

Chapter Two

An Illustration of the Dynamics of the Discussion of Postmodernism and the IX Jakarta Fine Art Biennale

After becoming widely known in the Western hemisphere in the 1970s, the terms “postmodern” and “postmodernism,” only surfaced in Indonesia in the 1990s. The first time that these terms emerged in a piece of Indonesian writing was in the publication of an inaugural journal of the National University in 1991, which proposed postmodernism as an introductory theme. Following this, the emergence of these terms occurred in the scope of literature and theatre, and a paper by cultural expert, Nirwan Dewanto, for the National Culture Congress held from 28 October – 1 November 1991.

Another event, characterized in relation to the early emergence and widespread use of the terms “postmodern” and “postmodernism” in Indonesia, was a seminar held in cooperation with the Development Studies Program within the graduate program of Kristen Satyawacana University, which put forth the theme “Postmodernism: Relevance for Contemporary Indonesian Human Rights.” This seminar held from 8-9 October 1993, featured figures such as: Goenawan Mohamad, Bob Sugeng Hadiwinata, Tommy F. Awuy, Komarudi Hidayat, Keith Foulcher, and George Junus Aditjondoro as speakers. Because the speakers each represented different disciplinary scopes, it was not surprising that each viewed postmodernism from a different perspective. Nirwan Dewanto noted one of the conclusions that emerged:

“Last year at a seminar in Salatiga, an anthropologist stated that Semar is a postmodern figure because of his mixed identity, both man and woman as well as god and commoner. Further, the figure of King Prasojo, a carpenter from the village of Njobmor, Klaten, was called a postmodern figure because he had traded by carrying his load (*berdagang dengan pikulan*) on a pole for thirty-years, an act not fit with modern economic practices.”³³

After this event a number of articles emerged in the mass media about postmodernism. In the weekly magazine, *Tempo*, Arief Budiman published the article “Posmo, What?” (*Posmo, Apa Sih?*) on 16 October 1993. This article was followed by Bob Sugeng Hadiwinata’s article “Kang Prasojo’s Postmodernism” (*Pasca-Modernisme-nya Kang Prasojo*) published on 23 October 1993. Then, in a language and literature workshop held on 21 October 1993, Ariel Heryanto presented a paper entitled “Language Month in the year of Postmodernism” (*Bulan Bahasa di Tahun Postmodernisme*), which was then published on 26-27 October 1993 in the daily newspaper *Republika*. Another event raising the issue of postmodernism was a seminar entitled “The Postmodern Community and Clash of Civilization” (*Masyarakat Pasca-Modern dan Benturan Antar Peradaban*) held at the Institute of Religious and Philosophical Studies on 21 October 1993. Further, in a lengthy interview published on 12 December 1993 in the newspaper *Kompas*, philosopher Frans Magnis Suseno commented on the issue, stating that the emergence of postmodernism in Indonesia was “...a sign of intellectual shallowness.”³⁴ These events show how during the 1990s, “postmodern” and “postmodernism,” gained the attention of many groups in Indonesia.

2.1 An Illustration of Discussion Regarding Postmodernism, Leading up to BSRJ IX

Within the scope of Indonesian art discourse the use of this term began at about the same time. Seeds of this debate could be sensed with the emergence of opinion related to the term “postmodernism” and new tendencies in the work of Indonesian artists. In an article published in *Kompas* on 3 December 1998, entitled “The 9th Art Biennale, Trying to Capture Current

33 ³³ Nirwan Dewanto “Carut Marut yang Bikin Kagum dan Cemas,” journal kebudayaan Kalam, edition 1-1994, p. 4.

34 ³⁴ Quoted by Nirwan, see Nirwan Dewanto, *ibid* p. 4.

Phenomena,” (*Biennale Seni Rupa Ke-9, Mencoba Menangkap Fenomena Zaman*) it was explained:

“The Jakarta Art Biennale (biannually) is returning for the 9th time, to be held from 17 December until 17 January 1994 at Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM) Jakarta [...] This exhibition basically wants to capture recent phenomena and tendencies. According to Jim Supangkat, since the 1980s—in fact even during the period before that **namun masih timbul tenggelam--** whereas currently it felt increasingly as if the boundaries of various kinds of art were blurring. At that time alternative forms of media were emerging in the form of installation art, performance art, video art, and photography, all, which showed a divergence from previous concepts. This new wave was then often associated with this new flows of thinking, namely postmodernism.”³⁵

A number of articles in the mass media published reports of the IX Jakarta Fine Art Biennale’s press conference, which was attended by Astari Rasjid as the chief organizer, Mara Karma as the head curator, and members (Jim Supangkat and Toety Herati), as well as cultural expert Goenawan Mohamad. Other curators included Sri Warso Wahono and G. Sidharta, while Ikranegara was unable to attend.³⁶ At this press conference Jim Supangkat stated that the concept of BSRJ IX constituted a “...new tradition” in the history of Jakarta’s Biennale at Taman Ismail Marzuki, which was held for the first time in 1974. The plan for this exhibition in fact was the realization of a Biennale that had been postponed for one year and was supposed to have occurred in 1992.

Besides attempting to show “new trends” in the development of contemporary Indonesian art, BSRJ IX was considered different because “masters” were not displayed nor were awards given to the participants as had been in the case in previous BSRJ.³⁷ Through this event Jim hoped that new names would emerge on the Indonesian art scene.³⁸ The organizers of BSRJ IX planned to display the work of 41 young artists, under the age of 45—from Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, and Bali. BSRJ IX also planned to hold side events such as seminars, artist meetings, and art exchanges.

Before the opening of BSRJ IX, reaction against postmodernism in relation to Indonesian art emerged through in an article written by art critic Agus Dermawan entitled, “**Plesetan Postmodernisme di Seni Rupa**,” published on 12 December 1993 in *Kompas*. This article was published alongside the interview with Frans Magnis Suseno about “intellectual shallowness.” While not explicitly related to the connection of postmodernism and BSRJ IX, one argument in Agus’s article targeted “...species *posmo* connected to the development of Indonesian art.”³⁹ It stated:

“There is a hype around the latest Indonesian art that it tends towards an understanding of posmo. With the imposition of this argument, through a number of examples of work, which are far from relevant, there is an attempt to assert an understanding of posmo within fine art, or to search for it until it exists. Until **si penguar** – as the supplier of posmo in this country, that again, is not even totally modern.”⁴⁰

Agus also argued that, “Excess against elements of modernity definitely occurred in late-capitalistic countries, like in Western Europe and America. Postmodernism was born in order to give a new

35 ³⁵ “Biennale Seni Rupa Ke-9, Mencoba Menangkap Fenomena Zaman,” *Kompas*, 3 December 1993.

36 ³⁶ See *Kompas* (12/3/1993), *ibid*; see also “Biennale ke-9 di TIM dengan Suatu Tradisi Baru,” *Media Indonesia* published 4 December 1993; and see also *Suara Perbaharuan* published 15 December 1993 “Tanngal 17 December 1993-17 January 1994, Biennale Seni Rupa IX di Jakarta”

37 ³⁷ *Media Indonesia* published (12/4/1993) *ibid*.

38 ³⁸ See *Media Indonesia* (12/4/1993) *ibid*. See also *Suara Perbaharuan* published (12/15/1993), *ibid*.

