

Translation of "Rekaman diskusi Kaset 3"
Megan Hewitt

Discussion recording cassette 3:

Um...these people use masks...um...nuclear masks.

The title of this work is "*Kuda Binal*." This is very interesting because...um...people can instantly see it...um...because it is in an unusual place, not in a theatre but in a public place.

This is a work by Gentong Haryono Selo Ali. His work was also installed in front of the Binal, in *Purna Budaya* field.

This is a work by friends from KBS, *Kelompok Bulak Sumur*. They perform a dialogue on top of a bed. It is...um...not an afternoon bed, or an evening bed.¹ When they tire at the end of each day, they come down and continue the next, and so on.

This is the work of Dodi. The bike is made of straw. Not wrapped in straw but made of straw. It rained two days ago so...yes...now it is sagging.

This work is at the station. Friends of FSRD ISI. There is someone dressed as *Gatutkaca*², meaning that...um...the character *Gatutkaca* has been displaced by Superman or Superboy, or someone like that. Here the man goes around dressed as *Gatutkaca*...queuing for a ticket, walking up and down the train, he even used the city bus for two day...yes...dressed as *Gatutkaca*. At first he would dress up and just go home at the end of the day, doing his make-up there and coming out again the next. But on the third day he brought a bed and slept below the station.

On the other side, these paintings are typically mounted or hung on the wall, but here they are hung on the roof of the station.

This is Gatutkaca speaking with a women at PJKA, yes. Notice the tattoos.

Hahaha...

Um...who played Antok...Antok...

Oh excuse me, turn it over again.

This is *asongan* music. Friends of music.

This is a work by Oprasi and Hari Mul. Paying attention to real people with statues behind them on the right and left side.

This work is also at the station. Um...a piece like create a direct dialogue with the public.

No...no distance. This means that there is no distance, usually we know who is coming. The official buildings...um...exhibition. But there are a wide variety of groups there. From...um...pedicab drivers to people who are riding in economy class, even Bima can see it.

This is a photocopy of the Monalisa. The one with the mysterious smile, maybe a smirk. This one too. They dressed in white for several days. This is one where the audience can speak with the performers. The hand is made from meat, closed and placed in the corner

1 A reference to the film *Ranjang Siang, Ranjang Malam*.

2 A popular character from the Javanese *wayang* shadow play repertoire. He is a kind of superhero figure who has the ability to fly.

because of the smell. So, art can also smell...not just the smell of fresh paint but also a bad stench.

This is Jemek Supardi. Here he is performing a 24-hour pantomime at the opening. Oh...on the back...this was taken at 2pm. He started at 5pm on the 27th at the opening. No excuse me, the times are reversed.

This is a work by Tomon. It is at the lake in the valley of UGM. Tomon and his friends set up a stage for performance art.

This is...um...a piece presented at the Binal on *Gampingan Baru* street. It was created by artists living in a house on *Gampingan Baru*, with some participation from neighbors. The whole house was wrapped with...first with cartons, then the packaging of a wide range of products...cigarette packs, replon, anything. Advertisements from magazines were attached there as well. On June 2nd...um...students studying dance at ISI held a dance performance at the wrapped house. This is the scene of a tree from across the street, the trunk is also wrapped with advertisements.

Yes...thank you. Later we will have a closing event for the Binal. Friends, please feel free to join us tonight.

SUARA 4

We will continue our discussions in this final session by hearing from speakers from Jogja. Aris Arif Mundayat, whose essay you can read in the Binal tabloid.

Aris graduated from the faculty of Literature and Anthropology at UGM and is now a professor there. Aris has not written much in terms of mass media, but his lack of productivity is overcome by his ability to approach issues that we rarely speak about, especially in terms of Anthropological theory. The field of Anthropology is making new developments in the academic world. In his essay Aris explains several premises with great clarity, and presents several case-by-case studies of art in Indonesia. Perhaps even breaking away from art, as we discussed in the work of Bagong. I think that most of us have already read the essay so, Aris, feel free to speak more freely, to supplement or to clarify once more some of the issues in your essay. Aris, please, go right ahead.

ARIS

Thank you.

I began this writing based on my observations in Indonesia, especially...um...national rituals and ceremonies. There is a ceremony for civil servants every month on the 17th, then there is an event called FKY which is a ceremony for tourism, and many others organized by the state.

