body, some of them also felt compelled to re-dress her. At times, a woman would remove the *kebaya* again. *Dayang Sumbi* presents an important ambiguity regarding the subject/object relationship, stressed in this case in that while standing there offering herself to the audience, the artist kept repeating phrases such as “Come on, come to the peaceful country, a country without oppression,”²³ and talked about the perpetration of violence on women, the subjugation of the female body in capitalism, patriarchal society and Islam. Having been literally ‘caught in the act’ of symbolic violence by ‘inscribing’ her body with words, Iani hoped participants would become aware of invisible processes that define women’s identities and that control her body

²³ “Ayolah, datanglah ke negeri damai, negeri tanpa penindasan.”

(Rath 2005, 111). Whether those participating realized it or not, she positioned herself as a metaphor for both the nation in turmoil and the brutalized body of Woman.

As in many of her performances, the artist rejects the *kodrat* attached to woman and the stereotypes generated to perpetuate and ensure the absence of woman as having her own social identity. One of the most powerful means of doing so in Indonesia has been through its myths and legends that continue, in varying degrees, to define the roles of men and women in the present. Iani restages stereotypical images of women which set forward social, sexual, gender and moral boundaries that control women's ability in constructing their own histories and in taking control of their lives as subjects. As a woman refusing her given position and *kodrat* she steps outside the box of appropriateness, if even temporarily. Iani as Dayang Sumbi not only rejects her predetermined fate, but also questions Sundanese *adat-istiadat* or the traditional customs associated with and perpetuated through such stories. *Adat* are not merely the cultural contours or structures of ritual and social intercourse and discourse, but also the repository of unwritten rules. However, it is not just such traditional modes of social relations and ideas of gender relations, but how these continue to be promoted and perpetuated in the present with the use of the past as a means of justifying them. At base then, she is concerned with women's basic human rights - "the rights of women to define for themselves what is their voice and what is their own language" (Arahmaiani quoted in Wright 1999).

On another level, *Dayang Sumbi* was also intended as a kind of communal catharsis (purging of the unclean or polluted body/psyche). With her own body as the object and site of symbolic inscription, her actions can be read in an Indonesian context as an attempt at exorcising the collective body as well (Rath 2005, 108). This is evidenced by her assumptions that when she performs, her psyche alters states and it

is through her projected (sakti) energy coming into contact with that of others, that transformation on the intersubjective level is possible, if only temporarily.

Iani continued to work with the basic premise of *Dayang Sumbi* in a series of performances carried out in Japan, China, Australia, Europe and America called, among others, *His-Story on My Body*. Carried out in different locations and among different cultures constantly shifts the contours and significance of the work. While in Bandung, the issue of Muslim woman breaking with religious codes by allowing others to touch her body provided a crucial foundation to the work's criticality. However, this aspect was no longer as relevant once the artist engaged other sites and cultures. Instead, she underlines what she sees as a universal need for human compassion and touch, as well as universal violence born on the bodies of women throughout history. On the one hand, she offers her body as the catalyst for communication, "onto which people write their personal thoughts, histories, and wishes."²⁴ On the other, she underscores how the body/self is subjected to inscriptions of history while historically often being denied the right to write her own.

Situating Strategies

In much of her work, Iani appropriates and interweaves a number of temporalities and discourses into her work, such that in many cases it can be said that she creates new rituals via the secularization and fragmentation of others. This is not something particular to this artist, as it has been an underlying theme throughout this study of Indonesian contemporary, alternative art. Works such as *Dayang Sumbi* underscore the artist's need as a member of a minority group to not only appropriate certain images and sites of collective memory, but to rewrite them as autobiographical or

²⁴ Interview with Arahmaiani, Sept. 22, 2002, Jakarta.

private and publicize them once again as part of the artist's attempt to disrupt inherited gender norms and social expectations.

It also brings out the artist's pathos and empathy for what she sees as a deeply wounded, human condition; the act of performance is in certain respects thus rendered as a healing one, positioning the feminine as embodied spirituality. Datuin has pointed to the positive and critical role that such 'strategic essentialism' can play in the art of women from the region of Southeast Asia. She articulates a Southeast Asian feminist framework revolving around embodied spirituality – a concept where the body is construed as an anatomical, spiritual, social and psychic space grounded on fluidity and wholeness, instead of hierarchy and dualities. Here she underscores how certain women artists tend to emphasize bridging the nature/culture split, in their assumptions of the powers of the 'goddess' in situating their practices (Datiun 2000; Datiun 2006).²⁵

Another mechanism present in Iani's work, which she shares with the majority of alternative, critical artists of the same period, is the use of an allegorical layering of symbolic meaning (Wright 2000, 97). Wright suggests that such sedimentation and manifold meaning is a kind of risky realism; something usually, according to Wright, carried out by men. While such layered realism has been strategic in critical alternative art in Indonesia general among activist artists since 1965, "it is also generally true for those Indonesian women artists who choose to engage critically with inherited gender norms and social expectations" (Wright 2000, 97). In the New Order, as has been repeatedly underscored in the previous pages, committed artists had to

²⁵ Here I am not interested directly in the fact that this notion of 'strategic essentialism' is a concept coined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, but rather in Datuin's use of it in situating certain works of women artists who stress the female artist and artistic act as a kind of healing mechanism, one grounded in 'nature' which is brought to bear and disrupt that which is not 'nature', in this case the world of patriarchal hierarchies and ideologies.

develop alternative structures and means by which to think and express the world differently not only because preexisting models had been exhausted or were no longer adequate to the task, but also in order to escape the label of subversive. In Chapter Four, one of the ways I discussed modes of realism and their import was through Hughes-Freeland's definition of *adiluhung* and the possibility of something being enacted in such away that it lacks the proper distance or abstraction from that which is being depicted or alluded to. To recall her suggestion, Hughes-Freeland contends that within such a concept of *adiluhung* is the measure whether something is too naturalistic or too close to the real thing. Something too naturalistic lacks the subtlety required according to certain tastes (i.e., those of Javanese aesthetic principles in dance). It is perhaps similar in regards to the New Order proscription against certain degrees of realism or in this case works that pretend toward the real. I am not suggesting that the works of Arahmaiani under consideration is a matter of *adiluhung* or not, but rather the possible readings such an artistic pretense to the real can yield. For, as Wright further explains:

[T]he inherent danger in such acts [engaging critically with social realities] – one risks censorship or art world ostracism at worst – increases with the degree of realism in the work and the presence of specific political referents, a fact which ensures that only those artists with a fundamental, pressing need to nonetheless undertake such work will do so (Wright 2000 104).

In this regard, it could be argued that Iani occupies a position as both activist and woman artist. As Dwi Marianto has said of her, she is “one of the few women in Indonesia who have the courage to openly articulate another oppositional opinion through her writing, statements, and through her art works” (quoted in Hartiningsih 1999). Her work embodies the urgency and commitment in art as praxis. Like other artists, some of whose work has been discussed in this dissertation, she is an artist to

have grown up in a New Order Indonesia, living the many contradictions of the promises of development and modernization and their programs, as well as their limits and failures in postcolonial Indonesia. However, she also reads these from the perspective of a Muslim woman.

CHAPTER EIGHT

PERFORMING THE MARGINAL: HERI DONO'S APPROACH AND CONCEPTS

In previous chapters, I have demonstrated some of the ways in which artists have rebelled against the conventions of painting and sculpture, and how this anti-mainstream stance was concurrent with a sense of urgency in developing a critical and engaged art. Part of a critical artistic practice has entailed attempts to rewrite dominant codes. One of the ways in which artists have attempted to rewrite the rhetoric of national culture and its ideology of development is by recuperating that which it represses or oppresses. By the early 1990s, more artists attempted to find an approach that not only critiqued an oppressive nation state and exclusive national culture, but that also attempted to recuperate and construct alternative narratives to its official contents, to present the pristine or at least stream-lined image of a harmonious national culture with its heterodoxy by incorporating into its traditions and discourses representations that which had been left out. In this, I think that certain operations of appropriation by artists such as Heri Dono (b. 1960) offer a more positive approach than does the pessimism inherent in the work by artists like FX Harsono.

In this chapter, I am interested in Heri Dono's engagement with notions of the marginal and disenfranchised through a constructive process of collaboration and action through ritual and entertainment (the two are not easily separated) specifically through the lens of contemporary art and artistic practice. The 'truths' and the '*kaum marginal*' referred to regarding Dono's work relate to the heterogeneity of society and its diverse cultural traditions that coexist and at times collide and contradict each other, and "with distinct rationalities unevenly acquired by different sectors" (Canclini

1995, 43). Of interest in this regard is how Dono perceives the relation between individual expression and collective and collaborative propositions in which a group of people come together temporarily for a specific purpose and around a particular idea. His installation/performance works often entail two general types of collaboration, each one requiring different degrees of consigning authority and the central role of the artist to others. On the one hand, he reaches out to non-artist sectors of society, most notably those whose livelihood depends on repairing old technology. On the other hand, his installation/performance include large numbers of people who perform in community-shared projects. Three of Heri's large scale 'spectacles-rituals' will be discussed in this chapter. These he has at times referred to as 'pocket cultures' which involve exhibiting in alternative ways and in collaboration with others, often with non-art people. Many such projects and events have taken place outside institutional channels and were an attempt to "create new communities of people interested in art." Heri's performance work in general, especially his "big events" in Indonesia, emphasize the role played by what is typically called the '*kaum marginal*' or marginal group(s) and cultural forms that have been 'marginalized' by modernism.

Cultural Distance and 'Incorrect' Reinterpretation

Heri Dono grew up in Jakarta in a middle class, civil service, Javanese family, and was privileged with a private Catholic school education. His interest in art was a clandestine one, sneaking out to see the avant-gardist works at TIM, and was greatly inspired by the radicals of 'new tradition' theater such as Putu Wijaya and W.S. Rendra. Entering ASRI in Yogyakarta in 1980 (its name was changed to *Sekolah Tinggi Seni Rupa Indonesia*, STSRI-ISI in 1984), Heri, along with his fellow classmates, Dadang Christanto and Eddie Hara, was a key member in the first post-*GSRB* generation of ASRI/ISI students. By then, the days of direct confrontational

relations between students and teachers had come to an end. The fact that fellow art students were surprised at his experimentation outside of the conventional field of painting perhaps suggests that the tradition of dissent among students in the 1970s that culminated in the *GSRB*, and *Kepribadian Apa?* in particular, had little effect on the artistic philosophy and categories within the Yogyakarta academy itself. This is particularly the case regarding experimentation across disciplines that, according to several informants, was still seen as something rare and strange in the early to mid-1980s. Most artists that I have interviewed describe their arts education and academic training as formalist, with an emphasis on craft, technique, line and color, and the honing of personal expression. There would be no experimental art class for students to explore unconventional means of artistic expression until 1985. Such an education, according to Heri, “trained artists to lose themselves in the epiphany of creation.”¹ Similar complaints were voiced years earlier, first with the *kelompok lima* in the early 1970s and later with *GSRB*.

Different from many of his fellow academy classmates while at STRSI-ISI, such as Nindityo Adipurnomo, who grew up deeply immersed in Javanese culture and *adat*, Dono was not raised ensconced in any one traditional culture and was exposed to an ethnically diverse urban environment. As such, Heri argues, he was free to ‘incorrectly’ appropriate and integrate the traditions and other discourses from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.² He exploited his cultural distance to ‘incorrectly’ reinterpret traditions and discourses to critical effect. More precisely, he assumes that cultural distance provides him freedom from the burden of having to interpret them ‘correctly’. One of the subtexts in this chapter is the artist’s uniquely orchestrated

¹ Interview with the artist, 29 July 2002, Yogyakarta.

² Interview with the artist, 23 July 2002, Yogyakarta.

‘incorrect’ appropriation of traditional cultural forms as a means of not only changing the structure of the work of art, but to also question and critique totalizing notions of national culture and its rhetorical images. He repurposes objects and traditions from within the Javanese concept of *erling waspodo*, which he loosely translated to mean “one must be aware of the how and why of what he or she does.”³ The artist must be deliberate in the ways in which he or she works with materials and forms taken from different cultural and social sites to produce new knowledge, new visual structures in art. How can appropriated images and icons be retooled for a critical purpose in visual artistic practice without succumbing to self-exoticization or the exoticization of the Other? It can be argued that Heri’s ‘incorrect’ usage and ‘violation’ of the rules of convention “goes hand in hand with implicit critique of conventional social and political hierarchies” (Shohat and Stam 1998, 37). This will be discussed from within his concept of the ‘marginal’ as both those narratives, texts and traditions disavowed and marginalized by modernism and official sites of national culture, and those sectors or groups that have been disenfranchised by visions of modernity and development as conceived of by the nation-state.

Heri Dono’s collection of work is vast and includes painting, multi-media installations and performances. Much of his work is interdisciplinary and in fact it is more apt to suggest that it transcends medium. Important historically and blessed with a long career, Dono has been the subject of general and in-depth studies and catalogue essays both in art magazines as well as scholarly journals.⁴ Hence, it is not the

³ Interview with the artist, 23 July 2002, Yogyakarta.