39 ³⁹ Agus Dermawan T., “Plesetan Postmodernisme di Seni Rupa,” *Kompas*, 12 December 1993.

40 ⁴⁰ Agus Dermawan T., (12/12/1993), *ibid*.

function to the search for excess and the extreme attitude of modernity.”⁴¹ Agus Dermawan stated that he agreed with Denny J.A.’s opinion in the article “Merem Postmodernism” (3/12/1993, published in correlation with the BSRJ IX press release). Denny’s article explicitly stated that the discussion of postmodernism amongst intellectuals related to various modes of thought—whether written, “...from a broad understanding of feminism, religion, culture, politics, and literature.”⁴²—was actually irrelevant if one looked at the condition of Indonesian modernity, which was very different than the condition of Western modernity. Denny explained that there were three elements of Western modernity that had become extreme and challenged by postmodernism including: common sense, knowledge, and anthropocentrism. From there he concluded that in Indonesia these three elements of modernity, “...were new, and must be supported in order to reach a level of maturity...we can use the example of cooking rice as an analogue. In the West, rice has already been cooked. The fire itself should be lowered so that the rice does not burn. In contrast, for us the rice is not yet cooked, why must we lower the fire.”⁴³

In his article “Plesetan...” Agus Dermawan agrees and more or less takes up the assumption that had already been made by Denny J.A. This can be seen in the sentence, “...in fact, to call something modern we are still nervous, even more so to follow the crowds of postmodernism. So that there is an impression that postmodernism in Indonesia is merely for show. Or at the least, an intellectual trend...”⁴⁴ Agus claimed that, “the imposition of posmo in Indonesian art stems from the writing or art critique that attempts to “make-postmodern” the works of art that already exist, artworks that in reality represent conventional conceptions. It could also be from the general threat of modernity that is not hooked on postmodernism. The prolongation of thinking (and writing), the suppression of ideas and the “advancement” of culture, stimulates a person to the manipulation of philosophy.”⁴⁵

Agus Dermawan’s article was seen as a rather scathing criticism, specifically to those who were directly attacked. Its form was not only towards “suppliers/dealers of posmo in this country,” but also pointed at those referred to as “...Indonesian artists who lacked skill, vision, and intention.” In detail his argument stated:

Deviation that has a ‘wah’ vision such as that very easily stimulates those who lack skill, vision, and intention. This could also stimulate those that wish to quickly move beyond their capacity. ‘Rather than being helpless in regards to modern conventions, then enter postmodernism, where anything is allowed...with that a work works of ‘art’ will be born as if in the jungle, color added to canvas through the leap of an arrow. Then comes dirty cloth spotted with paint, hung on dilapidated on buildings. That is posmo. Then a row of palm leaf ribs emerge displayed and composed in the yard of a house or stacks of wood placed in the middle of the village. Various installations that are profane, decadent, and of progressive origin, making true installation artists uneasy. Even Marsinah’s art, whose performance remains unrealized, is quietly claimed as posmo. Works of “art” made with no base are falsely interpreted as the child of a creature named posmo based on a false terminology. Its presence is hastily authorized as an important part of the era prior to the 21st century, which must be exposed everywhere. The reception of posmo is quickly bought up by artists that wish to be called “advanced” through the creation of work that aims to be more and more “posmo.” Creations that are already posmo are re-appropriated by posmo in order to justify that posmo art exists. The coercion of posmo thinking and the force that postmodern art exerts on other forms continues rolling like a snowball, growing continually larger. And finally art in Indonesia, in a country that is in fact far from postmodernism now moves towards the abyss of disaster.”⁴⁶

41 ⁴¹ See Agus Dermawan T. (12/12/1993), *ibid.* See also Denny J.A.’s article “Merem Postmodernisme,” *Kompas* 3 December 1993.

42 ⁴² Denny J.A. (*Kompas*, 12/3/1993), *ibid.*

43 ⁴³ See Denny J.A. (12/3/1993), *ibid.*

44 ⁴⁴ Agus Dermawan T. (12/12/1993), *op cit.*

45 ⁴⁵ See Agus Dermawan T. (12/12/1993), *ibid.*

46 ⁴⁶ Agus Dermawan T. (12/12/1993), *ibid.*

Not long after the publication of “Plesetan...,” painter and critic Sri Warso Wahono (who was also a member of the board of TIM curators) published the article “Postmodernism and Indonesian Artists” on 19 December 1993. Amongst the arguments he suggested was the question of the tendencies found in the work of a number of foreign artists (amongst them: Joseph Beuys, Man Ray, Max Ernst, Alexander Calder, Marinus Boezem, Rui Sekido, Christo, Maciada, and Yoong Young Suk) who he stated, “make up the artistic branch of posmo art.”⁴⁷ In one of the sections of this article he explained that these artists “...were received and supported by the community as postmodern with roots based on modernism.”⁴⁸ Sri Warso’s version of postmodernism was written as follows:

“...post-modern must be defined as a new renaissance in behavior until now that has had both a positive and negative impact on mankind. This renaissance arises transcendently in the form of a denial against old values...a number of western socio-cultural experts view postmodernism as a new moral trend, which arises as a result of a new culture of marginalized global communities, which have been quickly passed up by capitalism and the world market. This new moral trend symbolically moves into the currents of modern life in realms including art and will result in a phenomenological shift of old powers, which generally have been exploited by parties that monopolize life.”⁴⁹

Sri Warso then explicitly questioned the relationship of this issue with Indonesian artists:

“Is it true, has postmodernism struck Jakarta? Is it true that Indonesian artists who are still agrarian, have suddenly passed into the post modern? If this is true where does this philosophy come from?”⁵⁰

Without drawing conclusions such as the claim of “force” or “postmodernization” such as had been made by Agus Dermawan, Sri Warso’s article did not rush into judgments. He hoped that there would be further discussion of the issue of postmodernism that had been raised by the BSRJ IX press release. This attitude can be seen in the statement:

“If their new spectacle was later interpreted as a denial of old patterns of art, worth debating are the studies such as those done by the writer’s explanations above...It is here where one’s level and clarity of thinking can be tested. When the slurs against Indonesian modern art have not yet ended, will we be ready to receive the next cultural abuse, merely because of the attitude of “postmo” Indonesia...”⁵¹

Sri Warso’s arguments regarding postmodernism and Indonesian art continued during BSRJ IX.

2.2 BSRJ IX di TIM, 21 December 1993 – 17 January 1994

Due to an obstacle that was not clearly explained, BSRJ XI that had been planned to open on 17 December was pushed back and opened instead on 21 December 1993. In a report, published in a daily newspaper, Astari Rasjid, the chief organizer stated that because of limited time and facilities provided at TIM the organizing committee was forced to push back the schedule and reduce the number of artists able to participate in the exhibition. He stated further, “...without reducing the quality. What is important is that the foundation and goals of the Biennale are

47 ⁴⁷ See Sri Warso Wahono “Postmodern dan Seniman Indonesia,” *Kompas*, 19 December 1993.