I see these ceremonies as forms of state media in Indonesia. State being defined not as the nation (*bangsa*) but as a system of power. The country is present in these ceremonies as a process, we might call it a hegemonic process or a...an arena for displaying the strength of the country. Through ceremony the state has the right to defend or to...to define culture and every other aspect of society.

Rituals—the ceremonies enacted by the state—are the center, the pivot, the engine, or nucleus of the political system in Indonesia. Perhaps this seems strange if seen...in terms of the concept of power. A ceremony is a site for reproducing and disseminating

discourse in order to be accepted by society. The ceremony is also a site of negotiation, a meeting point for society and the state.

Why does that negotiation take place? To answer this, will borrow a concept from Gramsci. It may sound very theoretical but I honestly want to avoid the theoretical as much as possible.

Now, ahem...In Gramsci's view, the ruling class is able to implement power only if their ideology can create a space for culture and class values for their opponents, the oppressed classes.

For the hegemony to continue, it needs to find a space for the process of negotiation such as in ritual and ceremony. This is asymmetrical, meaning that it is an unbalanced process of negotiation because only the dominant state ideology has the means to produce symbols.

The negotiation—the encounter within ritual—represents an intellectual discourse... among various other relations.

But the tendency in a country like I defined previously is for the state establish strength only it can define the culture of the society under control according to the bourgeois ideology of the state. Something like that.

That is...is...the sort of concept that I'm presenting here.

Even if we can already feel the strength of a state defining all aspects of culture, I still believe that the community can find space to create a "counter discourse."³

A counter-discourse reproduces symbols of resistance, symbols of opposition that we can see in some of the artworks I will discuss here.

I'm interested in these forms of symbolic resistance because they are symbolic of communities that exist within a strong state attempting to define the culture of the people. Many experts say that there is no space for resistance—that it cannot create oppositional political consciousness. I want to attempt to show that there is resistance here.

We can look at the rituals discussed earlier, for example. Or at what Benjamin Walter discusses. He says that the life of a piece of art begins in ritual, that it is enlivened by ritual.

But, with new phases of development emerge new mechanisms in art; new reproductive mechanisms like photography. These new instruments and mechanisms can be emancipatory, freeing art from ritual life. Something like that.

I want to talk about the ways in which the state is present in artwork, and how then does society, or artists, create counter-discourse?

Ahem, there are billboards at the end of Malioboro, at the old fountain and post office in front of the *Seni Sono* building. It seems that the state is symbolically present within these billboards, especially in the series of words.

Much like the two billboards posted on the *Seni Sono* building in July. The first for FKY (*Festival Kesenian Yogyakarta* or Yogyakarta Arts Festival), and the second helping to promote "Visit ASEAN."

The year of "Visit ASEAN" we could analyze the presence of other countries involved. The billboards in front of *Sini Sono* are connected to Independence Day.

3 He uses both Indonesian and English terms, "contra wacana" and "counter discourse."

They have since been changed, but they used to say, “Jogja, the Comfortable City.”⁴ In my analysis I see a kind of “fever” for creating billboards that appeared in the 1980s. It was an official effort to beautify the city and support the development of tourism, if I’m not mistaken.

It’s as though the artists involved in making billboards were drawn into the discourse of tourism, which then reflected back on the artists by being absorbed into an economic discourse.

Like in the 60s when Indonesia hosted the Asia Games. Many artists manufactured designs for hotel interiors and monuments. They engaged in the ritual.

It seems as if the billboards presented miniature forms of the state. They were state monuments.

In the 70s, students and social science professors protested many of the billboards as well as the *Taman Mini Indonesia Indah* monument built by Suharto’s wife in Jakarta.⁵

These projects continue despite protests.

Billboards like monuments showing conventional iconography and expressions of the victory of modernity. But, we should consider the brilliance of the past a victory, rather than modernity. Why? Because the very often these billboards show paintings of traditional objects, dance or fabrics from Java.

They are thematically traditional, just like *Taman Mini Indonesia Indah* from which Ben Anderson has done an analysis.

The prominence of traditional characteristics is an attempt to show Indonesian culture as something friendly, virtuous and perfect. What actually occurs is not city beautification, but a display of the deterioration of modernity in the economic pursuits of tourism.