⁴ For studies and different perspectives on his oeuvre see for example Japan Foundation Asian Center, ed., *Heri Dono - Dancing Demons and Drunken Deities* (Japan Foundation Asia Center, 2000); Marja Sakari and Tappola Taru, eds., *Winds from the East: Perspectives on Asian Contemporary Art* (Helsinki: Museum of Contemporary art Kiasma, 2007); Hendro Wiyanto, *Heri Dono* (Jakarta: Nadi Gallery, 2004); Astri Wright, *Soul, Spirit and Mountain: Preoccupations of Indonesian Contemporary Artists* (Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

intention of the present discussion to introduce Dono and his work as a whole or even specifically regarding his work for BJIX. Rather, I want to explore a few of his 'performance' works from between 1992 and 1994 in relation to his notion of the 'marginal' as the site and locus of his artistic intervention. Primarily three works will be discussed: *Wayang Legenda* (1988), *Kuda Binal* (1992 and 1994), and *The Chair* (1994, revised 2001). All three demonstrate the artist's strategic and critical appropriation and pastiche of multiple traditions and discourses into what are, in this case, staged spectacles/rituals and collaborative efforts that also underscore notions of the inclusion of the 'margins' from within different operative strategies that question dominant notions of art, of artistic practices, and narratives of inclusion/exclusion. Here Dono exploits stereotypical cultural incongruities as a fundamental aesthetic resource.

Collaborating with 'Kaum Marginal' (Marginal Groups)

Heri Dono makes a clear distinction between the more ego-centric, personal expressions that define painting. Installation and performance work, by contrast, is far more public and offers more direct forms of communication with people. He claims that while painting provides a personal space to express himself, installation/performance offers him the opportunity to make a public statement about real issues.⁵ In as much as this has to do with questions of the art object, its structure and critical practices, it also refers to the artist's assumptions of art as a moral center and social conscience, that it can but does not always have to strive to somehow intervene in the fabric of lived experience:

⁵ Interview with the artist, 6 August 2002, Yogyakarta.

As for installation art, I think the meaning is not only in the exhibition, but also in the process, because they employ people to participate in making the piece. When people ask about social issues, I say that's not the problem, because the concept of installation itself already involves people in art!

With this money [from painting] I can create artwork and share with people of the lower class society by employing them in my installations. The artwork itself is not only about social and political issues, but in the process 20 to 50 people are involved in creating the artwork. From this process I can learn about people's point of view.... (Obrist interview 1999).

This introduces one aspect of collaboration in his work: collaboration with people to produce his typically mechanized installations. I have discussed *Watching the Marginal People* (Figure 8.1) in relation to Supangkat's concept of postmodernism as the dissolution of modernism's 'pure form' in Chapter Two. Here I refer to it as an entry point into his use of the theme and metaphor of the 'marginal' as a twofold proposition: marginalized aesthetics and cultural forms, and marginalized groups and how they are represented or absented from dominant national narratives and economy.



Figure 8.1 Heri Dono, *Menonton Orang-Orang Marginal* (Watching the Marginal People), remade in 2000, wood, fiberglass, electric light bulbs, metal, radios, speakers, aprox. 500 x 170 cm, 10 figures. Illus. in *Heri Dono* (Jakarta: Nadi Gallery, 2000): 229.

For example, in *Watching the Marginal People*, he combines the roughly hewn wooden forms with low and recycled technologies such as small motors and transistor speakers to create mechanized ‘demon’-like composite figures of ‘endangered animals’ and the watchful eyes of the businessman, the bureaucrat - another ubiquitous metaphor for social and moral impotence and corruption at all levels of government (Rath 2007). The marginalized, in this case in the position taken by the viewer, is scrutinized. However, unlike the works by other socially committed artists such as FX Harsono and Dadang Christanto, Heri Dono’s work is less about the marginal as the site of ‘oppression’ and the marginalized as the ‘oppressed’. Instead he uses low-tech and simple, stream-lined, ‘poor’ aesthetic that itself becomes a metaphor for the marginal, for the disenfranchised sectors of society, and collaborates with those who recycle and repair old technologies such as transistors, old televisions out of economic survival to create his mechanized installations. His collaborators in this sense are part of a large and dynamic informal economic sector in Indonesia, a place where, unlike its neighbors of Singapore and Malaysia, labor to repair broken technology remains cheaper than buying new products.

The use of simple and recycled older technologies has been a consistent feature in Heri’s multi-media installation work. This is the case with a number of his installation works, such as *Gamelan of Rumor* and *Fermentation of the Mind*.



Figure 8.2 Heri Dono, *Gamelan of Rumor*, 1992, installation (Courtesy of Cemeti Art Foundation, Yogyakarta, Indonesia).

For *Gamelan of Rumor* (Figure 8.2), the artist worked with low-tech recyclers and repairmen to create a simple spring-mechanized set of *gamelan*, with a mallet set to strike at intervals to sound like droplets of water falling on metal. The piece can be read as an allusion to the ways in which Indonesian political discourse is often born by the wind of rumor that then serves as fact.

In *Fermentation of the Mind* (Figures 8.3 and 8.4), Heri uses low technology as a material means to retell a story of the nation, this time by publicizing one of his own personal childhood experiences in a Catholic school where he was often made to parade around class with a ‘dunce’ sign hung from his neck as a form of ‘educational’ punishment. More generally, the work serves as his criticism of the wide-spread Indonesian educational approach based on banal rote memorization. The piece is made up of a series of resin casts of the artist’s head which have been placed on metal rods

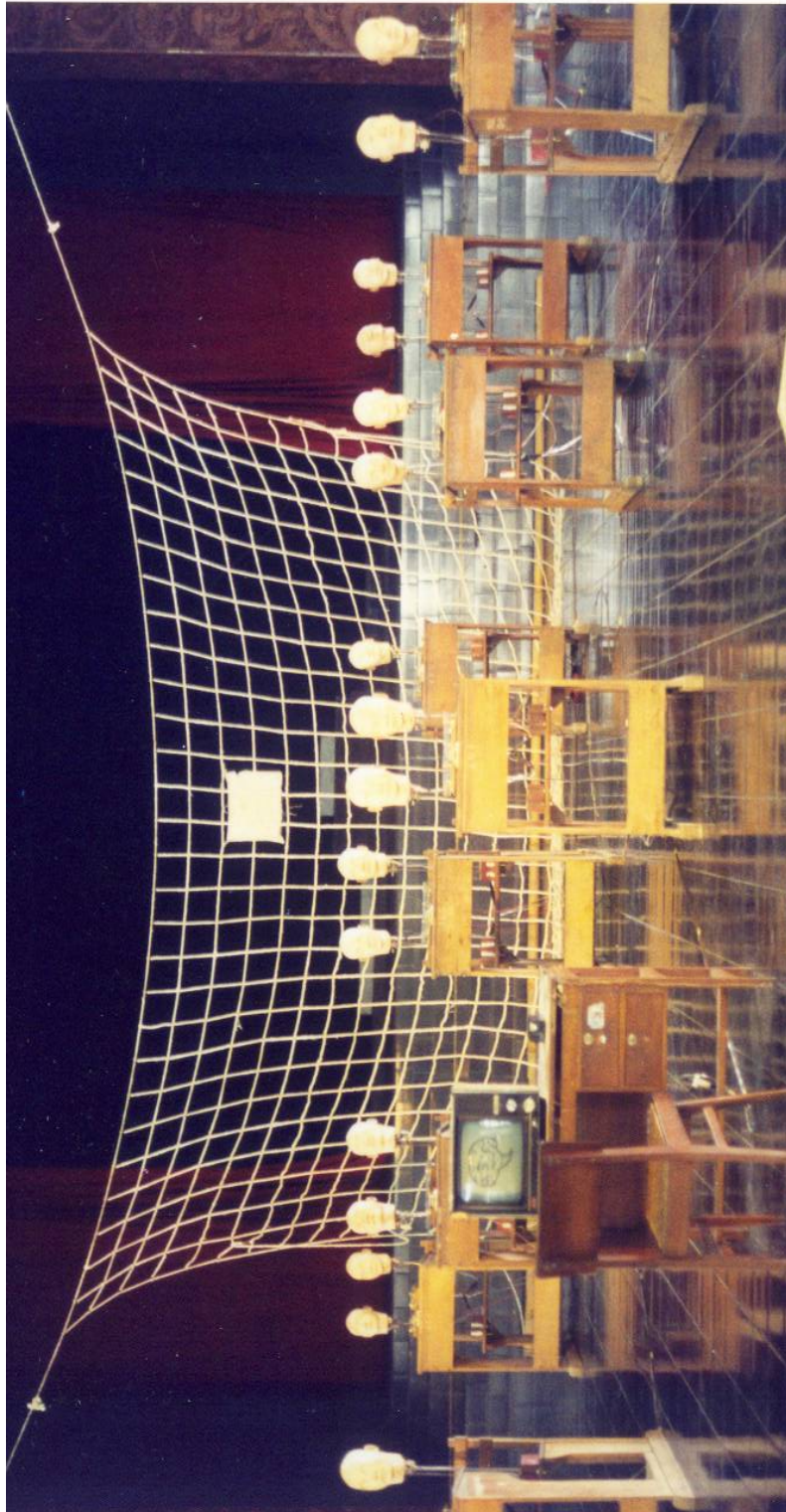


Figure 8.3 Heri Dono *Fermentation of the Mind*, 1994, installation, Yogyakarta Art Festival (Courtesy of the artist).



Figure 8.4 Heri Dono *Fermentation of the Mind*, 1994, installation (Courtesy of the artist).

attached to small motors such that each head moves in different rhythms, some seemingly falling asleep, others mindlessly nodding in acquiescence. These motorized heads symbolizing mental apnea nod from above the seats of student desks. Upon the surface of each desk a hollowed out book has been placed, its contents replaced with small speakers emitting incomprehensible whispering-like sounds. These are covered with an immovable sheet of plastic so that neither soundtrack nor pages can be changed or turned.⁶

⁶ In other versions of this work, the series of nodding 'pupils' face a projected video game, thus changing the focus from issues of education to one of youth culture and addiction to video games. For a discussion of the Indonesian education systems see Barbara Leigh, "Learning and Knowing Boundaries: Schooling in New Order Indonesia," *Sojourn: Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 14, no. 1 (1999); Barbara Leigh, "Making the Indonesian State: The Role of School Texts," *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 25, no. 1 (Winter) (1991). See also Niels Mulder, *Individu, Masyarakat, Dan Sejarah: Kajian*

Wayang Legenda

The above discussion suggested Dono's focus on the marginal and collaboration in terms of working with other, non-art recyclers of low technology to make some of his mechanized works, and this as a means of breaking away from the elitist role of singular creator, as well as highlighting the informal economic sectors within Indonesian society. In this section, I focus on Dono's notion and incorporation of the marginal narrative through his use and transformation of the *wayang kulit*.

Various forms of the traditional *wayang*, particularly the shadow theatre *wayang kulit*, have been a source of inspiration in Indonesian modern and contemporary art. Artists like Dono incorporate motifs, heroes and the cosmological and potentially political significance from the *wayang kulit* and its aesthetic into their artistic practices, often with the intent to comment on present circumstances in an oblique manner. This is evident in *Wayang Legenda* (1987-1988), a work consisting of a full set of 'new' *wayang* characters (Figure 8.5), which he unveiled during his first solo exhibition in 1988 at the alternative art space, Seni Sono Gallery in Yogyakarta.⁷

Buku-Buku Pelajaran Sekolah Di Indonesia (the Individual, Society, and History: A Study of School Study Books in Indonesia), trans. A. Widyamartaya (Yogyakarta: KANISIUS, 2000; reprint, 2).

⁷ Sections of my discussion of *Wayang Legenda* are taken from Amanda Rath, "Shadow Stories: Wayang in the Work of Heri Dono," *Prince Claus Fund Journal*, no. 10a (The Future is Handmade: The Survival and Innovation of Crafts (2003). For that article, different perspectives on the wayang were consulted. For instance, Kathy Foley, in "The Clown Figure in the Puppet Theatre in West Java: The Ancestors and the Individual," in *Humor and Comedy in Puppetry: Celebration in Popular Culture*, ed. Dina Sherzer and Joel Sherzer (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1987), discusses the shift in emphasis on the clown figures in the Sundanese, West Java *wayang kulit* with the rise of a strong middle class in the 1980s. For a critical commentary and description of the various characters from the 'court' wayang see Benedict Anderson's *Mythology and Tolerance of the Javanese*, Monograph Series SEAP, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965). In her *Shadows of Empire* (Durham and London: Duke University, 1996), Laurie Sears explores the Wayang as the arena for negotiations between colonial power and indigenous court traditions. She demonstrates what happens when the stories of the wayang move between various spheres such as the court and village and between different mediums such as manuscripts, contemporary stage plays, comic books, TV, and radio. Ward Keeler deals with village Javanese wayang performances and its symbolic and political meaning in this social sphere in *Javanese Shadow Plays, Javanese Selves* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). For an account of certain key texts of the 'classical' wayang see James R.