48 ⁴⁸ Sri Warso Wahono (12/19/1993), *ibid.*

49 ⁴⁹ Sri Warso Wahono (12/19/1993), *ibid.*

50 ⁵⁰ Sri Warso Wahono (12/19/1993), *ibid.*

51 ⁵¹ Sri Warso Wahono (12/19/1993), *ibid.*

maintained and preserved.”⁵² An article published in correlation with the exhibition’s opening provided this explanation:

“If the three principle lines of art (painting, sculpture, graphic arts) reflect the aesthetic principles of modern art, then the tendency of “one path,” dismantling boundaries which arose in the 1980s, reveal post-modern tendencies... The biannual fine art exhibition, the IX Jakarta Fine Art Biennale, which will be held at the Jakarta Cultural Center, Taman Ismail Marzuki (PKJ-TIM) from 21 December 1993 until 17 January 1994, will also show the signs of postmodernism in the sector of fine art.”⁵³

On 21 December 1993, Moerdiono, who at that time was the Secretary of State, opened BSRJ IX. A number of daily newspapers published reports regarding the opening of the exhibition, describing the environment that could be seen at this event. The work of Semsar Siahaan entitled, “**Penggalian Kembali**” was reported to be the exhibition’s most interesting object.⁵⁴ This piece was in the form of an entrenchment measuring 9 x 3.5 meters, dug in an old exhibition room of TIM. At the base of this entrenchment, which had a depth of 2 meters, were sculptures, resembling scattered human corpses, with a number of torches hung around the room. The somber atmosphere that included the ruins of the building, marred by the color of light rain—was contrasted with the festive opening ceremony in front of the main gallery, which included: carpet, tents, banners, delicious foods, and many of those in attendance wearing suits—namely Indonesian officials and celebrities.⁵⁵ Written on the wall next to the entrance of Semsar’s work was the statement: “You are entering a room free of posmo’s gravity.”

Participants of BSRJ IX, originally intended to consist of 41 artists was reduced to 40. In line with the press release’s promise, almost all of the works displayed were installations, performance, photography, video art, and works that used mixed media. In the catalogue the names of the artists were listed along with the title of their work, this list is as follows⁵⁶:

52 ⁵² Astari Rasjid quoted in *Merdeka* “Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta IX Menampilkan Gejala Post-Modernisme,” 21 December 1993.

53 ⁵³ See *Merdeka* (12/21/1993), *ibid.*

54 ⁵⁴ A number of articles can be found that prioritize the discussion of the work “Penggalian...,” amongst these: “Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta IX Menggali Hak Asasi dari Reruntuhan,” *Kompas*, 23 December 1993; “Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta IX, Ini Dia: Seni Rupa Pasca Pemberontakan,” *Republika*, 26 December 1993; “Semsar Siahaan Dengan Tegas Menolak Post Modernisme dalam Seni Rupa;” and “Menggali Kembali yang Sudah Kosong?” *Media Indonesia*, 2 January 1994.

55 ⁵⁵ H. Sujiwo Tejo, “Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta IX Menggali Hask Asasi dari Reruntuhan,” *Kompas*, 23 December 1993.

56 ⁵⁶ See the catalogue for IX Jakarta Fine Art Biennale at TIM, 1993, p. 40-119 (allow there are a few discrepancies; title of artworks, dimension and categorization of media in line with the sources quoted). For detailed illustration of a few works that were displayed see the attachment.

1. Agus Hari Raharjo SA
 - “Anungga Rungga” (mixed media)
 - “Jolly dalam Migrain dan Diabetes” (performance art)
2. Agus Kamal
 - “Ia dan Rembulan” (oil painting, 140x100 cm)
 - “Wanita” (oil painting, 100x70 cm)
 - “Berdoa” (oil painting, 140x100 cm)
3. Agus Suwage
 - “Cilaka 2000” (installation painting, 720x480 cm)
 - “Bendera” (installation painting, 300x350 cm)
 - “Manusia dan Benderanya” (installation, 10x10 m)
4. Andar Manik
 - “Retakan” (ceramic installation)
 - Seni rupa pertunjukan pada “Retakan”
5. Anta Wijaya
 - “Buku” (ceramic installation)
6. Anusapati
 - “Patung Kayu” (mixed media, 260x150x60 cm)
 - “Patung Kayu” (mixed media, 150x150x50 cm)
7. Asri Nugroho Pakurimba
 - “Peristiwa Roti dan Anggur” (acrylic painting, 190x250 cm)
 - “Ekspresi Putih dalam Hitam” (acrylic painting, 190x250 cm)
8. Awan P. Simatupang
 - “Kolam Renang” (mixed media installation)
 - “Konstruksi” (mixed media sculpture)
9. Bonzan Eddy R. Adisetyo
 - “Kejadian” (ceramic installation, 2,5x3 m)
10. Dadang Christanto
 - “For Them Who Have Been Killed” (performance art)
11. Dede Eri Supria
 - “Penunggang Kuda dari Amerika” (oil painting, 397x120 cm)
 - “Menari & Terpuruk di antara Kanvas & Palet” (oil painting, 10,8x3 m)
12. Diyanto
 - “Ini Batu Untukmu, Jangan Sedih” (mixed media)
 - “Pulo Gadung di atas sebuah Peta” (mixed media)
 - “Ciuman” (mixed media)
13. Eddie Hara

- “Alice in Wonderland” (mixed media, 200x300x20 cm)
- “Alice in Wonderland II” (mixed media, 200x300x20 cm)

14. Erwin Utoyo

- “Super Market” (installation, 8x6x3 m)

15. Fendi Siregar

- “Integrasi” (photo essay, 6 stages)

16. F.X. harsono

Installation (4x4x2 m)

17. Hedi Haryanto

- “Menonton Orang-orang Marjinal”

18. Heri Dono

- “Melihat Orang-orang Marjinal” (installation, 5x5 m)

19. Isa Perkasa

- “Dunia Menjadi Sempit” (installation, 3.5x3 m)

20. Iwan Koeswana

- “Merajut Wool” (water color, 106x75 cm)
- “Restaurant” (water color, 106x75 cm)
- “Africa” (water color, 106x75 cm)

21. Juandi

- Installation

22. Krisna Murti

- “Objects from Kampung Nagrak” (installation, 3x15x3.5 m)

23. Marida Nasution

- “Taman Plastik” (media campuran, 4x3 m)

24. Mella Jaarsma

Painting installation 3 meters in length

- “Ritual of Pouring 1” (mixed technique on canvas, 30x20 cm)
- “Ritual of Pouring 2” (mixed technique on canvas, 30x20 cm)
- “Ritual of Pouring 3” (mixed technique on canvas, 30x20 cm)
- “Ritual of Pouring 4” (mixed technique on canvas, 30x20 cm)
- “Ritual of Pouring 5” (mixed technique on canvas, 30x20 cm)
- “Inti I” (wood, 180x40x40 cm)
- “Inti II” (wood, 160x40x40 cm)
- “Pouring” (wood and water, 160x40x40)

25. Melodia

- “Menanti di Hari Panjang” (oil painting, 95x65 cm)