Why? Because as tourism grows local people are victimized into assisting in tourist rituals.

...There is something missing from my text. A common issue when writing on a computer, suddenly things just go missing...just the section on tourism is missing....

We can also see forms of social protest presented in artworks at the Binal.

In this case, money and the state are at the center of the discussion. The billboard is a meeting point for artists, the state and money.

This complex—between artists, the state and money—emerges from a shift in priorities; from artistic to economic themes, and then from economic to state themes. From all of this comes the emergence of popularity. It’s unfortunate that the *Syamsul* group is not here; if they were they could share some rather interesting information.⁶

Now, the relationship between art, money and the state represents a cultural process from a hegemonic nation that defines the culture of society according to their bourgeois culture.

This then reinforces the dominance of the state over the people. The dominance of the state is strengthened as a source of legitimacy when artworks are attached to the state;

4 “Jogja Berhati Nyaman”

5 This is an amusement part in Jakarta that represents the cultural diversity of Indonesia in the form of miniature houses and a man-made lake that reconstructs the island configurations of Indonesia.

6 reference?

they are completely caught up in the discourse of the state. Artists help to strengthen state hegemony and the state then becomes the sole source of legitimization. The legitimacy of the state is in its popularity.

When artists are attached to the state in this way, the people (*rakyat*) lose energy and are put in a position of weakness within the negotiations discussed earlier. They are too easily subordinated to and defined by the state.

This happens because the state provides services to subordinated classes, at the same time destroys their culture and replaces it with the official, state sanctioned culture attached to artists. The destruction of culture occurs at the symbolic level. It has to do with mystification, which is a difficult term to define in Indonesian. There is mystification of bourgeois ideology when the state becomes an icon, a sacred symbol. Artists contribute to the process of creating that icon when people attach themselves to the power of the state as the bearer or owner of the means of symbolic production.

The presence of the state is very important for artists. Firstly, because the state legitimates meaning according to a discourse that positions the state at the top of the hierarchy, such as the artist Bagong Kussudiarjo. I don't think he is present here today. He created popular art by finding legitimacy through the state, rather than through the beauty of the contents of the art.

He is better known for colossal dance performances created for the state, rather than the beauty of the artworks alone. Here...there is...maybe an outside critic who can interpret these artworks. I am not an artist so I don't really understand the styles of art myself.

Bagong's search for legitimization is more of a process of involution, meaning that it is not a significant development. His art actually complicates the movement and progress of art. The more Bagong creates, the more *gedruk* his dance becomes.⁷ There is not progress in his art, just a complication of the movement of art as a thing of beauty.

How can this kind of involution occur in art? It seems to have occurred because Bagong was too interested in state rituals, to the point where the presence of the state was too strong. His works are now defined by the state, not by Bagong himself.

By attaching himself to the state he became an artist commissioned by the state for state interests. His works are shown day in and day out at city anniversaries and military events.

Bagong's involvement in these state rituals raises an awareness of the strength of state mythology. Displays of art always have a relationship with history. Bagong presents dance performances in which old histories are separated from the present, from the *Majapahit* Kingdom⁸ to the history of the New Order. This is the mystification of state ideology. History presented through symbols in dance and colorful costumes enliven a fantasy of the grand hegemony of the state. The state manipulates traditional symbols for the legitimization of its own greatness. This constitutes the greatness of past, more than that of the present.

In the works of Bagong we can see how the socialization of an attachment to the state occurs by looking at his school of art and the many students involved. The state is the center of reference. That is more or less Bagong Kussudiarjo's position.

7 A pounding or stomping on the earth.

8 12th-14th Century in East Java

I'd like to turn to the topic of Joko Pekik.

Joko Pekik, for example, seems to represent more themes from the people (*tema rakyat*). The fight for the little people (*rakyat kecil*) is a kind of obsession that colors his works and penetrates his thinking. He understands that he faces an impenetrable wall of political realities, so he chooses to continue his struggle through painting.