As in most of Dono's work, *Wayang Legenda* presents a satirical and poignant commentary of contemporary society.

BRIEF BACKGROUND TO THE SHADOW THEATRE

Before providing a reading of *Wayang Legenda*, it is perhaps still useful to first briefly suggest some of the most salient features of the shadow theatre and its cultural and social significance. The shadow theatre is one of the oldest traditions of storytelling in Southeast Asia and combines the arts of dance, music and drama. Many of the stories or *lakon* are drawn from Java's pre-Islamic past and combine animistic beliefs and the Hindu epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. However, there is a wide variety of plots, and emphasis placed on certain characters in the classic stories change according to the needs of the *wayang*'s changing constituencies. In addition, new stories have been added over the centuries, for instance, for political propaganda purposes during the nationalist period and to disseminate state ideology and other state programs such as family planning during the New Order.⁸ The favored traditional form in Central and East Java is the *wayang kulit* or shadow play.

Brandon, ed., *On Thrones of Gold: Three Javanese Shadow Plays*, 2 ed. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993).

⁸ Becker describes that in the *wayang* plot, no matter where one enters or exits the larger narrative or epoch, the plot must begin and end in certain places: "Any scene in a *wayang* plot may be transposed or omitted, except for the constraint that the plot begin in a court [of the antagonists], have its center in nature, and return to the court [of the protagonists]. Transpositions and omissions of story material do not destroy or even change the whole...When something is brought in, however, it must follow the paradigmatic and syntagmatic constraints of the *lakon* [structured event] structure described above." See A.L. Becker, "Text-Building, Epistemology, and Aesthetics in Javanese Shadow Theatre," in *The Imagination of Reality: Essays in Southeast Asian Coherence Systems*, ed. A.L. Becker and Aram A. Yengoyan (Norwood: Ablex, 1979), 225.



Figure 8.5 Heri Dono, *Wayang Legenda*, 1988, performance and installation, screen, a single light, bamboo and acrylic on paper, Collection of Singapore Art Museum. Illus. in *Heri Dono* (Jakarta: Nadi Gallery, 2004): 246.

Delicately carved and painted puppets – which are sometimes exhibited ‘alone’ as art-works in museums, but which come to life in a performance – are moved in carefully choreographed, dance-like movements to the sound of complex orchestral music played on the gamelan orchestra. As important as the story is, the overall experience of the theatre and the music, and the individual scenes featuring everything from serious discussions and graceful puppet dances to comedy, political commentary, pop songs, and acrobatic fighting. [Part of the] enjoyment of the all-night *wayang* performance involves [...] also enjoying the atmosphere of the night and the food stalls present at every performance (Mrázek 2006, 12).

In the above quote, Jan Mrázek distinguishes between *wayang* when exhibited “alone” in museum settings and the more communal “all night” performance atmosphere in Java. The latter is an event of entertainment and communication, something that is still an important aspect of popular theatre in Java today.⁹ *Wayang* theatre in general, and shadow theatre especially, has traditionally been one of the major means by which concepts are brought across in Javanese cultures and society, through the combined use of sound, music, dance, and drama.

The *wayang kulit* puppet, according to Jan Mrázek, is like an image of an idea, or what he likens to a “picture”, and these pictures become part of a larger picture, which the *dalang* creates by using each puppet as his “building blocks” (Mrázek 2006, 14). These then create a composition, which must adhere to certain aesthetic principles: “the composition should be visually pleasing, orderly, and balanced, and the exact position of each puppet expresses the character’s role in the scene, his/her relation to other puppets, and his/her nature and mood.” The position of the character, whether it is placed higher or lower in the scene for instance, further defines and “express[es] something about the character in the scene.” The conventional ‘types’ or characters in the *wayang kulit* have long “serve[d] as a standard against which to measure the behavior of living people” (Sears 1996, 8).

The narratives and characters of the shadow play have been reproduced in comic books, cartoons, television serials, books, video games, and movies. Such a range of interpretive media shows the cross-class and cross-cultural popularity of what is typically discussed in Western scholarship as a ‘court tradition’. Just like the stories that animate it, the *wayang kulit* is also a site of collective memory and cultural and

⁹ For his in-depth study on the *wayang kulit*, see Jan Mrázek, *Phenomenology of a Puppet Theatre: Contemplations on the Art of Javanese Wayang Kulit* (Lieden: KITLV Press, 2005).

political contestation. In *Shadows of Empire*, Laurie Sears (1996) traces the ways in which the narratives, meaning, cultural and class locations of the shadow theatre have been contested and negotiated. She explores the ways in which the shadow theatre had been framed by the Dutch colonial discourse and claimed by Javanese nationalism, and used by viallge *dalang*'s as a powerful means of criticizing power relations and dominant ideologies (see also, Schechner 1993).

The colonial interest in Javanese court and village traditions, according to Sears, has its roots in eighteenth century European thought and its interest in "folk" cultures, but it was particularly in the nineteenth century that:

[within] European intellectual circles, belief in religion had often been displaced by a glorificaiton of high culture - the humanistic pursuit of the arts - and a reification of "folk" culture. These beliefs were a source of pluralist but also racist assumptions..." (Sears 1996, 18).

At the same that the Dutch were claiming the shadow theatre as a site of colonial investigation and power, so too did the Javanese court have a vested interest in controlling Javanese cultural meaning. For the Javanese court, as the shadow theatre was a microcosm of all existence, and set in motion cosmic forces, the Court used the shadow play for the construction and enactment of myth to bring into effect an ideal future. In this way, it was in the interest of the Javanese ruler to control the powerful *dalang* who was responsible for bringing the universe into existence by way of bringing puppets to life.

Historically, the *dalang* or puppet master has been both the disseminator of social norms and conventions of moral behavior and critic of all levels of society including the elite.¹⁰ Part of how his play is received and appreciated depends heavily

¹⁰ For a study on the position and role of the *dalang*, see, Victoria M. Clara van Groenendael, *The Dalang Behind the Wayang: The Role of the Surakarta and Yogyakarta Dalang in Indonesian-Javanese Society*, ed. Kininklijk Instituut, vol. 114 (Dordrecht: Foris Publications, 1985).

on his ability to criticize and comment on current events, to tell the ‘truth behind society’, through the allegorical use of the great epics. Speaking the present through the stories of the past is required for any *dalang*, as well as a matured technique of oblique commentary or euphemistic speech, or what in Javanese is called *pasemon*.¹¹ “Javanese puppeteers are sharp observers of society and its ills, and shadow tales are among the tools they use to elucidate the workings of power within Javanese society” (Sears 1996, 21). Hence, it was in the interests of some to harness and control the power of the village performer.

Prior to the early 20th century, or the late colonial period, the court and village shadow theatre were, according to Sears, unpredictable and its texts and plots malleable. It was out of consequence of setting itself apart, of constructing something capable of distilling the ‘essence’ of Javanese culture, that the courts, with the Dutch colonials, began to standardize a form of court shadow theatre, with changes to the music and plot lines. *Dalang* schools were opened to educate the village performer in colonial-court ideology and new plots. This was, as Sears explains, one attempt by the

¹¹ For different discussions of *pasemon* and *semu* and their function in social and political commentary, see Nancy K. Florida, *Writing the Past, Inscripting the Future: History as Prophecy in Colonial Java* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995); Goenawan Mohamad, "Pasemon on Allusion and Illusions," *Tenggara: Journal of Southeast Asian Literature* 31 (1993): 50-61; Laurie J. Sears, *Shadows of Empire*, 1996: 7-8. Describing its function within the *wayang*, Sears observes that “*pasemon* serves to bring the observer/hearer’s attention to those domains which often lie outside the boundaries of any particular story...By commenting on the present through the past [through conventional characters], the allegorical nature of *wayang* technique sets up a special relationship between the author and certain people in the audience” (7). Hughes-Freeland has discussed this relationship as a common *rasa* that is essential to aesthetic experience according to traditional Javanese principles. See Felicia Hughes-Freeland, "Art and Politics: From Javanese Court Dance to Indonesian Art," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 3, no. 3 (1997): particularly pages 485-487. It should be noted that the social strata of this “common *rasa*” and aesthetic experience is initially located in court culture and gradually becomes the privilege of the *priyayi* or civil servant class. Similar to the bourgeoisie in Europe, for instance, the Javanese *priyayi* class, beginning in the late 19th century, had taken on and elaborated certain court traditions and aesthetic values under the move to standardized Java’s court traditions by the Dutch. On this aspect of the *wayang* and 19th century standardization of ‘traditions’, see also Richard Schechner, "Wayang Kulit in the Colonial Margin," in *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

colonial scholars to “redefine village ritual as ‘high art’” (Sears 1996, 27). Yet, Sears further contends that even with such uneven power relations as played out in the history of the shadow theatre, the position of the village performer was not as “members of a mystified subaltern class.” Rather, she argues that it was the:

[s]hifting lines of power and patronage among Javanese elites, Dutch scholar-administrators, and village puppeteers entwined intellectual, artistic, and political discourses as dominant and dominated groups engaged in negotiations that left some measure of agency and awareness in the hands of village puppeteers” (22).

During the period of nationalism and the project of nation building after independence, and “[d]espite efforts to redefine village ritual as ‘high art’...Javanese shadow tales did not successfully serve as narratives of the nation” (27). What was needed was not ethnic jingoism and ethnic nationalism, but rather a pan-Indonesian nationalism that took into account the many and diverse stories of the many ethnic groups.

In his *Wayang Legenda*, Heri Dono takes what is held to be a Java-centric form, the shadow theatre, through which his *dalang* performs a Batak genesis myth from Sumatra, as a means of breaking through the dominance of Javacentric stories, thus refashioning the theatre to accommodate other narratives. In so doing, as the artist explains, he also used this open platform of the shadow theatre to introduce other narratives into the idea of national culture. This does not mean that he assumes Javanese stories to be the national narrative. Rather he uses the platform of the shadow theatre and its ability to distill a number of plot lines and narratives to make subtle commentary of current events, to further question the contents of a different dominant, namely the idea of a Universal referent of an “Indonesian” reality and society.

Heri Dono began making his *wayang* set while studying under the *wayang kulit* master and innovator, Pak Sigit Sukasman (1932), in Yogyakarta. Heri met

Sukasman by chance while waiting for a bus in 1987, at which time he expressed his interest in making his own *wayang setan* or devil's *wayang*.¹² Heri studied the following year under Sukasman and his Ukur Group (founded in 1972) in the art of puppet making and performance. Sukasman's work is notable for his alterations to the foundations of the classic stories enacted through the *wayang* and distortions to the conventional forms through which the stories are told.¹³ His premise for doing so is his belief that traditional art is contemporary, existing in present time as a product of society and culture and should be allowed to evolve accordingly. Sukasman's main concern is with the condition of human existence and its propensity toward violence, greed, and hypocrisy. He incorporates contemporary concerns, circumstances, and new character types such as political corruption and the stripping of the environment due to human greed directly into his figures.

Heri Dono's *Wayang Legenda* evolved under the tutelage of Pak Sukasman. First performed in Jakarta in 1988 and subsequently in a number of interregional international exhibitions in Australia and Japan, it was later purchased by a Japanese collector and then donated to the Singapore Art Museum in 2006. In *Wayang Legenda*, Dono has used low culture, meaning not 'high culture' materials associated with sets of court shadow puppets. In this case, he has used cheap materials of acrylic on cardboard and bamboo sticks instead of ornately painted puppets of sheep's leather and handles of finely hewn and polished water buffalo horn. Dono's puppets takes recourse in village traditions that incorporate new figures depicting present day concerns and characters at the very local level to associate this ancient yet timely form

¹² Interview with the artist, July 26, 2002, Yogyakarta.