26. Nindityo Adipurnomo
- “Lukisan dan Objek-objek” (3.5x5 m)
 - “Beban Eksotika Jawa” (mixed technique, 5x120x50 cm)
 - “Beban” (oil painting on canvas, brass, wood, 170x70x10 cm)
27. Nyoman Erawan
- “Yang Tertusuk Menusuk” (installation, 6.5x13 m)
28. Pintor Sirait
- “Transilient” (mixed media, 8x8 m)
29. Rahmayani
- “Empat Wajah” (installation, 2x6x9 m)
30. Semsar Siahaan
- “Selendang Abang” (oil painting, 1.5x3 m)
 - “Jeritan Biru Seorang Pelukis” (oil painting, 1x1 m)
 - “Di antara Pabrik dan Penjara” (oil painting, 1x1 m)
31. Setiyono Hadi Susanto
- “Perdamaian” (mixed media, 3x5 m)
32. Suatmadji
- “Pesan Kolase” (collage painting, 97x117 cm)
 - “Sepasang Kolase” (collage painting, 80x122 cm)
33. Sudarisman
- “Peragawati” (oil painting, 70x80 cm)
34. Sutjipto Adi
- “Introspection” (oil painting, 121.5x91.5 cm)
 - “Welcome to My World” (oil painting, 50.5x40.5 cm)
 - “Cinta Kasih” (oil painting, 101.5x76 cm)
35. Tara Sosrowardoyo
Photo
36. Tonny Haryanto
- “Keluarga Berisik” (installation, 6x6x3 m)
37. Yana Wiyatna Sucipto
- “Balada Palu dan Paku” (resin sculpture electroplated, 3x2.5 m)
 - “Sepatu Buaya” (resin sculpture electroplated, 50x35 cm)
38. Yanuar Ernawati
- “Imej” (mixed media, 100x100 cm)
 - “Mistik Bali” (mixed media, 100x100 cm)
39. Yudhi Soerjoatmodjo

- “Waria” (photo essay, 15 stages)
- “Oma” (photo essay, 15 stages)

40. Yudi Yudoyoko

- “A Man and an Egg” (mixed media, 3x4 m)

There were four essays in the BSRJ IX catalogue written by Goenawan Mohamad, Mara Karma, Jim Supangkat, and Bambang Budjono. Jim Supangkat’s essay will be discussed in detail. As was mentioned previously, there were a number of points in this essay that were explicitly connected to the curatorial’s base and are related to the issue of postmodernism, which exploded prior to the exhibition. As will be seen in the subsequent discussion, the other three essays (by Goenawan, Mara, and Bambang), did not receive a great deal of attention from BSRJ IX respondents and as a result, will only be touched on briefly.

In the essay by Goenawan Mohamad, which served as an introduction, some early indications can be read regarding the issues that supported BSRJ IX. In a straightforward manner he wrote:

“From this Biennale, held at the end of 1993, it is apparent how many changes have occurred in the world of Indonesian fine art since the Jakarta Art Council organized the first biennale in 1974. While a number of famous painters have already passed away (Affandi, S.Soedjojono, Zaini, to name a few), new names have emerged. The understanding of fine art seems to have changed as well as the type of media used such as the eclectic tendency of installation, which is strongly represented in this IX Biennale. In addition, the attitude of artists has changed in terms of how they connect to their communities: we are witnessing greater attention to art from the market, galleries are opening, yet at the same time, the creative impulse is no longer confined to closed spaces or separated from the community. As stated above, this era cannot be seen as either an “advancement” or a “decline” in comparison to previous eras, but rather these changes can be seen as evidence for what is happening in the life of art, thinking, and society around us.”⁵⁶

The statement that must be noticed here is that about the belief in change at the level of production that would also “change the understanding of art.” The phrase “change in understanding” seems also to be concerned with the device and conceptual frame as well as the boundaries of the ideas used to look at the very processes of art production. Goenawan emphasized in particular changes that had occurred in “...art, thinking, and society...” that were reflected in the presentation of art works in BSRJ IX. In the following paragraphs, he encouraged the reader to scrutinize the other three essays in the catalogue stating:

“First there is an overview of the major points in the history of Indonesian art, written by Mara Karma, a writer and painter who is now a member of the Jakarta Arts Council. The second essay represents the fruits of Jim Supangkat’s thoughts – Supangkat being one of the curators of Biennale IX as well as a critic. Supangkat puts forth the basic choices made in order to determine the trend in contemporary art—a trend that sometimes, whether correctly or incorrectly, is connected to the “post-modern” spirit. Finally, the third essay, written by Bambang Budjono, an art critic for the magazine *Tempo*, tries to look at how particular systems support the socio- economics of Indonesian contemporary art by describing galleries in Jakarta, Bandung, Yogya, and Bali.”⁵⁸

Mara Karma’s essay entitled “Indonesian Art in Retrospect” returns to the historical

⁵⁶ “Introduction,” Goenawan Mohamad, see BSRJ IX catalogue (1993), *op.cit.*, p. 5.

⁵⁸ Goenawan Mohamad, *ibid.* p. 5.

narrative of Indonesian fine art. At the beginning of her explanation, Mara asserts that there is a difference between the history of Western modern art and Indonesian modern art.⁵⁹ This difference, according to Mara, is situated in what is referred to as “the history of PERSAGI modernism.” Explained further, the principle of “PERSAGI’s version of modernism” can be seen in the writing of Sudjojono, which calls for “...a new type of painting with a singular Indonesian character. Not a type of art that originates from the character of old art forms: Bali, Batak, Minangkabau, Dayak, Papua, and others.”⁶⁰ Although Mara does not list references or sources that she read while explaining Sudjojono, it is clear that Mara is referring to Sudjojono’s “Move towards a new singular style of Indonesian Painting,” one of the articles included in Sudjojono’s anthology “Painting, Art, and Artists” published in 1947. She also quoted Sudjojono in more depth stating:

“First a type of art with character, namely unity...Second, a type of art that contrasts *reality and everyday needs*...Third, it must be free, completely free...and cannot be based on the moral principles of one group or party...Fourth, it must reject an individual soul...Those are the characteristic of the concept of PERSAGI modernism...”⁶¹

The next part of Mara Karma’s analysis describes the changing situation of Indonesian art after 1950:

“...the perception of PERSAGI modernism coupled with a strong sense of nationalism and psychological character rooted in the socio-cultural environment began to shift, taking on elements of western modern-art that possessed an international and universal character. During this era it became crucial for Indonesian artists to determine the character of their art...their artistic vision oscillated between defining their own artistic characteristics and adopting those of modern-western art. The main trend at that time tended towards western modern art.”⁶²

Without specifically describing the definition of modernism and “*modern-art*” or the difference between “PERSAGI modernism” and “Western modern-art,” Mara continued by stating, “ever since modern-art succeeded in infiltrating Indonesian art, the primary concern of our artists has been focused on things related to various isms, styles, and techniques used by Western modernists...However, either because the attraction is so strong, or because our artists do not believe in themselves, modern-art is viewed as something appropriate to take up as the foundation of one’s work, and continues to be followed.”⁶³ Mara then went on to explain that Western modern art “...is continuously criticized and questioned...” because this type of art is continuously alienates itself from society.”⁶⁴

“It is stated that modern-art does not enhance artistic life, but instead maintains its development. The attitude of artists who are anti *anti-realist* and *autonomous*, who are considered modernists, are the primary reason for the development of the individualistic, materialist, and hedonistic attitude that is exaggerated by modern artists. The work that they produce can only be understood and appreciated by themselves as well as other artists who are part of the bourgeois middle class that have supported their ideals from the beginning.”⁶⁵

Mara concludes her essay with a section entitled “The Search for Alternative Art,” where she states, “...with the expression of modern-art’s weaknesses, the art world everywhere, including in

59 ⁵⁹ See Mara Karma “Seni Rupa Modern Indonesia dalam Retrospek,” BSRJ IX catalogue, *ibid.*, p. 7-11.