I will discuss some of his characteristic paintings, especially one that goes by the title “*Kuli Perempuan*” or “Female Coolies,” if I’m not mistaken. He painted...um...several women working at *Bringharjo*.⁹ A red car sits in the background. There is a contrast between the two, but the message it is not immediately apparent. Joko Pekik wanted to point to a social imbalance that was immediately apparent, encouraging viewers to ask questions and enter into the painting by conducting their own individual analysis of the work. That analysis is what differentiates Joko Pekik’s work from Bagong. Every person who sees the work of Joko Pekik is also present in the history of Indonesia, they enter the work in this way. Bagong Kussudiarjo, however, presents history in a way that is easily understood but doesn’t raise any historical issues. Joko Pekik’s work, however, is colored by social imbalances spanning the length of history. This is what becomes the analysis for understanding his paintings.

It is not easy to understand how...um...Joko Pekik’s paintings creating a counter-discourse. Why? Because the connections between Joko Pekik and the Binalare still influenced by the state, whether we like it or not. Heavily influenced.

It is difficult to engage in any form of criticism towards the state because there is always some sort of state influence. The state is present in Joko Pekik’s imagination and in his paintings.

I’ll speak about this in the context of language.

Joko Pekik is from Purwodadi, far from the center of high language (*kromo*). He grew up speaking informal Javanese (*ngoko*) with his family. He would occasionally use formal Javanese (*kromo inggil*) outside of his family.

The Javanese language context is present in Joko Pekik’s work by combining *kromo* with *ngoko*. I discuss *kromo* in this example because many people find it difficult to understand the social difference between a worker—here as a female worker...a female coolie in the painting—and an expression of suffering or sadness. This goes for the red sedan as well as the big buildings in the background.

The connection between the female coolie and the setting is not immediately apparent... this is a social discrepancy. People are slow to respond to this.

This process of differentiation is influenced by the inclusion of *kromo* language in his painting, as well as an awareness of the state in his thinking.

Maybe this is different from the paintings of Semsar Siahaan. I...I...don’t really know Semsar, and I’ve only heard of his paintings from Australian news written by Irip.

They are still very different. First, Semsar is not from Java. He is *Batak* (from Kalimantan). He is also a military child. He lived in Yugo...in Yugoslavia, and went to school in San Francisco. His life is influenced by cultures outside of *kromo* and *ngoko* culture. *Kromo* doesn’t enter into his painting.

⁹ A traditional market in Jogjakarta.

In one work by Semsar entitled “*Penunggang*” (“Rider”), there is an official wearing safari clothes, riding another person...a worker, I think, perhaps a skinny farmer. The official rides the farmer while holding onto his neck. Next to his left foot there is the number two, perhaps representing *Golkar* (a political party).

There is also some Javanese fabric on the official. In Joko Pekik’s work we saw a hierarchy preserved by a system of power in Java. He doesn’t attack Java, but rather a dominant characteristic of Javanese that has become pathological in the political process of democratization. The state is present in art. My paper is rather long and perhaps somewhat complicated. This is just the foreword; hopefully everyone had a chance to read it earlier. Thank you.

VOICE 4

Thank you, Aris. I have a few notes to add.

Um...we’ve heard Aris speak about the concepts of state and political language, and such.

Actually, this is not how we normally understand the concept of the state.

Something concrete, bureaucratic, with officials and so on.

Here we are talking about the nation state.

So...

Hah...because...because...I conclude with this because Aris also quotes from Anderson.

Yes...concerning imagined communities.

The state is a representation of an imagined community, of a nation.

The concept of the nation is not concrete, yet we still imagine it to be so.

Um...this is one point that I have noted.

There are several problems with this, such as what Aris has pointed to from the perspective of the politics of language in the paintings of Semsar and Joko Pekik.

This is a problem in the politics of language itself.

Aris has not explicitly touched upon these aspects, but they certainly concern the paintings of Joko and Semsar.

So...um...painting is like a language that creates a space for counter discourse, and it uses power and authority as a point of reference.

I think that is all from my notes.

I’m not the speaker here.

I’m the moderator.

ARIS

Maybe I can make a correction.

It is not my intention to say that the state is the nation.

It is not the nation.

But an ideological system that...that possesses and controls people without having a connection to the nation. People do, however, feel that there is something outside of them that is controlling them. The nation is a form of control because of its strength.

The nation is not just present in reality, but it is also present in imagination.

Thank you.

VOICE 4

Yes.

Okay. I will continue.