¹³ Unless otherwise noted, information on Sukasman comes from my interview with him, March 1997, Yogyakarta.

of communication with the lives of the majority of contemporary Indonesians.¹⁴ Dono also decentralizes the *wayang* from its mostly Indic narratives by using a genesis story from the Batak region of Northern Sumatra that tells of a union between different clans (*marga*). This aspect is crucial to understanding the piece beyond merely attempting to innovate or introduce a non-conventional narrative into the play. It was during the 1980s that it became apparent to what extent the state employed structures and other aspects of particularly Javanese culture to reinforce a kind of paternalism in which the president became the primordial Bapak or Father of the nation and to also deny freedom of expression and popular participation in the political field. The Batak story indirectly, but crucially, acts to symbolically undermine this dominance in national cultural discourse. Batak mythic characters form the core of Dono's puppet characters, such as *Raja Batak* (The Batak King), *Boru Anian* (When She was Wood), *Dukun Cabul* (Naughty Priest), *Kenbul Raksasa* (The Bull), *Boru Sopak Panuluan* (When She was a Baby), among others.¹⁵ He combines these with other characters and events generally not found in the more official Javanese *wayang kulit* tradition, but that also reflect the other side of the New Order state psyche, namely social renewal and modernization. However, here Dono is perhaps making less a statement about this other side of the New Order psyche than he wishes to depict Indonesian reality in its

¹⁴ For a more in-depth discussion of the aesthetic strategy of the redemption of the low in artistic production in 'Third world' and postcolonial countries see Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, "Narrativizing Visual Culture: Toward a Polycentric Aesthetics," in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzeoff (London and New York: Routledge, 1998). For a discussion of similar tendencies or strategies in a specifically Indonesian context, see also Sanento Yuliman, "Dari Pluralisme Estetik Ke Estetika Pluralis," *Tempo*, no. 27 June (1987c), Sanento Yuliman, "Parodi Pasaraya," *Tempo*, no. 27 June (1987d), Sanento Yuliman, "Perspektif Baru," in *Pameran Seni Rupa Baru 75*, ed. Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru (Jakarta: 1975), Sanento Yuliman, *Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru, Sebuah Pengantar* (Jakarta: DKJ, 1976).

¹⁵ For images of some of these characters, see Singapore Art Museum., *Inoyama Donation: A Tale of Two Artists* (exhibition brochure) (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2006), 10-11. See also Center, ed., *Heri Dono - Dancing Demons and Drunken Deities*.

variety, such as the low and poor classes, corrupt politicians, tourists, prostitutes, comic book heroes such as batman, a wild boar as a symbol of unrestrained behavior and political corruption.

In addition, he insinuates sexual relations in a new way into the structure of the *wayang kulit*. Typically it is the *dalang* who interjects such scenes often through bawdy jokes, but there is no actual visual representation of sexual relations in any one puppet in traditional *wayang*. In *Wayang Legenda* the King lays with his Queen (Figure 7.5), both depicted nearly naked upon a wedding dais. His forms and what they are to represent in the narrative do not invoke a sense of the *halus* and its assumptions of refined beauty. Rather his *wayang* offers the beauty of the vernacular, of the basic human condition without glamour, right down to the anti-mosquito coil that emits smoke from beneath the platform upon which the couple lays. Here his shadow play is quite in keeping with the mechanism of bawdy humor deployed by *dalangs*. Heri Dono's rendition takes recourse in such metaphors, characters and talent for innuendo.



Figure 8.6 Heri Dono, detail *Wayang Legenda*, Raja Batak laying with Boru Anian (Courtesy of Cemeti Art Foundation, Yogyakarta, Indonesia).

In a similar vein, the artist also counters gendered assumptions of figural hierarchy in the *wayang*. In traditional shadow play there is a hierarchy of representation, the more important and typically male figures are larger in size than lesser figures or characters, such as women whose representations and characters are fewer and far more diminutive compared to the many noble male and demon characters. In other words, the *wayang* serves as a mirror of social relations, each character being enacted appropriately according to their position within that universe. Dono problematizes such relations by making his female and other ‘lesser’ characters unconventionally large in size, thus making them more important in the overall social hierarchy of the narrative than is traditionally suggested.

Dono deliberately ‘incorrectly’ includes previously ‘unrepresentable’ acts and sectors of society, culturally and aesthetically ‘unrefined’ characters, both in form and content, elevating the beauty of the vulgar, and the base human condition as critical parody.

Nonetheless, his work is also insinuated in a long tradition in the *wayang* of introducing new narratives and characters into its structure and repertoire. Both Holt (1967) and Schechner (1993) have discussed various non-court traditions of the *wayang kulit* and its uses for political and propaganda purposes that have typically been ignored by Western scholars who favor the aestheticized and standardized ‘court’ traditions of the late 19th century.¹⁶ Holt also points to how even ‘courtly’ *wayang* of the early 20th century incorporated the ‘foreign’, such as the Dutch, bicycles, and cars into the world view of the *wayang* by way of new puppets to give them a role in the preexisting structure of mythological plot. Putting together of the culturally and textually incongruous is a way of both generating a visual pun and joke, and more importantly giving that which is ‘foreign’ a cognitive place in the Javanese horizon. Dono’s *wayang* presents the culturally incongruous in his deployment of the Batak legend as the basis of his narrative and his new characters that invoke popular culture and lived reality in Indonesia. However, Dono’s ‘colliding’ of the familiar and the ‘foreign’ into the *wayang* and ‘marginal’ and ‘*kasar*’ to dominant cultural discourse, are radical when seen on the side of expanding the limits and boundaries of ‘contemporary visual art’ such that it transcends ‘known’ categories.¹⁷

¹⁶ Schechner especially critically traces this academic blind spot among Western scholars., For a study on the kinds of political or propaganda *wayang* during Sukarno’s and Suharto’s regimes, see also Mrázek, *Phenomenology of a Puppet Theatre: Contemplations on the Art of Javanese Wayang Kulit*; John Perry, "The Potential of Puppetry to Persuade: Interpretation, Appropriation and Control of Javanese *Wayang Kulit*" (Master of Art, Cornell University, 1994).

¹⁷ For a critical study of the use of popular culture, humor and structural changes in recent *wayang kulit*, see {Mrázek, April, 2000 #3975}

In a way, *Wayang Legenda*, with its use of the current, vernacular and realistic depictions of segments of society, can be also seen as building on aspects of the role played by Semar, a semi-divine, squat, fat, androgynous figure of great wisdom, and his sons, Gareng, Petruk and Bagong – the ‘clown’ figures in the *wayang* who serve the kings and warriors.¹⁸ They are the only characters in the *wayang* that possess individuated and distinct behaviors, have histories (different for each story being told) and are quite human in bodily functions and aspirations (Foley 1987, 67). “What is noticeable about the clowns,” Foley writes,

is not that they are farty or uncouth, but that they are distinctive. For the other types, what the performer attempts to present and what the public reads is a (sic) icon of that type. The clowns, outside of this typology, represent an individualism that is at a premium in this artistic universe and available only to those at the bottom of the *wayang* world (68).¹⁹

In addition, Semar embodies seemingly contradictory attributes exemplified in his vulgar jocularly and high levels of mystical and political speech, thus acting as a bridge between the lower classes and higher levels of power and society. He and his sons speak directly to the musicians and refer to current events in ways that the ‘noble’, *halus* (refined) types cannot. It is Semar who carries the subtext of the plot, voicing criticism, commentary on current events, as well as disseminating or parodying governmental programs. Foley further explains that “throughout the story, the clowns may make reference to the real world, which the audience inhabits. Similar

¹⁸ In the classic tale of the Mahabharata, Semar is the clown servant of the noble warrior Ardjuna. He is also Siva’s brother Ismaja, but was cursed and transformed into the misshapen figure whose primary role is to both deal with his unruly and impetuous sons and to council his master whose mortality places Semar in a cosmically higher position. For discussions of Semar in the work of Heri Dono, see Behrend, “The Millennial Esc(h)atology of Heri Dono: ‘Semar Farts’ First in Auckland, New Zealand.”; Rath, “Shadow Stories: Wayang in the Work of Heri Dono.”

¹⁹ The clown figure, as in the Panji mask drama, also serves as the mediator between the action on stage and the audience. The clown speaks for the noble characters on stage.

to the ways in which the clown figure is used as a “transparent mask for the opinions of the particular *dalang* on issues of current concern” (71), so too can Dono’s cast of characters, the segments of real contemporary life in Indonesia, be seen as his critical foil as well. However, his characters are not magically potent as is Semar. The aspect of Semar that the artist appropriates is not the archaic, ancestral figure, but perhaps what Foley, in specifically locating Semar, describes as a “most modern and flexible element, the individualistic spokesperson” for today’s marginal classes and finger pointing at the absurdity of the combined forces of human greed and hypocrisy as the building blocks of power (75). The concerns and commentary offered by Dono’s different characters are those of the artist identifying with ‘*kaum marginal*’ who live outside of the imagined pale of dominant assumptions and representations. They disturb the fine fabric of decorum. Such a position is liberating and it serves as the site of the humor and criticality of the piece.

Dono repeatedly has suggested that his work aims to confound totalizing truths. In the case of *Wayang Legenda*, this includes auratic Javanese ‘high culture’ *wayang* in his turn to the vernacular, and the Universal referent by injecting it with the local and other cultural narratives. In terms of artistic practice, he stressed that the *Wayang Legenda* project was situated within neither the *wayang* nor the discourse of contemporary art, but within some kind of other space of artistic practice capable of transcending totalizing categories. This ‘other space’ is something that is emphasized throughout this dissertation as a key element in understanding contemporary artistic practice in an Indonesian context.

Site Specific and Community-based Work in Kuda Binal

While making and performing his *Wayang Legenda*, Dono was also making quite a name for himself as an unconventional painter, using the same ideas of the *wayang* in

his flat allegorical paintings that make use of the *wayang* for a new kind of visual political commentary. Yet, and what I want to underscore in this chapter, Dono also saw a distinct possibility with more performative, community-based actions. In engaging a painting, the viewer must ‘read’ the work but remains a solitary figure in doing so, hence ‘reading’ remains in a private encounter. This, according to Dono, is in contrast to installation and performance in which the “people experience it together.”²⁰ There is distance in reading individually, while in mutual experience the distance between the person viewing and that which is viewed presumably collapses. Painting, the most personal mode of production for him, does not rely on others to assist either in its making or in collective action to ‘enact’ the piece. In his performances, Dono contends that while artistic autonomy and individual creativity are crucial, his works depend heavily on local context, narrative and traditions, and the creativity of others. Installation/Performance, then, provides a more ‘social space’ in that it often requires collaboration with others, including non-art individuals and groups who participate as performers of the piece.

One such performance work was his *Kuda Binal* or ‘Wild Horses’ performed on July 29, 1992 (Figures 8.7 and 8.8). The artist enlisted the involvement of roughly twenty participants, members of ‘*kaum marginal*’ from Kleben village close to the ISI campus. None of whom no formal training in the arts or dance. In other words, the performance took place initially outside the network of the museums or galleries.

²⁰ Interview with the artist, 6 August 2002, Yogyakarta.



Figure 8.7 Heri Dono, *Kuda Binal*, 1992, performance, north courtyard of the Sultan's palace, Yogyakarta (Courtesy of Indonesia Visual Art Archive, Yogyakarta, Indonesia).



Figure 8.8 Heri Dono, *Kuda Binal*, 1992, performance, north courtyard of the Sultan's palace, Yogyakarta (Courtesy of Indonesia Visual Art Archive).

Kuda Binal was a deliberately ‘incorrect’ reenactment and reinterpretation of the traditional *Kuda Kepang* (horse of plaited bamboo) trance dance, from agrarian and mountainous regions of West, Central and East Java. For a description of the dance, particularly in Yogyakarta, and its intentions, I quote Claire Holt at length:

[T]his folk play is performed by men mounted on flat horses made of plaited and painted bamboo. The dancers’ own legs create the illusion of the horses’ movements. [...] Sometimes a single rider accompanied by a few musicians and a masked or unmasked man with a whip may trek through a town and stop at a street corner for a performance. The usual combination, however, is four, six, or eight riders, several musicians, and one or more masked figures. In a *djatil* performance near Yogyakarta [Yogyakarta, AKR] in 1956, four masks were present: a clown wearing a white half-mask, a man in a black mask, a red-faced “wild man,” and a yellow-masked female being. In addition, weaving about the eight dancing horsemen was a man who held with both hands a wooden crocodile head from which a long, twisted cloth trailed over his shoulder. In deep trance, he danced in a wide circle, unceasingly, obsessively, bending from side to side.

Entrancement is the principle event of a hobbyhorse performance. At the beginning, the dance is orderly; in regular and persistent rhythms supplied by a small percussion orchestra, the horsemen ‘trot’ in a circle. In some plays they divided into two parties which engage in a sham battle. Gradually the obsessive rhythms become more tense, and before long one of the dancers ‘becomes’ (*djadi*), that is, becomes possessed. Sometimes trance is induced when the leader lashes a horseman with a whip believed to have been ‘charged’ with magic power by means of a ‘filling’ ritual. The entranced rider then starts behaving like a horse...[It is the] troupe’s spiritual leader...usually an old man and mystic teacher, [that] calms him and eventually brings him out of the trance with incense and muttered incantations (Holt 1967, 104-105).²¹

²¹ In the above description, Holt combines the features of a number of *Kuda Kepang* dances, but with a main focus on those of Java, and more specifically, Yogyakarta. As she contends, this type of dance can be found throughout Southeast Asia and beyond. For photographic images of this ritual dance in the early to mid-20th century see Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change*, 1967: 105. For anthropological discussions of this and similar dances, see Victoria M. Clara van Groenendaal, *Jaranan: The Horse Dance and Trance in East Java*, trans. Maria J.L. van Yperen, *Verhandelingen Van Het Koninklijk Instituut Voor Taal, Land- En Volkenkunde* (Leiden: KITLV, 2008); Kathy Foley, “The

Kuda Kepang is ritual, entertainment, and a mode of communication, which, like the *wayang*, can be a key component to social or communal functions and religious ceremonies. Some forms of this ritual incorporate narratives, often demonstrating the interweaving of Javanese mysticism and the teachings of Islam among the Javanese.²² By the time of Heri Dono's investigations into the *Kuda Kepang* in central Java during his academy days, it apparently had almost disappeared in its form as an efficacious public ritual due to increasing pressure from more orthodox Islamic groups and because it was considered not in accordance with modernization (Marianto 1992, 114).²³ Many such traditional forms had been taken out of their ritual cycle and repurposed as tourist attractions and artifacts of regional culture.