60 ⁶⁰ Mara Karma, *ibid.*, p. 8.

61 ⁶¹ Mara Karma, *ibid.*, p. 9-10. Italics are the same as the source quoted.

62 ⁶² See Mara Karma, *ibid.*, p. 10. The phrase “modern-art” with and without italics is the same as the source quoted.

63 ⁶³ Mara Karma, *ibid.*, p. 11.

64 ⁶⁴ Mara Karma, *ibid.*, p. 10.

65 ⁶⁵ Mara Karma, *ibid.*, p. 10-11.

Indonesia, will be forced to look for new alternative principles in exchange for those of modernism.”⁶⁶ The following statement can be seen as important in understanding the base of BSRJ IX:

“It is suggested that the art world has already entered the era of *postmodernism*. In the era of postmodernism there is not one stream of art that can claim itself as more important than others. Or consider itself capable of placing value judgments on art that is outside of its socio-cultural realm... Can the momentum of postmodernism be used effectively in order to seek out and determine a new type of Indonesian modern art, in line with the demands of the contemporary situation? The answer rests in the hands of Indonesian artists...”⁶⁷

Although she does not refer directly to the primary themes used in the selection of artworks displayed at BSRJ IX, a number of Mara Karma’s explanations can be seen as an introduction to the curatorial essay entitled “Art of the 80s: An Introduction to the IX Jakarta Fine Art Biennale, 1993” written by Jim Supangkat.

In his 14-page essay, Jim Supangkat begins his explanation with an ancient Indonesian proverb, which loosely translated means “arrange things in order that they are good” (the original proverb states *dijemba-jemba bagai bersiang dihela surut bagai bertanam*) According to Jim, the art included in the Biennale displayed the concept of **penjembaan**. He elaborated on the concept of “penjembaan” stating:

“...the statement **dijemba-jemba** has a deeper meaning. This allegory shows a concept of engineering referring to work that: infers, sifts through, cleans, and weeds related to the activities of collecting and strengthening.”⁶⁸

According to Jim, the art displayed in BSRJ IX had in fact already appeared in alternative galleries and had been seen in international exhibitions, although it was not yet well known at home. This trend he defined as “...the process of change regarding the fundamental understanding (and definition) of modern art,” which he considered a continuation of the phase of artistic rebellion, resistance, and renewal that began in the 1970s.⁶⁹

“Art of the 1980s, displayed in the 1993 Jakarta Fine Art Biennale, is art that can be considered post-rebellion: no longer resisting modernism, but rather leaving it behind. This type of art is known as post-modern.”⁷⁰

Jim wrote that the meaning of postmodern art, which had appeared in America in the 1960s, only became clear in the 1980s after it was influenced by the European philosophy of post-structuralism. It was thus these principles of post-structuralism, which influenced the art of the 1980s. Jim wrote that the characteristic of postmodernism could be seen in the artistic idioms displayed at BSRJ IX, for example installation art and performance art. Jim firmly stated that these were “...signs of the postmodern era.”⁷¹

From here the essay “Art of the 80s” specifically problematizes the existence of “Indonesian contemporary art.” “Indonesian contemporary art” according to Jim is a type of art that possesses plural characteristics that had developed out of various trends. He continues, “This type of art is not the same as modern art, which believes in the linear development of history, with the principle of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*, influenced by continuity.”⁷² The use of the term “contemporary art” is

66 ⁶⁶ Mara Karma, *ibid.*, p. 11.

67 ⁶⁷ Mara Karma, *ibid.*, p. 11.

68 ⁶⁸ See Jim Supangkat in BSRJ IX catalogue (1993), *ibid.*, p. 13.

69 ⁶⁹ Jim Supangkat (1993) in *ibid.*, p. 13.

70 ⁷⁰ Jim Supangkat (1993) in *ibid.*, p. 13.

71 ⁷¹ Jim Supangkat (1993), *ibid.* p. 14.

72 ⁷² Jim Supangkat (1993), *ibid.* p. 14. Italics are the same as the source quoted.

explained further as an attempt to avoid the use of the term “modern art.” However, rather than simply avoiding the definition or the terminology of modern art, Jim Supangkat views the term “contemporary art” as its own specific category, which possesses its own idioms and development different than modern art. This can be seen in the explanation:

“It cannot be denied that the emergence of Indonesian contemporary art is best seen through uprising that stems from the efforts to overhaul the principles of modern art. This was the primary consideration important to the 1993 Jakarta Fine Art Biennale in displaying post-rebellion art, art of the 1980s.”⁷³

According to Jim, theories, which explain the characteristics of contemporary art, only emerged after the 1980s in correlation with theories of postmodernism.⁷⁴

The curation of BSRJ IX involved Jim Supangkat’s effort to review and reformulate things that connected to the history of Indonesian fine art. This effort was clearly connected to the “history of art rebellion” in Indonesia. According to Jim, this type of art began to appear in 1974 with the “Black December Statement,” which was a reaction towards the awardees of the Big Indonesian Painting Exhibition (Pameran Besar Seni Lukis Indonesia), held at Taman Ismail Marzuki, who were said to reflect “the identity of Indonesian painting.”⁷⁵ Reaction towards this event continued with the establishment of the Indonesian New Art Movement (Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia) in 1975. This movement not only criticized decorative tendencies in art, which had been the focus of the Black December Movement but also more broadly, “...rejected the entire tradition of modernism that had been the base of the development of Indonesian art from the 1940s through the 1960s.”⁷⁶ The Indonesian New Art Movement was seen as a proclamation of “...a new art, no longer based on the traditions of *fine art* (painting and sculpture).” Jim quoted the proclamation of the New Art Movement, written in 1979, which stated:

“In the process of production, discard as completely as possible the image of “art” that has been recognized until now (the movement considered this old art), namely art that is limited to categories including: painting, sculpture, and drawing (graphic arts). For the Indonesian New Art Movement, the use of new forms that cannot be categorized within the forms mentioned above will be seen as “legitimate” (new art).”⁷⁷

In this essay, Jim Supangkat asserted that the polemic surrounding GSRB Indonesia—that had been acted out by Kusnadi and Sudarmadji—was a “confirmation” of the debate between arts of rebellion and modernism in Indonesia. Exhibitions and events initiated by GSRB—from 1975 through 1979—were presented chronologically and explained as specific signs related to the emergence of rebellion art. One explanation of particular importance discussed the “Presentation Exhibition” (Pameran Presentasi) held in 1978 at Balai Budaya, Jakarta. Supangkat stated that this exhibition “...criticized the depoliticization (the depreciation of politics) of Indonesian art, considered out of sync with the socio-political conditions of the time.”⁷⁸ Works displayed in this exhibition included journalistic photographs and texts as original documentation. Jim confirmed this as *avant-garde* art.