Um...I think it will be best for us to go into the forum now because there are many issues of interest that we have not thought enough about, especially concerning art and artists normally confined to paints and canvases.

We only occasionally think about these things.

With that, let's open the forum.

Perhaps it's best if we "ping-pong" comments one-by-one, not every three.

Yes...wait. I see that Leak has put his hand up first.

Go ahead.

Please introduce yourself first.

LEAK

Thank you.

I am Leak, from...from...here.

I want to ask Aris about his illustration of Bagong as having undergone a process of mystification because of his proximity to the state, among other things.

I also want to ask about Semsar and Joko Pekik, have they not experienced the same process? Because they are also close to the state in the sense that they are...opposed to the state, but still actually quite close.

Did he not experience the same process as Bagong?

The process of mystification. That is all.

Thank you.

I think Aris can reply directly.

ARIS

Thank you.

Honestly...it is very difficult to translate mystification.

Earlier I discussed the works by Bagiong as pointing to the strength of the state.

The state is present in his artwork, there is an extraordinary closeness with the state.

At the same time, while the works of Joko Pekik are very different from Bagong, there is still a connection to the state. Which means to say that the state continues to control the imagination of Joko Pekik. We can look at this, for example, from the perspective of resistance. Joko Pekik's paintings represent an expression of criticism. What is most interesting is that this is part of the process of mystification...state mystification is strengthened by Joko's Pekik's statement. I quote here when I say that there is actually no resistance.

He...he is only presenting a criticism. That's it.

But we can also say that with his criticism he is "*mbronjol*." *Mbronjol* means that he is free from his own grip.

In the context of the politics of language, the *ngoko*-ization emerges from the critique, from the work of art, as something that can “*mbrojol*,” free the grip. Why? Because *kromo* usually dominates.

Kromo is not actually a language that he...possesses. What dominates here is *ngoko*. *Ngoko* frees the usual grip and hierarchy of language in this critique.

There is a duality in this example.

On one side the works of Joko Pekik point to the strength of the state. On the other, he is able to find a place that has not yet been dominated by the state. That is what emerges in the painting “*Ringsek*” (“Wrecked”). The title is very appropriate.

The critique is clear from the title, the painting is the critique.

So does this...does this also develop the mystification of state power?

It is possible. But there is another side, the side of critique within. I have not called this “resistance” because Joko Pekik doesn’t want to call it that.

Counter discourse is perhaps more appropriate. There is a counter discourse facing the dominant discourse. It is not enacting a mystification, but if the counter discourse is held by the state, if it is owned by the state, then there will be artists to support it. This means that the state experiences a mystification. It becomes greater in a mythological sense.

It doesn’t work like that in the works of Joko Pekik because of the critique, because there is a counter discourse present. Yes, maybe Semsar will make this clearer.

His artworks are very...look very much like forms of resistance. Demonstrations and writings about returning the land usually provide the background for his painting exhibitions.

Or he depicts people lying miserably on the ground to be trampled by officials.

There has never been a style of painting like this... not yet. Maybe there is an exception...um...but I have not looked closely at his...um...paintings. Maybe if there was an image of a flyover in the background, I think that would very interesting.

That’s what I think is different.

SUARA 4

Okay. Um...I see many people raising their hands.

I must give priority to...to the people who raised their hands first.

I not sure exactly who it was, but if I’m not mistaken, it was Harsono. Go ahead, Harsono.

I don’t think you need to introduce yourself again.

HARSONO

Thank you.

I want to ask...um...is the state the only dominant factor? I also see capitalism as being another dominant factor. That’s my first comment.

My second is an example from...um...Bagon Kussudiarjo. Is Bagong truly conscious of what he creates in a work of art, or is there an ideological awareness supporting...um...the government ideology? Or an ideology from the state that proceeds his own consciousness? Is it an economic awareness...um...of capitalism? This...this...

problems like this emerge when...um...when you mentioned earlier that the state was supported by artists and the artists gain legitimacy through popularity.

The problem is whether the popularity makes Bagong Kussudijajo rich, if...um...his goal is to achieve wealth or survival. This is not an ideology because it is difficult to distinguish and monitor closely. Also, with the work of Joko Pekik, it seems appropriate that there is only the state if we see it from the perspective of state ideology, but what other forms or problems influence his works? I have also seen the psychological obstacles from groups forced to join along with the power of the state. It is a form of hegemony, but I also wonder whether this strength is born outside of the state. This is something rarely discussed.

