

B I N A L
A PROLOGUE TO BE
DISCUSSED

This writing will begin with a conclusion.
If *binal* is not *biennale*, then *binal* cannot
be the same as *biennale*.
(ed. Reversed from original text position)

(Sorry, the writing was back-to-front)

What I mean is, in our language, *binal* usually reminds us of the characteristics of a child or an animal, especially a horse. A child is dubbed *binal* if he is hard to control, or doesn't want to do as his parents say; a horse is called *binal* if he has wild whims or is difficult to rein. Sometimes *binal* is also associated with a particular quality in a woman, as appears in the expression *perempuan binal* (wild woman) or *cewek binal* (wild chick). Note too this metaphorical expression: '*that woman is like a wild horse*.'¹ So it is clear that there is no connection to *biennale*, which is a prestigious painting exhibition. According to a reliable dictionary, *biennale* means 'occurring every two years.'

So, both present in mutual opposition: *biennale* connotes regularity (an event that is held regularly, that is every two years) whilst *binal* connotes wildness. Both, borrowing from Levi-Strauss' terminology², contain oppositions of *order* and *disorder*.

Up to this point perhaps we might be reminded of the classifications made by Indonesian art critic, (dec.) Sanento Yuliman, of high fine art and low fine art.³ A *biennale* is certainly a carrier for high fine art (painting), but *binal* is neither high nor low. *Binal* wants to be sociable: sincere to the higher-ups, kind to the lower-downs. Because of its wildness, it is not tied to any classification, especially not those that tend to the hierarchic and anti-democratic. *Binal*, in its enthusiasm to open itself up, doesn't open up to attempts at decadent classification.

In a broader sociological context an artist who is called *binal* holds a socio-cultural function. This was discovered by Jonkopings:⁴ *Tandsticksfabrick Patent Paraffinerode Sakerhets.Tandstickor utan svafvel och fosfor Tanda endast mot ladans plan*. Jonkopings really wanted just to say that all of us are basically artists, because the word *seniman* (artist) is based on the words *seni* (art) + *man*, which means *manusia* (person) and *seni* (as in the title of Father Dick Hartoko's book). Meanwhile artist (in English) actually comes from the words *art* + *ist*, that is *art* and *ist* = a short form of *istri* (wife) meaning, artist is 'the art of a wife, for instance flower arranging or knitting.' The conflicting confusion between *binal* and *Biennale* is said to be sourced from a semiotic study that has been epidemic

¹ This expression is just an example, it is not meant to offend women.

² Claude Levi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning*, London: Routledge

³ Sanento Yuliman, "Seni Rupa Atas, Seni Rupa Bawah," dalam *Temp*, no. 45, 4 January 1992, p. 42-48

⁴ Jonkopings makes fire-lighters

in academic circles these past few years. Anthropologists who were interested in studying semiotics would certainly be familiar with Geertz' statement that:

The concept of culture I espouse..... is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs....

Humans are animals that are trapped in webs of meaning that they have determined themselves; in other words animals are humans that are not trapped in webs of meaning because they cannot spin them. That is why the *binal* is more chaotic than the *biennale*. That is culture.

Finally, permit us to offer our apologies if you've come across any swiping terrors, sorry....typing errors, here and there in this writing.

Yogyakarta 27, July 1992



trans.

- Why is your work so cheesy, Mas?
- + Because it's BINAL, dear