Jim included a relatively long explanation of the categorization of the *avant-garde*. This categorization was based on Jim Supangkat’s argument, which followed the viewpoint of Charles Jencks, an English art and architecture critic, who stated that the *avant-garde* could be divided into three groups, including: the purist *avant-garde*, the heroic *avant-garde*, and the radical *avant-garde*. According to Jencks’s explanation, quoted by Jim, the heroic *avant-garde* was the modernist trend before and during the early 1920s, which established the concept of “art for art’s sake.” The heroic *avant-garde* was characterized by the spirit of “heroism” and the idea of the individual genius, whose strength came via introspective exploration, “Artists lives are like laboratories, art their mode of exploration.”⁷⁹ He continued that according to more current theories the spirit of the heroic *avant-*

73 ⁷³ Jim Supangkat (1993), *ibid.* p. 14.

74 ⁷⁴ See Jim Supangkat (1993), *ibid.* p. 14.

75 ⁷⁵ Jim Supangkat (1993), *ibid.* p. 14.

76 ⁷⁶ Jim Supangkat (1993), *ibid.* p. 14.

77 ⁷⁷ Jim Supangkat (1993), *ibid.* p. 14.

78 ⁷⁸ Jim Supangkat (1993), *ibid.* p. 18.

79 ⁷⁹ Jim Supangkat (1993), *ibid.* p. 16.

garde is related to “early modernism” (which developed between 1860-1930), differentiated from “late modernism” or post-war modernism; namely modernism characterized by the spirit of the purist avant-garde.⁸⁰ As explained further, late modernism, characterized by the purist avant-garde, has become the generally accepted understanding of modernism until now. This type of modernism is identical with the ideas of Clement Greenberg, a famous American critic, who argued that the essence of modernism “...was the discovery of self-criticism within the exploration of a specific discipline, be it sculpture, painting, or architecture.”⁸¹ Jim stated,

“The aesthetic value to be achieved in this exploration is a transcendental value outside of the history of mankind. The basic belief: achieve an essence that constitutes the height of transcendence. For example in religion, this essence is believed to be a purity that leads to universal truth.”⁸²

Jim explained postmodernism by quoting Jencks’s critique of Greenbergerian modernism as a group of the purist avant-garde. Here he states that Jencks, along with other postmodernists, criticize the purism described by Greenberg as a tendency that “...evokes abstraction, formalism, and technique, that dominated the art and architecture of the 20th century by creating a new territory and conquering all existing languages and exploration that had ever existed.”⁸³ Jim also included quotes from the art critic Hal Foster. The following explanation quotes Foster’s view that the debate of late-modernism and postmodernism was not based primarily on the idiom of purity but rather on how the idiom of purity had been criticized as the “historicized avant-garde” through the principle of historic transcendentalism—namely, the legitimation of particular points in history through the domination of art institutions like the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. The following paragraphs in the curatorial essay of BSRJ IX describe a number of examples that represent the mission of the avant-garde via movements such as Dadaism in Germany, Pop Art in America, and Gutai in Japan as well as artists including Alan Kaprow, Joseph Beuys, Nam June Pak, and others. Jim explains that these artists struggled to “...purify art, returning it to life.”⁸⁴ The tendency of these groups and artists is related to the opposition of the tradition of *high culture* that separated modernism from reality. Jim Supangkat interpreted the rebellion art, which emerged in Indonesia in the 1970s as a tendency identical with the opposition towards modernist tendencies. He argued that the 30th September Movement of 1965 was the cause of art’s depoliticization, particularly in the 1960s. This incident led to the domination of art institutions by the government.

“The rebellion art which emerged in the 1970s was connected to the depoliticization of art. The Black December Statement of 1974 demonstrated opposition within the art establishment towards the political and economic conditions of the time. The 1977 exhibition “**Kepribadian Apa,**” opposed the rise of institutional formalism and “artistic formalism.”⁸⁵

Jim Supangkat makes a similar argument as Mara Karma. The argument that the depoliticization of art was the result of G 30 S/PKI is seen in both of their essays. If Mara stated that this event led to the “...victory of Western modern art,” with more or less the same tone, Jim states that the emergence of late-modernism’s influence on Indonesian modern art represented the accumulation and cleansing of socio-political conditions in art—precisely after a number of artists affiliated with the PKI were stifled. In correlation with Mara Karma, Jim also questioned the existence of Indonesian modern art that developed outside of the influence of Western modernism.⁸⁶

80 ⁸⁰ The explanation of the categorization of the avant-garde is completely summarized from Jim Supangkat who explained the ideas of Jencks about the avant-garde (1993), see Jim Supangkat in *ibid.* p. 16-20.

81 ⁸¹ Quoted from Jim Supangkat’s article (1993), *ibid.* p. 17.

82 ⁸² Jim Supangkat (1993), *ibid.* p. 18.

83 ⁸³ Jim Supangkat (1993), *ibid.* p. 18.

84 ⁸⁴ Jim Supangkat (1993), *ibid.* p. 20.

85 ⁸⁵ Jim Supangkat (1993), *ibid.* p. 20.

86 ⁸⁶ See Jim Supangkat (1993), *ibid.* p. 20.

In the next section of the essay “Art of the 80s,” the conclusion is made that there is a special relationship between the rebellion art of the 1970s, Art of the 1980s, the radical avant-garde, and postmodernism. Jencks’s theory suggests that opposition to modernism arose not because of the ideas of postmodernism in the 1960s or because of the mechanisms of resistance that occurred through the radical avant-garde from 1920 until 1960. Jenck’s view regarding the relationship of the radical avant-garde and postmodernism was seen to explain the relationship between Indonesian rebellion art of the 1970s and post-rebellion art that characterized the development of the 1980s (BSRJ IX); the connection of these two types of art then becomes the postmodern era.⁸⁷

“The radical avant-garde is often interpreted as modernism, in a position separate from postmodernism. Whereas in order to understand this type of rebellion art, one must also understand postmodernism.”⁸⁸

From here one can see the basis of the curatorial framework that more or less intended to connect Indonesian rebellion art of the 1970s with “Art of the 1980s” that was displayed at BSRJ IX. Jim explored the realm of postmodern theory that was said to “...support the development of international postmodern art in the 1980s.”⁸⁹ In his opinion this development was the direct result of the translation of French post-structuralism into English in the 1970s. His description was as follows:

“In the United States where postmodernism began, Clement Greenberg’s criticism towards the principles of (late) modernism spread, becoming the theory of opposition towards traditions of modernism. An examination of all concepts produced by modernism occurred...this critical attitude developed from the belief that all understanding of modernism that were believed to bring universal truth, were in fact a series of myths—mere mystification.”⁹⁰

Jim included an explanation of the ideas of post-structuralism from theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Michael Foucault—regarding “deconstructionism,” which he stated “...became synonymous with postmodernism.”⁹¹ Relevant to this explanation is Jim’s examination of the views of the late critic Sanento Yuliman, which he states: reversed the perceptual structure of art and “... pointed towards a theory of deconstructionism...”

“The singular view that states there is only one type of art with only one type of reference system, and therefore one society that can be imagined as a whole with coherent intentions...is a view that prioritizes painting, sometimes along with sculpture, while underestimating various other types of art. This view is the heir of the history of European art and aesthetics...attached to information from advanced industrial nations (that) raises the controversial never-ending issue of “Indonesianness.”⁹²

According to Sanento’s theory, the general perception that two basic groups existed, modern art and traditional art “...was deconstructed...and consequently, the exposure of exclusive boundaries.”⁹³ Jim connected the trends present in the work of the 1980s, exhibited at BSRJ IX, with the viewpoint of Sanento that rejected Western art’s reference system. According to Sanento, Indonesian art should not be based on the aesthetic principles that had influenced the definition of western art; nor should it be divided based on categories of “high” and “low” art. Sanento asserted that Indonesian fine art possessed plural characteristics and could not be confined within a single aesthetic frame, as

87 ⁸⁷ Jim Supangkat (1993), *ibid.* p. 21.