Dono's *Kuda Binal* recuperates and at the same time decontextualizes the traditional 'low' form. In this case, the action is posited as a grassroots artistic activism that speaks to larger contemporary environmental issues and a disenfranchizing developmentalism mediated through the interpretive lens of the local community of Kleben village and from within a local ritual form. His collaborators were youth, *becak* drivers, and homemakers. As the nine horsemen carried out the *kuda* dance, their performance was punctuated by experimental music of Joseph Praba

Dancer and the Danced: Trance Dance and Theatrical Performance in West Java," *Asian Theatre Journal* 2, 1 (Spring, 1985), 28-49.

²² In Malay versions of *Kuda Kepang*, animistic elements have been removed and the form itself has been refashioned within the frame of Islam to tell the story of the nine Javanese *nabi* or those who spread Islam to the inlands of Java in the early 14th century. Islam was largely spread through oral culture and story telling. As part of their story telling, according to legend, the *nabi* rode on horseback to dramatize the great battles won in the name of Islam. Like its Javanese counterpart, Malay *Kuda Kepang*, besides being a popular tourist attraction, is still performed today at wedding ceremonies.

²³ Regarding the state's discouragement of such dances, based as they are on ethnic animistic beliefs, they were seen not to serve the state ideology of *Pancasila* in which only Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Catholicism are the officially recognized religions in Indonesia. When Suharto came to power, through the frame of *Pancasila*, and as a means of undermining residual Communist leanings among the population, Indonesians were expected to join one of the main religions.

that combined electronic sound with experimental *gamelan*. Rather than wearing the traditional *wayang*-style makeup replete with the ‘classical’ thick moustache and crown of ‘gold’ seen in the tourist versions of the dance, the performers wore no makeup and their costumes were roughly hewn, a combination of cloth and natural materials such as coconut fiber. *Kuda Binal* retained the use of the masks, particularly that of the clown mask in white.²⁴ However, for this performance, Dono transformed the clown’s mask into a gas mask. This would become something of a signature motif in the artist’s later works, among others his *The Chair*, discussed below. The breathing apparatus in some of these masks are actually small transistor speakers. Dono and his collaborators also maintained the crocodile figure that would wind its way through the other dancers. Yet, the community added other figures to the dance, namely animal avatars of their own making in the form of different animals of their own choosing such as elephants, snakes, crocodiles, the wild boar, and horses. Each one represented an animal that had been brought to the “brink of extinction at the hands of human greed.”²⁵ The two-dimensional plaited horses were also retained, but decorated and embellished with Dono’s signature cartoon/*wayang*/Picasso-esque style (Figures 8.9 and 8.10).

²⁴ As has already been indicated, colors have symbolic meaning in Javanese culture. Four colors of white, black, red and yellow are also associated with the four cardinal points, human character, cosmic forces.

²⁵ Interview with the artist, 29 July 2002, Yogyakarta.



Figure 8.9 Heri Dono, *Kuda Binal*, 1992, performance, north courtyard of the Sultan's palace, Yogyakarta (Courtesy of the artist).

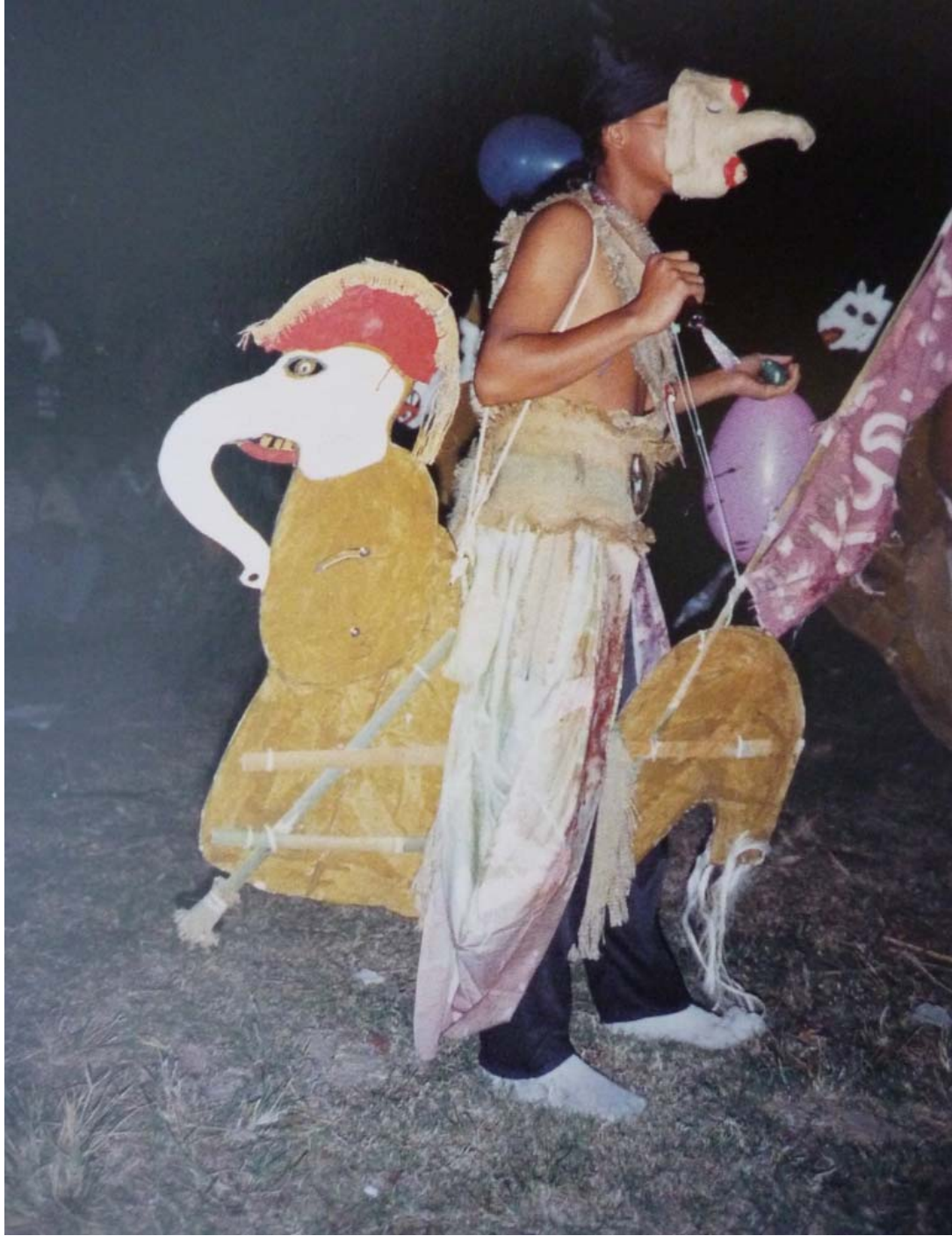


Figure 8.10 Heri Dono, *Kuda Binal*, 1992, performance, north courtyard of the Sultan's palace, Yogyakarta (Courtesy of the artist).

As the artist explained in his statement for the Binal event, the work “is not meant as entertainment but rather is intent on presenting an alternative aesthetic” capable of enacting and embodying “the values of a contemporary art and humanity that have more than one dimension of truth” (Quoted in Wisetrotomo 1992, 93).²⁶ *Kuda Binal* demonstrates a key and consistent structure and mechanisms that can be found in so much of the artist’s installation-performance works from then on. It is a collection of appropriated forms that have deep-seated meanings for the Javanese. The artist appropriates, recontextualizes, and deterritorializes these profound connections, transforming them into a new contemporary visual art form (see Antoinette 2007). The critical nature of this work is not simply in its overt message regarding environmental tragedies at the hands of development and capitalist greed. It contains what would perhaps be more apparent to Javanese readers of this same work than others. Here Dono has taken what is historically a village tradition, a so-called low, non-court performance and, for the *Binal*, staged it in the northern *alun* or courtyard of the palace of the Sultan of Yogyakarta – an open area that belongs to the Court complex but is for common usage, typically as a gathering place for all sorts of secular activities such as night fairs and festivals.²⁷ As suggested in regards to his *Wayang*

²⁶ “Kuda Binal tidak bersifat hiburan, melainkan ditekankan pada kemurnian karya seni dalam konsepsi, persepsi, serta estetika alternatif, dan sekaligus juga memiliki nonnanonna sena nilai-nilai seni dan kemanusiaan kontemporer yang memiliki banyak dimensi kebenaran. Musik di dalam Kuda Binal tidak dimaksudkan untuk mengiringi tari, dan gerakangerakan tarinya bisa bebas tanpa harus sesuai dengan irama musiknya.”

²⁷ During the war for independence (1945-1949), the Sultan of Yogyakarta, Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX, sided with and supported (including financially) the revolutionary government. Because of which, after the war Yogyakarta was given the special status of a ‘special district’ (*Daerah Istimewa*). After the revolution, the Sultan remained head of the royal family while also serving as the country’s first Defense Minister (1948-1953) and later as Vice-President under Suharto (1973-1978). He was seen as a kind of *Ratu Adil* or mythic ‘Just King’, the opposite of the then President Suharto and his regime. The Yogyakarta royal house is seen as the preserver and seat of Javanese culture. At the time of Heri Dono’s performance, the symbolic meaning and function of the palace and the Northern and Southern squares of the palace (*alun-alun*) were still widely recognized, though the squares had taken on many secularized functions.

Legenda, he deliberately, and with a critical eye toward how discourses collide rather than fuse, not only pastiches different and at times incongruous elements together. He critically plays with the tension that derives from unequal and uneven relations between perspectives and discourses, the incommensurability of representations among Indonesia's cacophony of cultural voices and social realities. And this, as he explains, is really what Indonesia is all about.

Binal takes advantage of humor of the absurd to bring people out of their complacency and to think the world differently. People were invited to 'act out' as well as share in a common project. This idea of a type of catharsis in which social change can be brought about, as he suggests, for and by the community can then also serve as a positive contagion spreading new relations and ways of seeing the world. He compared such collective acts to ritual to the extent that it is not what is offered in the ceremony or ritual itself but the moment when people become invested in the mutual encounter within that space, to then mutually participate in bringing about some act of transformation. It is here that the work's critical nature resides.²⁸ Whereas ritual is designed to reaffirm the status quo and bring about and maintain balance and harmony among a community of people, Heri Dono's performances appropriate such forms as reaffirmation of another sort. The work reaffirms the values of the community by way of their participation in constructing representations of themselves and their concerns in the contemporary world; the performance allows the community to voice their concerns over and experiences of the processes of development and modernity. Dono, although establishing the main idea, engages people directly in

²⁸ This is not to rule out that the artist was tapping into a traditional notion of the role of the priest, shaman, and seer. This notion seems to have gained capital in contemporary art in Asia among a number of artists. Regarding such ideas in relation specifically to contemporary artists from Indonesia, see for example Astri Wright, "Artists Role and Meaning in Modern Indonesian Painting," in *Modernity in Asian Art*, ed. John Clark (Sydney: University of Sydney East Asian Studies, 1993).

telling their own stories, creating a temporary space of social relations instigated in the co-production of a shared project.

For now, I want to extend this notion of collaboration in relation to the initial staging of *Kuda Binal* as what Heri has referred to as a ‘pocket culture’ and what I am calling community-based projects (borrowing from Miwon Kwon, 2005/1997) to suggest certain critical gestures therein that then may or may not travel as the piece is created in another context, both geographically and culturally.

As previous chapters have suggested and the following chapter further analyzes, contemporary art in Indonesia contains a strain of collective-based projects that occurred outside the purview of the galleries and curators, and to varying degrees went undetected by the authorities and were largely undocumented. The artists experimented with different means by which to express their concerns over social interactions in the world and art’s ability to be a part of social change. One type of this was an attempt to make collaborative, short-lived collective projects. Describing one type of pocket culture, particularly one consisting of artists and supporters of art, Heri states:

[For example,] we organize in rice fields without asking permission from the government. When the police come, we just say it's a rehearsal. Now this [can be] a big event, with [sometimes up to] seventy to one hundred artists participating, without any official paperwork. After two days, perhaps the government is informed by newspapers or magazines, but when the police come again and protest, saying " this is not a rehearsal, this is a performance and exhibition ", we say ‘but it's already happened , it's over (Obrist 1999).