Thank you.

SUARA 4

Go ahead, Haris.

HARIS

Yes, yes.

My questions intersect with those presented by Harsono, I strongly agree with your questions.

In my paper I have only presented two sides of the discourse of art: the state and the artists.

Harsono wonders if capitalism does not also play a role.

What I have added is whether the strength of the state doesn't also play a role.

I think that there are four typical communities that give...um...shape...um...give meaning to the discourse of art and culture. The state, artists, capitalism, and we must not leave out the scholars.

Each one tends to evaluate art and culture, and they each have their own definition.

This is rarely mentioned.

So I ask, what is the function of scholars here?

I see limits to these explanations, like what Aris presented here. There are limits to the explanation of these cultural symptoms. Is there not another function other than what is developing...from the community of scholars to think about and plan the way culture should be engineered? But most scholars do not contribute their ideas to cultural development. That's what I think.

Thank you.

ARIS

Okay, from Harsono's question concerning whether there are...sources that work to define or influence these processes, other than artists?

I am sure...that the position of the state is...is very strong. As I clarified at the beginning of my paper, the context between artists, the state, and money—or we might call it the context of the state, artists and capitalism—are what bring about changes in thematic priorities; from art to economy, and then to the theme of the state. All of this then becomes the theme of popularity.

The state and capitalism share the same history that occurs in one place, namely the state. Therefore the state continues to define its people, culture, and community, at the same time destroying culture in order to incorporate state culture created by the bourgeoisie. That's how it is applied. If we talk about the bourgeoisie, then we have to talk about capitalism.

This is capitalism supported by the state. It is a complex conspiracy that we cannot separate out; we might call it a capitalist era.

Other than capitalism, there are many other sources that influence artists, especially the historical journey of...of individual artists. Many artists like Joko Pekik have experienced a similar fate by existing in an era that has conditioned their thinking. Their artistic imagination, whether they like it or not, is connected to their background experiences in the context of the state. That is what our awareness to the strength of state ideology.

Despite this, artists such as Joko Pekik do still have strength. They engage in discourse resistance that is counter to the dominant discourse. They do this, and it is very influential.

The work of Joko Pekik sounds...speaks the language of politics by combining *ngoko* with *kromo*. His works contain more *kromo* than *ngoko*, and the strong presence of *kromo* shows the strong influenced by a state political system that supports hierarchy. That's what I think.

And then, the other question. I am not really...

Can you repeat it briefly?

HARIS

In short, what is the function of scholars, other than their role in developing explanations?

ARIS

The function of scholars.

Hehehe...

Sometime I joke that scholars don't have any function. Not just scholars, I think.

What function?

Yes...I think my writing, other than providing explanation, also presents a critique of art.

The people here are not the only objects, I am also an object.

But yes, there is the creation of a practical counter discourse. Painting is a practice that comes from a system of one's political stance.

This essay is a practice...of my own stance. Roughly something like that.

Now, what is a counter discourse? Everyone can define themselves. This is necessary in a state.

For example, Rudini says that I do not understand people who are not concerned with discipline.

But, did we not struggle this long to strengthen the Javanese language?¹⁰

10 His wording is strange here...Dan kalau kita lihat misalnya, saya...kapan itu Rudini mengatakan bahwa saya samasekali tidak paham kenapa ada orang-orang yang tidak suka dengan ketertiban. Seperti itu. Bukankah yang kita perjuangkan selama ini kan

Our struggle is to find togetherness.

It seems that Rudini cannot escape from his military attitude. His tendency, which also exists in politics, is to teach others to be just like him.

Such things cannot determine a dynamic state; they dynamics can only be determined by the emerging turbulence.

If all artists attach to the state, what kind of dynamics will emerge?

We'll return to where we started.

When an artist is attached to the state, he is attached to the rituals.

It is like Walter Benjamin said, that from the beginning...the ancient past, not the traditional, but the past where ritual became art and art became a parasite of ritual. Then mechanical reproduction emancipated art from ritual. Now, if everything is attached to the state, everything will be seen as a setback.

That is the function of my writing.

I am not harrowing any development. I am less interested in that because development already has its own connotation.

No.