88 ⁸⁸ Jim Supangkat (1993), *ibid.* p. 21.

89 ⁸⁹ See Jim Supangkat (1993), *ibid.* p. 21.

90 ⁹⁰ Jim Supangkat (1993), *ibid.* p. 22.

91 ⁹¹ Jim Supangkat (1993), *ibid.* p.

92 ⁹² Jim Supangkat quotes Sanento Yuliman in *ibid.* p. 32.

93 ⁹³ Jim Supangkat (1993), *ibid.* p.

had been the case with the development of modern art in Indonesian.

“Sananeto’s opinion reflects the development of art in the 1980s, which demonstrates a return to an examination of social problems. This idea, theoretically, continued the idea that had been put forth by the rebellion art of the 1970s.”⁹⁴

Jim then went on to explain the relationship between trends (in the use of idioms, media and ideas) in art of the 1980s and ideas concerning the historical development of Indonesian art as well as a number of western postmodernist concepts and theories, referred to previously. He explained that a number of works from the 1980s still strongly expressed the characteristics of rebellion art, namely opposition to the depoliticization of art, seen in specific works by Dadang Christanto, F.X. Harsono, Mulyono, and Semsar Siahaan. Their work was seen to have a direct connection with socio-political issues, the question of human rights, and issues related to suppression from the government. According to Jim, this type of work could be connected to the trend called radical avant-gardism. In addition, in the Art of the 1980s, a number of examples can be found of work that examined social issues in a broader context, namely the “cultural context” whose characteristics were as follows:

“In these works the principles of postmodernism can be studied in more depth. The main goal of this group was that art no longer had to be made with a specific code or in a particular realm (sculpture, painting). Each tradition that indicated a type of artistic exploration that then became a characteristic of modernism was no longer primary. The search for originality, the hunt for new techniques and the essence of exploration, the exploration of new media, and the construction of new elements, was no longer problematized by these works.”⁹⁵

Jim’s effort to connect the trends in art of the 1980s with theories of postmodernism can be seen in his reference to the ideas of American critic Rosalind Krauss from “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” (1979):

“Moving outside of a specific realm, postmodern artwork no longer becomes a historical object, but rather is an object that questions cultural logic like post-structuralism.”⁹⁶

Further, Jim Supangkat claimed that the work of Heri Dono, Dolorosa Sinaga, Yana W.S., Eddie Hara, Anusapati, and Hedy Haryanto was no longer connected to an exploration of the traditions of sculpture and painting. Jim observed that in these works there was a new trend, different than modernism.

The display of works with “alternative idioms” such as: installation, video, photography and mixed media, ready-mades and found objects in BSRJ IX or Art of the 1980s was based on the curatorial claim that these works were representative of the radical avant-garde. Further, he stated that the infiltration of new aesthetic frames—for example installation and performance art—were a sign of postmodernism.⁹⁷ The issue of “installation art” received also a long explanation, namely in the explanation of works by Krisna Murti, Nindityo Adipunomo, Nyoman Erawan, Andar Manik, Yanuar Erawati, and Heri Dono. Utilizing the ideas of American art critic Douglas Crimp, Jim suggested that with the opening of artistic forms of expression (primarily with “alternative idioms,” including installation), aesthetic limits will be come more open, leading to new types of expression. “In such a structure, theatrical installation spaces will no longer have a concrete character like in the

94 ⁹⁴ Jim Supangkat (1993), see *ibid.* p. 23.

95 ⁹⁵ Jim Supangkat (1993), see *ibid.* p. 24.

96 ⁹⁶ Jim Supangkat quotes Rosalind Krauss, *ibid.*, p. 24.

97 ⁹⁷ See Jim Supangkat’s explanation that quotes Douglas Crimp. There it is stated that installation art and performance art that had previously been criticized by Michael Fried as “littering the aesthetic frame of art with theater,” became a popular idiom in fine art that appeared at the beginning of the 1970s, check *ibid.*, p. 25.

minimalist style,” but rather, “installation space will become mythical.”⁹⁸

Installations displayed at BSRJ IX were said to “...show the effect of a mystical space. Their works were seen also to interact with various aspects of traditional art.” Returning to the explanation of Douglas Crimp, Jim stated that this type of art became a representation of stratified meaning.

“Because of this Crimp believed that postmodern art did not stop at demystification. Creating a picture within a picture, or arranging layers of meaning was a strategy to destroy ideological system of modernist symbolism.”⁹⁹

In his curatorial text, Jim stated that the realistic paintings part of BSRJ IX—mentioning the names of artists including Sudarisman, Dede Eri Supria, Asri Nugroho, Melodia, and Agus Kamal—could no longer be categorized as works associated with ideological concepts of modernism (realism, surrealism, or naturalism),¹⁰⁰ because, as he stated, “...they were not seeking realistic representation.”¹⁰¹ In fact these paintings “...destroyed the concept of realist painting by excluding emotional factors and aesthetic contact with the object of painting.”¹⁰² Jim reached this conclusion because the images represented in these paintings were the result of photocopies, advertisements, and various popular reproduction; they did not point toward an authentic reality.¹⁰³

Jim continued the discussion of “advertisements” referring to the work of Agus Suwage. According to Jim advertisement symbolism was the same as postmodern symbolism, which was different than modernist symbolism that “looked like a singular ideology.” He stated that symbolism in postmodern art “...represented various ideologies present in society.”¹⁰⁴

“Agus Suwage, who is also a graphic designer, not only displayed the symbolism of advertising in his work but also inserted text into his installation painting. With this work Agus destroyed the myth: drawings cannot be an exchange with verbal commentary.”¹⁰⁵

98 ⁹⁸ Jim Supangkat, *ibid.* p. 14.

99 ⁹⁹ Jim Supangkat, see *ibid.* p. 25.

100 ¹⁰⁰ Jim Supangkat, see *ibid.* p. 14.

101 ¹⁰¹ Jim Supangkat, *ibid.* p. 26.

102 ¹⁰² Jim Supangkat, *ibid.* p. 26.

103 ¹⁰³ Jim Supangkat, *ibid.* p. 26.

104 ¹⁰⁴ Jim Supangkat, *ibid.* p. 26.

105 ¹⁰⁵ Jim Supangkat, *ibid.* p. 26.