During the New Order, such events were designed as ‘unofficial actions’ among scattered ‘pocket cultures’, typically organized among artists who, although also exhibiting and performing in commercial galleries/museums, preferred making exhibitions in alternative ways, gathering outside institutional channels to engage in

some kind of collective performance activity, experimenting with music, dance, theater, and performance art (Obrist 1999). These projects often involved large numbers of participants from different disciplines and non-art people under the umbrella of a temporarily shared solidarity. Solidarity in this case was generally understood to be a kind of mutuality, accountability, and placed emphasis on shared interests as the basis of this relationship in the production of quite porous yet bounded (temporarily) communities. Rather than assuming an enforced commonality of oppression, the practices of solidarity here foreground communities of people who choose to work together. These were not registered acts and were meant to be difficult to ‘capture’.

Certain of the operative strategies that Miwon Kwon maps in “One Place After Another, Notes on Site Specificity” (2005/1997) regarding the different paradigms of site-specificity in American art, and in “Sittings of Public Art: Integration versus Intervention” (2002) regarding changing conceptions of community-based art after 1970, are helpful in framing works such as *Kuda Binal* and the notion of a ‘pocket culture’ as part of this idea of temporary collective action. The work is both an action associated with a protest against the institutionalization of art and an artistic means of redressing “urgent social problems [...] or more generally in order to revitalize art as one among many forms of cultural work” (Kwon 2005/1997, 37). Kwon further explains that such work of “expanded engagement with culture favors ‘public’ sites outside the traditional confines of art in physical and intellectual terms.” In this regard, as Kwon argues, it is possible to conceive of the *site* of these types of works as something more than place (as in the *alun-alun* or courtyard), and instead as “repressed ethnic history, a political cause, a disenfranchised social group...” (39). Works such as *Kuda Binal* demonstrate a trend in contemporary art in Indonesia for art to seek to expand its jurisdiction via “a more intense engagement with the outside

world and everyday life, a critique of culture that is inclusive of non-art spaces, non-art institutions, and non-art issues...”

A distinctive trait in works such as *Kuda Binal* and its place within the concept of a ‘pocket culture’ is the ambiguity surrounding its significance as some form of *community*-based project which also then entails the “discursive slippage” around the meaning of audience, site, and public. In approaching such issues, I am particularly interested in Kwon’s treatment of what has been called art-in-the-public-interest model or works distinguished by the artist’s “foregrounding social issues and political activism, and/or for engaging ‘community’ collaborations” (Kwon 2002, 284). Kwon’s concept of a logic of community-based site specificity is helpful in that she also argues that emphasis in such work is placed on the social, which, she contends, stems from the belief that the “meaning or value of the artwork is not contained in the sole object but accumulates, is durational,” and comes about “through the interaction between artist and community” (310). Such interaction is integral to the work itself and the ‘work’ that art does. In this way, the “*performative* capacity of the artist to integrate with the community,” no matter how temporarily, becomes part of the way in which *Kuda Binal* might be gauged regarding “artistic authenticity and ethical fitness of the work.”

This points to the work’s “public relevance and its democratic sociopolitical ambitions” (Kwon 2002, 283). This of course has important implications regarding collaborative performances that are re-staged in different contexts. In the first version of *Kuda Binal* the viewer/spectator, audience and the public are enlisted to participate in the production of the artwork, they engage in the work of art thus enacting the ‘work’ that art does, in this case temporary formations of community. Unlike the above examples of Heri Dono’s collaborations, *Kuda Binal* does not include concrete, more permanent objects beyond the actual performance. Kester (2005) would suggest

that the ‘work’ of such art is in the dialogue and collaboration between the artist and the community. A central objective of *Kuda Binal* and other similar community-based projects is to make a work in which members of a community, as both audience and participant, “will each see and recognize themselves in the work, not so much in the sense of being critically implicated but to being affirmatively pictured and validated” (Kwon 2002, 311). Important in this kind of work then is that there is something shared among the members of the temporary community. To varying degrees, concepts put forward and the types of performativity taking place in these works are those that uphold and reaffirm the local community, dealing with its specific needs, often with the community itself and its plight being the idea and subject of the work. Such works that include the participation and collaboration with the community itself constitute a kind of ‘collective artistic labor’. Kwon makes the point that in such ideas of community and identification through a kind of ‘collective artistic labor’ is the assumption of an unalienated labor, or a provisional position outside of capitalism’s forces (Kwon 2002, 312).²⁹ In such an assumption is the ‘unspoken imperative’ not to challenge or disrupt those points of common or shared reference, so as not to disturb the participant’s sense of self. Nonetheless, the politics behind such an unconscious state is an “imagined [...] *politically* empowered social subject with opportunity (afforded by the art project) and capacity (understood as innate) for artistic self-representation (equals political self-determination).” Kwon concludes that it is this operative logic, the production of “empowered subjects” that underlies the intent of certain modes of community-based art. I concur with Kwon that such community-

²⁹ Quoting Kwon further: “This investment of labor would seem to secure the participants’ sense of identification with the work, or at least a sense of ownership of it; the community sees itself in the work not through an iconic or mimetic identification but through the recognition of its own *labor* in the creation of, or becoming of, the work.”

based projects run the risk of assuming some kind of monolithic or total collectivity over and against specific identities of its constituency. Here, however, it seems that Kwon reads such questions of identity as at best naïve, at worst dangerous and outdated assumptions, impossible in a postmodern world of late capitalism. She appears to view the idea of collaborative, community-based work pessimistically unless its goal is to challenge or unsettle the viewer's reliance on precisely such forms of identification. In contrast, however, contemporary artists in Indonesia, and perhaps others elsewhere, do view collective identities and solidarity as a possible counterargument against oppressive totalities and authoritarian regimes, as a means of democratizing (elitist) creative acts. This is because, and I argue that Heri Dono's *Kuda Binal* is just one example, following Grant Kester's notion of 'dialogic' aesthetics, "it is possible to define oneself through solidarity with others while at the same time recognizing the contingent nature of this identification" (Kester 2002, 85). The very idea of 'pocket cultures' embodies similar ideas. Part of the challenge of such actions has been how to rethink collective practice and community and their 'authoring ideologies' in non-universalizing and non-oppressive ways (Bodden 2002, 295).

A Question of Context: The Binal Secession and Public Spaces

I have discussed *Kuda Binal* so far primarily as a collaboration work within a loose frame of a grassroots community-based project in response to the nationalist discourse of development and the contents of national culture. However, its context takes on different contours when discussed and framed as part of an arts event – one of the last collective and substantial art rebellions against the official art world (Sumartono 2000, 42). In its initial context of the *Binal: Pameran Seni Eksperimental* or 'Binal: Exhibition of Experimental Art', Heri Dono's *Kuda Binal* performance served as part of a direct challenge to the still upheld conventions of what signifies as art and by

whom at the official level. The *Binal* exhibition/event opened on 28 July, 1992, one day before the ‘official’ Biennale in Yogyakarta was scheduled to open.³⁰ It was both a kind of secession (declaration of independence) from and a demand for entry into the established order of art. As the opening Chapter suggests, national and regional biennales had been the target of heavy criticism by younger artists for their set criteria of styles, medium, and age requirements. Such was the case, among others, regarding the 1992 *Biennale Seni Lukis Yogyakarta III* (Third Yogyakarta Painting Biennale). In terms of importance, this Biennial is second only to the national Biennial in Jakarta.³¹ As the title states, the Yogyakarta Biennale was restricted to painting. Another criterion was age. Artists above the age of thirty were preferred as they were considered to have a matured style and consistency in their work. While artists under the age of thirty five were allowed to participate, their works had typically been shown separately from those of the more ‘senior’ artists.³² Against these criteria of two-dimensional works and age, Dadang Christanto, acting as main organizer, called artists to arms to help organize and carry out the ‘*Binal* Exhibition of Experimental Art’.³³

The term *Binal* is a Javanese play on the borrowed word ‘Biennale’. It means to behave in an uncivilized manner like wild beasts. Rhetorically, then, the intent

³⁰ *Binal* ran for one week, closing on the 5th of August. During my field work (2001-2003), I and my field assistant, Iwan Wijono, were able to interview a number of the artists who were part of the event’s planning. My discussion of the event here is largely taken from these interviews as well as Dwi Marianto’s “The Yogyakarta Painting Biennial III,” 1992.

³¹ A *Festival Kesenian Yogyakarta* or the Yogyakarta Arts Festival takes place every year. Included in this event, which entails ‘craft’ exhibitions and ‘traditional’ performance as well, is the yearly ‘painting exhibition’. In 1988 this was supplemented by the larger *Biennale Seni Lukis Yogyakarta*. The Biennale gave awards for best works, and for all three biennales up to that point, paintings in decorative and ‘Yogya surrealism’ styles won. See also Mikke Susanto, “Biennial Di Indonesia, Dari Masa Sulit Ke Masa Sulit,” 2001.

³² Even as late as the Arts Festival in 1999, the two ‘generations’ were exhibited a week at a time as if there were two exhibitions in one.

³³ With the primary assistance of Harry Wahyu (ISI) and Agung ‘Leak’ Kurniawan (University of Gajah Mada or UGM).

behind its use here is an artistic rebellion or *pemberontakan* against the format and criteria of the official Biennale. As the title also suggests, it was an exhibition dedicated to experimentation, in this case with different mediums and ways of staging transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary works or works that defied classification or categorization.³⁴ More event than exhibition in the conventional sense, the *Binal* was a deliberately organized series of events and projects intended to intervene in public spaces such as the railway station, the famous Malioboro Road, and students' flats.³⁵ With over 100 artists, both those who had already graduated and students of ISI (formerly ASRI) and other surrounding campuses, the event constituted the largest 'exhibition' to date of experimental works in Indonesia, and especially in the city of Yogyakarta since the *Kepribadian Apa?* events (1977 and 1979).³⁶

Among the many works that were staged or installed throughout the city, certain main themes can be found across them, namely the destruction of local culture and environment by the forces of modernization and exploitative development. This includes Dadang Christanto's map of Indonesia that he fashioned out of sand. On each

³⁴ For reviews of *Binal* see Afrizal Malna, "Binal Eksperimental," *Kompas*, 9 Aug. 1992; Marianto, "The Yogyakarta Painting Biennial Iii 1992 and Its Pun, the Binal Exhibition"; Moelyono, "Upaya Hidup Seni Rupa Pembaruan," *Kompas*, 11 Oct. 1992.

³⁵ This meant obtaining the myriad of required permits to display the various works in such places, permits that did not guarantee that the works would not be removed later, as happened to at least three works from the aTegu Station under order of the Railway Manager from Jakarta. Different teams of artists were given the task of coordinating the works for each site.

³⁶ Although its various events took place largely outside the gallery or other sanctioned 'art' space, it was still an event situated within the realm of an art world and remained situated in relation to elitist institutions. Unlike previous rebellions in Yogyakarta, the *Binal* received silent support from some ISI faculty members. In addition, the Japan Cultural Foundation donated generously to the project, with additional funding coming from cultural and political magazines. These sources of funding also underscore another circuit in the network. The Japan Cultural Foundation, like the French and German counterparts has been among of the major international supporters of 'experimental art' in Indonesia since at least the 1980s. According to interviews with various artists involved with the event, even though large sums were donated for overall operations and permits, each artist was responsible for financing his own work (no women have been recorded as participating in this event). Because of this, accusations surfaced regarding issues of bad financial management.

province he placed a white glove as a symbol for how centralization dictated from Jakarta was stealing natural resources from the provinces, thus leading to uneven development and distribution of wealth. Others pointed to increased militarism in relation to development and modernization. Such issues informed, for instance, the ‘performance’ *Kartu Damai* or ‘Cards of Peace’ by S. Pahlevi, Operasi Rahman and others. They wrapped themselves in posters and bandages as if the walking wounded, carrying a poster hung around their necks that read ‘*kartu damai*’ while handing out leaflets and cards with the same theme.

For the *Binal* Hedi Haryanto, a trained sculptor from STSRI-ISI, began experimenting with installation and site specific work as mediums for raising public awareness not only regarding the detrimental effect ‘garbage’ has on the environment, but more specifically about the insidious penetration of the text and image of the advert into every aspect of human existence, and how this bespeaks of uneven relations in society in general. For his *Teror produk* (The Terror of Products), he accrued hundreds of pounds of scavenged paper and plastic packaging, as well as advertising posters and newspapers and covered the entire exterior of his rented house in the Gampingan neighborhood (an area close to ISI campus and popular among students) and front walkway with them (Figure 8.11). In this piece, the artist taps into the phrase “social terrorism” that was circulating at the time, which meant a kind of cruelty via the manipulative force of advertising of goods and services that only a fraction of Indonesian society could hope to acquire. It also overtly referenced the living conditions of a certain strata of Indonesian society, which make a living from collecting the recyclables from the landfills. Many of these people live either on or near the landfills.



Figure 8.11 Hedi Haryanto, *Teror Pruduk* (Terror of Products), Binal Exhibition, 1992, Gampingan, Yogyakarta (Courtesy of the artist).

In Indonesian contemporary art during the early to mid-1990s, garbage was often used as a material and metaphor of protest and criticism usually aimed at the negative effects of modernization and capitalist consumption, particularly its socio-economic registers.³⁷ As Robert Stam explains regarding its strategic position within a postcolonial aesthetic, “garbage is hybrid...[a] heterotopic site of the promiscuous

³⁷ For example, FX Harsono and Bonyong Munni Ardhie would carry out another collaborative pseudo-scientific study on waste and landfills in Jakarta, and bring their findings as well as numerous bags of garbage to their outdoor installation work for the 1994 Yogya Biennale, *Rupa, Rupa, Seni Rupa*. Dicki Chandra, an artist from Ujung Pandang, South Sulawesi, and trained at ISI, would produce a similar piece in which he placed a number of nicely wrapped parcels made from scavenged garbage in a public walking space. It was summarily rejected by the city authorities and ‘thrown away’ as ‘trash’. In her many versions of ‘Nation for Sale, Arahmaiani deploys video footage of the ‘landfills’ and ‘dump sites’ in and around the mega-cities of Jakarta and Bangkok as one component in her work that deals with the effects of political corruption on the land that is both sold off for profit and contaminated out of indifference. Most recently, American artist Ann Weiser has made garbage and particularly its socio-economic networks the site of her collaborative work in Southeast Asia for nearly a decade. The proceeds from this endeavor have helped to pay for the education of some of the children of the cooperative members.

mingling of rich and poor, center and periphery, the industrial and the artisanal, the domestic and the public,...the national and the international, the local and the global...” (Stam 1999, 68-69). This is in part true for at least what Hedi aimed to stress in his notion of ‘social terror’ via the ‘terror of products’. At base, as a commentary on the imposition of products on Indonesia as a developing country, ‘garbage’ in Hedi’s work serves as a site of what Stam further describes as the “gooey distillation of society’s contradictions” (69). I do not intend to take Stam’s theoretical positioning of ‘garbage’ too literally, as his concern is with ‘cultural diatrus’ in relation to postcolonial critical strategies of redeeming the ‘low’, that which has been cast out of the dominant, typically Eurocentric, model of modernity. Yet, his theoretical use of the term ‘garbage’ can be applied here to the literal use of ‘garbage’ that aspires toward some of the same ‘promiscuous mingling’ but for a local concern that aims to comment on the uneven terrain of consuming subjects and those who are subjected to consumption, the center and the periphery within the nation.

In critically commenting on such general issues, many of the participants reinterpreted forms of local traditional culture. Rianto Ruswandoko’s performance as *Satria GatotKaca* (Figure 8.12).



Figure 8.12 Rianto Ruswandoko as *Gatotkaca* performing in front of Hedi Haryanto's *Teror Produk* (Courtesy of Indonesian Visual Art Archive).

Dressed in full *wayang wong* costume in the role of Gatotkaca, the artist walked from his house in Gampingan to the Tugu train station, while more and more children joined in following him to the station.³⁸ He stood in line for tickets, boarded trains waiting to depart or that had just arrived, greeted passengers, telling them that “the great Gatotkaca was now ill, his power diminished, his existence forgotten” (Sujiwo 1992). According to Javanese versions of the *Mahabharata*, the legendary warrior Gatotkaca is the son of the mortal Bima and the giantess Dewi Arimbi. Such parentage gave him the magical power of flight. In the Bharatayuda scene, which stages the battle between the Pandawas and the Karawas, Gatotkaca strikes with his mace from the air, nearly annihilating the Korawa's. In the end he is struck down by

³⁸ *Wayang Wong* is a late Dutch era invention in which the *wayang* epics are performed as dance drama on a proscenium stage. It was created largely as a form of entertainment for the indigenous civil service.

Karna, the most skilled warrior fighting on the side of the Korawas. Gatotkaca, a symbol of loyalty and fealty, remains a popular hero and has been transfigured like the *wayang* into a myriad of mediums, particularly popular culture such as comic books and now video games.

In fact, according to Rianto Ruswandoko, in portraying his childhood hero he was recalling a “less complicated” time of his youth when he watched *wayang* performances that accompany other communal ceremonies. He lamented the loss of the social interaction that such events offer, having been replaced by video and cinema reproductions that had begun to be shown instead of live performances because they were more cost-effective. He wanted his actions and comments to trigger a more critical stance about the mediation of local tradition(s) that he argued were being displaced by mass culture, a kind of ‘global uniformity.’”

From the above discussion of only a handful of works, it is perhaps clear that within the event of *Binal* exhibition the overarching theme were issues of rapid influx of a kind of liberal capitalism, modernization and industrialization, and the effects these had on the local cultures and the environment. In general, it demonstrated a concern over the ‘*kaum marginal*’ and the places in which they live and experience modernity. Such installations, performances, and site-specific work should not be gauged according to conventional principles of aesthetics; this is not work that tries to engage the viewer poetically but through a kind of artistic activism. “It is art with a socio-political message, that aims to further heighten and stimulate awareness about important and problematic issues both on the individual and system level, and to increase people’s will for active participation in social, political and personal transformation” (Wright 1999).

Revisiting the Operations and Question of *Pemberontakan*

In addition to its activist foundations, the collective action of the *Binal* experimental art event also served as a kind of final gesture of *pemberontakan*.³⁹ It should be seen in relation to other open challenges to the status quo and established categories and understandings of the art work and the work that art does. This would include the *GSRB*, *Pasar Dunia Fantasi*, and other similar events; conjuring up the perennial and unresolved tension between questions of artistic autonomy from social obligation and the art market, and artistic self-determination and artists' profound desire to intervene in the social fabric through artistic practice. However, as intimated above, there are key differences between this and previous rebellions. Beyond its aggressive or confrontational stance is also its relation to *pembaruan* which, as I discussed in the previous chapter, carries with it ethical connotations of not just innovation in the visual arts for its own sake, but innovation for the sake of renewing or creating new social relations and values; an art of engagement. One of the strategies or ideals of the concept of *pembaruan* then is the playing on the boundary between the art and life worlds. In this regard, the *Binal* did something that the *GSRB* and *Pasar Raya Dunia Fantasi* did not; it endeavored to take art outside of the institutions and into public spaces. In so doing, it attempted to expand the work of art as well as its reach and context.

Such ideas were further delineated in the discussion held in conjunction with the event in which noted intellectuals and writers in the art world presented papers giving definition to the event as well as putting forward interpretations of the artistic propositions therein for a specifically art going audience. I have already mentioned FX

³⁹ Like the art rebellions of the 1970s, most of those involved in the *Binal* were students, more than half of whom would not be heard from again as active artists.

Harsono's presentation, "The Development of Contemporary Art in Indonesia," in which he defined the site of the socially engaged artists as the '*kaum marginal*' who are disenfranchised and disempowered on a number of levels in New Order national culture and development (see also Harsono 1992b). Others commented on the *Binal* as a kind of 'democratization' of the art work by demonstrating how art can be site-specific outside of the channels of the gallery and curatorial authority, and constituted of non-elitist (non-'fine' art) modes of production. According to Franki Raden, the *Binal* was the first step in making art more sociable and intimate for a non-elitist society. His motto was that "art should have a function in everyday life" (quoted in Tejo 1992).⁴⁰ He saw the *Binal* as something of a cultural movement, at least in the sense that it offered alternative values and new ideas by recuperating the place of art in everyday life and bringing it out of the institutions and placing it into the very spaces of lived experience, in the 'local', the spaces the public inhabits (Raden 1992). He goes on to suggest an affiliation between these attempts and the supposed 'clear role' aesthetic objects play in traditional cultures as some kind of social body, which is typically discussed as having an *akrab* or intimate relationship to people and society. Such 'new' social relations based on perceived traditional values are then set in contrast to urban culture and society in the cities throughout Indonesia, which Raden equates with an imposed modernity. Modernity and urban society and culture are seen not just as 'Western' but as the result of cultural imperialism. He underscores the fact that modern art in Indonesia is the result of intercultural yet unequal exchange, leaving Indonesia in a marginal position. Because of which, he contends, modern art in Indonesia has been separated from the life *praxis* and its 'natural' or 'clear' social role

⁴⁰ "seharusnya kesenian di Indonesia *funksional* dalam kehidupan sehari-hari."

through its over reliance on institutions, galleries, and museums, all the legacy of Western capitalist culture.

Raden's assumptions share a lineage dating back at least to the 1970s and the debates over *keIndonesiaan* or Indonesian-ness in the visual arts. Like Sudjoko (see Chapter Four), his contentions are close to a neo-traditionalism that sets a more authentic, post-colonial 'local' traditional culture against an imposed, foreign and colonial constellation of values and aesthetic codes.

As many of the works of the *Binal* attest, however, it is not as black and white as the above suggests. The experimental works that speak to the aforementioned general issues also demonstrate the artists' ambivalence to modernity, globalization and changes to Indonesian culture(s) and society in the process. What, at base, is the larger issue for them are the inhumane and dehumanizing processes of modernization and those aspects of culture that are pushed aside by modernism and the national cultural and development policies. While much of their visual rhetoric seems to present rather black and white assumptions of the world, what they seem to really be doing is arguing for a more just world, one capable of cultivating the best in humanity and a more ethical development process. Often times, this ideal is simplified into a gesture of merely placing 'art' in public spaces as if this automatically dissolves the 'aura' of the elitist art object and returns art to its supposed 'original' sociality and social body. Such disruptions confront the viewer without much consideration given to the question of what kind of new knowledge is generated by doing so and with little assistance to aide the viewer in interpreting it. Yet others, such as Heri Dono with his *Kuda Binal*, attempted to offer the viewer or audience a participatory space in exposing and expressing the social problems they mutually face, thereby reinterpreting the 'ritual', and particularly appropriating its function of social renewal, for the benefit of a temporary 'pocket culture' within the visual arts.

As a form of collective protest in the visual arts, ‘*Binal* Experimental Art Exhibition’ marks one of the last major publicized rebellions against the established order and its criteria as to what types of art are allowed in national and regional level exhibitions.⁴¹ By then, experimental art was beginning to cross over from a position of obscure marginality to a sustainable anti-mainstream art in Indonesia. It can be argued that the *Binal* had an impact on the following BJIX of late 1993 and the Yogya Biennial in mid-1994. The *Binal* is one event with an important linkage to the BJIX in that at least four of its participants also participated in the *Binal*, namely Dadang Christanto (main organizer), Heri Dono, Eddie Hara, all three entering ISI in 1980, and Hedi Heryanto, who entered in 1984. Regarding the 1994 Yogyakarta Biennial, not only was Dadang invited as a jury member, but experimental art by younger artists was one of the main attractions. It is perhaps not surprising that Supangkat, the leading champion of alternative art in Indonesia was also a co-curator of this event.

The *Binal* Experimental Art Exhibition was important at the time also in that it erupted onto the scene at the cusp of the internationalization of contemporary art from Indonesia. By that time (1992), Dono and Dadang were not only two of the most well known ‘experimental’ or ‘alternative’ artists of the post-*GSRB* generation in Yogyakarta. At the same time that they participated in a secessionist movement in Indonesia, demanding transformations of the established order, they were rapidly becoming enmeshed in another socio-economic network circuit of large exhibitions dedicated to the new contemporary art practices of the Asia Pacific region in the 1990s; a market that both encouraged as well as supported the development of certain kinds of art in Indonesia, in this case ‘experimental’ or, as Supangkat has suggested,

⁴¹ Similar to the aftermath of *GSRB*, this strategy seemed to work as certain participants of *Binal*, namely Dadang Christanto, its leading organizer, was subsequently invited to serve as a member and later head of the selection committee for the next two Yogyakarta Biennales.

Indonesian versions of the postmodern. Anti-mainstream, adventurous contemporary art from Indonesia was seemingly more appreciated and supported by the international art world than it received critical interest in Indonesia. Heri Dono and Dadang Christanto, along with other critical experimental artists such as FX Harsono, and Nindityo Adipurnomo, and later women artists such as Arahmaiani and Marintan Sirait, became part of a core of anti-mainstream artists in the mainstream of contemporary art exhibitions of the Asia-Pacific region. They formed what Australian curator and critic Pat Hoffie has referred to as a “floating tribe” of artists whose work is more appreciated abroad yet rarely reviewed and collected at home. “These artists travel widely, becoming perennials in the biennials and triennials of the world, but somewhat at odds with their own society” (Hoffie summarized in Morrel 1996, 53).

It cannot be denied that events such as the *Binal* and the internationalization of experimental art from Indonesia had an important impact on the formation of the BJIX, which gave official recognition and legitimacy to works that still possessed a marginal place in the established Indonesian art world.

The Chair: Traveling Marginalities

“I am the Power that controls everything...I am the Power that controls what you do, what you think...I am the Power of all power...I am the all-powerful *dalang* that makes things happen...” Such are some of the droned and endlessly chanted words of the ‘puppet master’ in Heri Dono’s *The Chair* (1994). It was a large-scale spectacle-performance combining the traditions of *wayang wong* or *wayang* dance drama and *wayang kulit* in the artist’s performance about Suharto’s authoritarian regime and questions of succession, two subjects banned during the New Order. It was a piece that, as far as I know, was first performed during the Second Asia Pacific Triennial in 1993, then in Adelaide in 1994, and not in Indonesia until 2001. This is a deeply

allegorical work in both structure and narrative and deserves a somewhat lengthy description of its main parts prior to analysis.



Figure 8.13 Heri Dono, *The Chair*, 1993, rehearsal of performance, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia (Courtesy of the artist).

The Chair (Figures 8.13 and 8.14) opens with an ‘army’, wearing ‘chemical’ suits and *wayang* clown/gas masks (a Dono trademark), squatting motionless in a row. They are divided into two groups, each one flanking a lone figure in the middle foreground shrouded in deep shadow. A single spotlight shines center stage on a singular nearly nude figure covered in whitewash. He comes to middle stage, lies rigidly on his side, and moves clockwise as if ticking off the seconds before the *wayang*, the time of shadows, is to begin. The scene is constantly backdropped by a

soundtrack consisting of a fusion of Japanese traditional drums, gamelan and Western experimental jazz.

After which, the central figure previously in shadow is gradually and obliquely illuminated. He stands and takes a pose typical of male heroes in the *wayang wong* dance, and the recitation of mantras in Javanese begins, resonating from deep within his chest. While this *dalang* moves about the stage, his chanting becomes more insistent as if speaking incantations, oscillating between Javanese and Indonesian. The ten figures in their clown/chemical suits begin mechanistically and slowly moving, mimicking militaristic marching gestures as if compelled by unseen strings. Each of them carries strapped to his or her back a different kind of plastic doll seated in a small wooden chair. The dolls take a variety of popular culture forms from modern baby dolls to replicas of the traditional figures of ‘bride and groom’ found at Javanese wedding ceremonies. This group of seeming automatons serves as the *dalang*’s puppet army/masses. As they move toward the front of the performance space, the *dalang* continues to chant his hypnotic words – “I am the power that controls all power, I am the power over all...” This marks the middle of the *wayang* narrative.

The *dalang* slowly makes his way behind the screen that backdrops the stage. It is a *wayang* screen, illuminated from the other side by a single light source, silhouetting Heri Dono’s absurd world of *wayang kulit*. In the center of the screen is the *kayon*, which is the most powerful symbol of the *wayang* in that it marks the beginning and the end of time as well as signals the change in episodes and settings of the narrative. Dono’s *kayon* is in the shape of both ‘tree’ and ‘palace’. When the *dalang* begins to bring the *kayon* ‘to life’ on ‘the other side’ of the screen, two figures come on stage bearing a chair upon which has been placed a cardboard abstract figure of a ‘ruler’ consisting of only a head donning the traditional ‘Malay’ Muslim cap, arms, and a combined symbol of stomach/liver/heart or what in the Malay speaking

world is the *hati* or the seat of all human emotion, compassion, pathos, empathy, and sympathy (see Lim 2002). The ‘chair’ upon which this figure sits is in Indonesian political imagery the symbol for a ruler, the ruler of the country.⁴² The ‘Chair’ is placed center stage and to the back.

With the Chair in place, the *goro-goro* begins – the time when the forces of good and evil battle for supremacy. The *dalang* enacts the war through various puppets from behind the screen, all the while repeating his mantra of ultimate power over all things and actions. During the *goro-goro*, the army/civilians on ‘this side’ of the screen take out ‘tape measures’ and begin taking stock and measure of the material world for sale, consumption, corruption. The soundtrack, which up to this point has been a somewhat subdued combination of jazz piano, traditional Japanese drums and gamelan cymbal, takes on a wild energy. At the height of the battle, as the *dalang* chants his power over all of human actions, the army/civilians stand again in single file, pick up plastic machine guns and ‘shoot’ into the air and then indiscriminately in the direction of the audience. The deep and menacing voice repeats: “I’m the one who controls what happens... I’m the one who watches and controls this stage...”

Having ‘master-minded’ the battle from behind the screen/scenes, the *dalang* makes his way once again to ‘this side’, the earthly realm of human fealty/frailty. Yet, this time he is ensnared by his creations, by his human puppets. The masses become the puppet master, forcing the once mighty *dalang* to move in accordance to its wishes, eventually vanquishing him. In the end the *dalang* devolves into a huddled mass.

⁴² Taken from Javanese court culture, in this case the throne as the seat of the king’s power, the chair as symbol for Suharto’s power typically is paired with other Javanese symbols of power such as the eternal flame placed atop the iconic throne and *kris* or dagger as surrogate phallus of power. Many artists have made artworks that utilize this constellation of symbols (throne, eternal flame, kris) to refer to questions of Presidential succession during the 1990s.



Figure 8.14 Heri Dono, still images from *The Chair*, 1994, performance, approx. 30 min., Adelaide Art Festival, Adelaide, Australia, (video courtesy of the artist, digitized from black and white VHS recording).

Figure 8.14 (Continued)



Figure 8.14 (Continued)



Figure 8.14 (Continued)



Figure 8.14 (Continued)



The above description provides only the basics of the heavily layered performance of *The Chair* as it was recorded for the occasion of the Adelaide Installation-Performance Art Festival in 1994. Before dealing with the issue of context, a number of features need teasing out. First, the artist has poetically and to great effect combined two formats of the *wayang*, the dance-drama *wayang wong* and the shadow play *wayang kulit*, to comment on a timely issue of the brutality of an authoritarian regime. It also points to the highly sensitive issue of succession regarding who would be groomed to take over from Suharto as President of the Republic of Indonesia. Other theatrical and artistic productions that deal with the same issue had been banned in Indonesia.⁴³ In addition, this piece was performed just months after the banning of the four cultural and political magazines discussed above, which effectively brought the brief period of 'political openness' to an end, and issues of freedoms of speech became the site of political urgency among artists of all kinds. Hence, it is no surprise that this performance-spectacle was not staged in Indonesia but abroad to an Australian audience appreciative of social commentary coming from within the visual arts of neighboring 'Third World' countries. While the *dalang* was played by the artist-author, namely Heri Dono himself, the other roles were played mainly by Asians from the area of Adelaide. Most of them were involved in dance, theater and the visual arts. The fact that the narrative was told in both Javanese and Indonesian makes it even more culturally 'specific' in the context of its performance-in-exile, speaking mainly to an Indonesian audience living abroad.

⁴³ For instance Riantiarno's theater production, *Sukses*, of 1990 was banned from being performed publicly in Jakarta and elsewhere. For critical commentary, see Michael Bodden, "Teater Koma's Sukses and Indonesia's New Order," *Asian Theater Journal* 14, no. 2 (1997); N. Riantiarno, "Sukses," (Jakarta: 1990).

The Chair was staged at the same festival as a re-staging of the *Kuda Binal*, which in its reincarnation included women performers dressed in bras and sarongs, a type of decorum not possible in a performance in Indonesia, who danced around the arena with the signs marking the different rounds of the performance. It was also more ‘staged’ in that instead of a community-based performance between the artist and non-art ‘*kaum marginal*’ representing themselves and their concerns, it enlisted the assistance of students of dance and theater. Instead of representing the local concerns of the ‘*kaum marginal*’ under such an oppressive regime, the piece spoke of the problem of endangered wildlife and the environment on a more universal, global level. Also unlike the performance in Yogyakarta in 1992, which was staged as an anti-establishment statement against the institutions of art and a commentary on the devastation of the environment through the processes of development, the 1994 restaging was part of an international art event that invited its various artists to participate and the performances and sites for which were planned months in advance. The work remained collaborative, but did the participants view their shared labor as one of a community self-empowered to represent themselves? How do culturally specific forms travel and in what way do these unfamiliar and deterritorialized spaces impact on the construction of temporary community? When asked if he concerned himself with issues such as commensurability and comprehension across cultural contexts, Heri Dono replied that while details were local, aesthetically and socially the work contains a universality that taps into the basic human condition in which we all have a stake.

Nonetheless, it was for their wholesale appropriation of traditional cultural forms for international venues, the discourse of which at the time stressed the use of ‘traditional’ and ‘indigenous’ materials in the art of non-Western contemporary art, that Heri Dono’s works discussed above have been accused by some as demonstrating

a kind of self-exoticization and neo-traditionalism for an international market.⁴⁴ While such accusations cannot be denied altogether, such ‘deterritorialized’ traditions in an international arena can also be seen as the artists’ political subjectivity publicized in an arena that disallows ‘full’ disclosure but that gives space to those statements that would otherwise not have been voiced publicly. This is particularly the case with *The Chair*. *The Chair* was restaged in 2001 in Yogyakarta to an audience that could perhaps more fully appreciate the iconography and symbolism, as well as content enacted by the various figures and characters. Yet, while its geographic site was now on Indonesian soil, its site of criticality was no longer the New Order and the authoritarian rule of its president. The *wayang* of *The Chair* was now a comment on the chaotic political situation in a post-Suharto scramble for political power among the various (including some anti-democratic) voices that had been silenced during the New Order but had emerged as part of Indonesia’s democratic reforms.

⁴⁴ From various interviews with artists and art critics in Indonesia in 1997 and 2001-2003. For discussions of such expectations in the ‘international’ arena see for example, Hal Foster, "Artist as Ethnographer," in *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*, ed. Goerge E. Marcus and Fred R. Meyers (Berekeley: University of California Press, 1990); T.K. Sabapathy, "International Contemporary Art: Artistic Movements within the Frameworks of International Contemporary Art: Some Implications" (paper presented at the Contemporary Art of the Non-Aligned Countries Exhibition and Seminar, Jakarta, April 29-30 1995); T.K. Sabapathy, "Introduction to the Themes of the Exhibition," in *Contemporary Art of the Non-Aligned Countries: Unity in Diversity in International Art Exhibition Catalogue* (Jakarta: Departmen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1995); Shohat and Stam, "Narrativizing Visual Culture: Toward a Polycentric Aesthetics."; Stam, "Palimpsestic Aesthetics: A Meditation on Hybridity and Garbage."; Caroline Turner, "Introduction: Internationalism and Regionalism: Paradoxes of Identity," in *Traditions and Change: Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Caroline Turner (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1993).

APPENDIX 1

PERNYATAAN DESEMBER HITAM

Mengingat bahwa sejak beberapa tahun yg lampau, kegiatan-kegiatan seni budaya dilaksanakan tanpa strategi budaya yang jelas maka kami menarik kesimpulan, bahwa pada pengusaha-pengusaha seni budaya sedikitpun tidak tampak wawasan terhadap masalah-masalah yg paling azasi dari kebudayaan kita. Ini pertanda bahwa sejak beberapa waktu suatu erosi spirituil sedang menghancurkan perkembangan seni budaya.

Karena itu maka kami merasa perlu untuk pada bulan desember 1974 yang hitam ini menyatakan pendirian kami tentang gejala yang tampak pada wujud seni-lukis Indonesia masa-kini.

- 1) Bahwa kepancaragam seni-lukis Indonesia merupakan kenyataan yang tidak dapat dimungkiri, akan tetapi kepancaragam ini tidak dengan sendirinya menunjukkan perkembangan yang baik.
- 2) Bahwa untuk perkembangan yang menjamin kelangsungan kebudayaan rohani yang berpangkal pada nilai-nilai kemanusiaan dan berorientasi pada kenyataan kehidupan social, budaya, politik dan ekonomi.
- 3) Bahwa kreativitas adalah kodrat pelukis yang menempuh berbagai cara untuk mencapai perspektif-perspektif baru bagi seni lukis Indonesia.
- 4) Bahwa dengan demikian maka identitas seni lukis Indonesia dengan sendirinya jelas ekistensinya.

Bahwa yang menghambat perkembangan seni lukis Indonesia selama ini adalah konsep-konsep usang yg masihdianut oleh establisment pengusaha-pengusaha seni budaya dan seniman-seniman yg sudah mapan. Demi keselamatan seni luki kita, maka kini sudah saatnya kita memberi kehormatan pada establisment tersebut, yaitu kehormatan purnawiraman seni budaya Indonesia.

APPENDIX 2

THE NEW ART MOVEMENT'S FIVE LINES OF ATTACK



Figure 9 1 The New Art Movement's Five Lines of Attack, 1979. Illus. in *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1979): xix.²⁹⁴

²⁹⁴ A slightly different version of *Lima Jurus* is contained in Asikin Hasan, *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia*, 1992: 6. The two versions are relatively the same. Hasan cites his source as the 1979 publication. Yet, there are some discrepancies, namely in that the copy he reproduces in his text

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contains references to specific types of art practices such as Installation, Conceptual, and Environmental Art as alternatives to the dominance of painting.

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