Throughout the development of modernism, Jim Supangkat continued, modernist artists avoided writing and written statements. They were even afraid to talk about their work. This assumption was based on the belief that verbal descriptions or language was an unoriginal media that offered no chance for exploration. In the following paragraph, Jim's explanation regarding the ideas of the French poststructuralist, Roland Barthes (a bit odd Jim repeatedly wrote 'Roland Bathers') is presented:

"In poststructuralist theory, it is argued that language never actually depicts reality. As stated by Roland Bathers, "text is not a line of words that conveys meaning, but rather, a multidimensional room where description and understanding mix and compete, because there is no signified or signifier that are purely related...therefore in a work of art, text and visual structure, are essentially the same. Neither will be able to maintain its meaning through the system or *code* outlined. If the two crash, a progressive decontextualization will occur in regards to all of the problems present. This points to the opinion of Roland Bathers that, "Every cultural structure, is at its base a formation as well as a deformation."¹⁰⁶

This quote from "Roland Bathers" was seen as a representation of the characteristics displayed in the work of Agus Suwage. Along with mentioning a number of specific terms such as *signifier* and *signified*, Jim mentioned an additional term, namely "allegorical impulse:"

"This state was represented in the work of Agus Suwage. At the primary base he displayed personal expression. On top of this expression he played with collage and text that jutted out into a three-dimensional space. This is a sign of allegorical impulse. The effect being the deconstruction of personal expression."¹⁰⁷

The explanation of the painter Tasikmalaya Iwan Koewana in fact used the same term:

"The allegorical impulse appeared more progressively in the work of Iwan Koeswana. There was not a single image in Iwan's painting with a stable context. Iwan's wild imagination crashed and twisted naturally, as can be seen in his painting of a telephone. Beginning with the penetration of numbers, a cement spoon (the shape of the telephone handle), to technology and **angka penunjuk tingkat pada bangunan, lalu ke meliuk-liuk** to numbers on a microwave."¹⁰⁸

In Jim's explanation, there are a number of terms that are used in specific ways in particular contexts. In a few instances, Jim neglects the meaning of these terms that should be explained in more depth.

The curatorial essay is concluded with a few paragraphs that include the main thematic points considered important to BSRJ IX, namely:

"Advertisement, text, technology, daily objects, and low art are the themes that draw attention to the Art of the 1980s, demonstrating parallels and connections with social issues. This is a trend that makes sense, because it is a "theoretical" series based on the thoughts of our artists rather than art history or aesthetic theory that is not a part of our lives. Goenawan Mohamad stated, "The development of our art is being colonized by social theory." The problem with this is that the majority of our writers of art essays come from disciplines of social theory. This is the reality of our fine arts: artists struggle to follow the ideas of these social theory experts. Rebellion art of the 1970s

106 ¹⁰⁶ Jim Supangkat, *ibid.* p. 26.

107 ¹⁰⁷ Jim Supangkat, *ibid.* p. 26.

108 ¹⁰⁸ Jim Supangkat, *ibid.* p. 27.

demonstrated this tendency. Art of the 1980s, displayed in the 1993 Jakarta Fine Arts Biennale shows a development: the demystification of this paradigm of social theory.”¹⁰⁹

Thus the issue of postmodernism expressed in the press release of BSRJ IX was in fact actualized by Jim Supangkat’s curatorial essay.

Another article in the catalogue of BSRJ IX was presented by Bambang Budjono, entitled, “Gallery: Supporters, Disseminators, and also the Market” (*Galeri: Pendukung, Penyebar, juga Pasar*). Very different than the focus of Jim Supangkat and Mara Karma, Bambang did not question BSRJ IX. His essay, as described by Goenawan Mohamad, described some of the ins and outs of galleries as a socio-economic support system for Indonesian art. In order to write this essay Bambang Budjono traveled to Bali, Yogyakarta, Bandung, and Jakarta. It is thus clear what Goenawan meant, that the presentation of Bambang’s essay in the BSRJ IX catalogue was solely based on this “...aspect (galleries) that had never before been discussed within conversations of Indonesian art.”¹¹⁰

Bambang’s essay was more like a report that one often finds in a magazine supplement or newspaper. Basically, this essay consisted of his observations regarding the condition of galleries in Bali, Yogyakarta, Bandung, and Jakarta such as Santi, R-66, Cemeti, Hidayat, C-Line, Edwin, Agung Rai, Neka, and others. Based on various interviews with gallery owners, this essay explains a number of “strategies” or steps pursued by these galleries in order to enliven the “pulse of the art world” in Indonesia. Those who pursue work in the trade of art, as described by Bambang, must be sensitive to the trends that sell in the market. They must consider two factors, namely the market and quality. Bambang seemingly agreed with this dichotomy. In the following explanation he then differentiated between works that were “serious” and those that were “market.” One part of his explanation stated:

“What can be done if what develops tends more towards market oriented art? In this case, public tastes, or more appropriately that of art buyers has a significant influence. A painting purchased for one thousand dollars (approximately Rp. 10 juta) is more concrete than a work of art that is praised by art critics but cannot be sold by contemporary Indonesian art galleries.”¹¹¹

It was written that in the world of buying and selling paintings or other works of art, there was a trend amongst gallery owners to buy and sell decorative works of art as “souvenirs” for the sake of the gallery’s financial viability.¹¹² It was relatively surprising that the phenomenon of the Indonesian painting boom received only a minimal discussion in Bambang’s essay. He quoted only Agus Dermawan’s explanation that the *boom* was driven partly by a 1987 exhibition held at a gallery in Jakarta.¹¹³ Besides this, he also included explanations, describing the market condition of Indonesian art, which he stated had already reached a very capitalistic level. “Collectors view paintings like stock,” was thus Bambang Budjono’s argument.

2.3. Debate Surrounding BSRJ IX

There are a few written archives that describe the IX Jakarta Fine Art Biennale as an event that attracted the attention of many observers. Articles describing BSRJ IX and its relationship with postmodernism were published with relative intensity. Along with articles published in daily mass media like newspapers, there were also a number of articles in journals, although only a few. The

109 ¹⁰⁹ Summarized from the last three paragraphs of the conclusion “Art of the 80s...” see Jim Supangkat, *ibid.*, p. 27.

110 ¹¹⁰ Goenawan Mohamad in *ibid*, p. 5.

111 ¹¹¹ Bambang Budjono, *ibid.*, 30.

112 ¹¹² Bambang Budjono, “Galeri: Pendukung, Penyebar, juga Pasar,” *ibid.*, p. 28. The term used in the quote is the same as that mentioned by Sutedj Neka, a gallery owner in Bali.

113 ¹¹³ Bambang Budjono, *ibid.*, p. 36.

majority of newspaper articles were reports, while another portion were responses written by writers, critics, and artists. The intensity of conversation about BSRJ IX, postmodernism, and Indonesian fine art since 1995 has begun to recede. The series of articles published specifically in relation to postmodernism, Indonesian art, and BSRJ IX since the exhibition's opening—as observed in the process of this research—chronologically were as follows:

a) Articles included in newspapers:

- >23 December 1993
 1. “IX Jakarta Fine Art Biennale Displays a Wealth of Symbols” (*Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta IX yang Tampilkan Kekayaan Simbol*) (Agus Sularto, *Media Indonesia*).
 2. “IX Jakarta Fine Art Biennale, Excavating Human Rights from Ruins” (*Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta IX, Menggali Hak Asasi dari Reruntuhan*) (H. Sujiwo Tejo, *Kompas*).
- >26 December 1993
 1. (*Menebak Postmodernisme dan Terpeleset*) (Jim Supangkat, *Kompas*)
 2. “This is the Jakarta Fine Art Biennale: Post-Rebellion Art” (*Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta IX, Ini Dia: Seni Rupa Pasca Pemberontakan*) (Kumara Dewatasari, *Republika*)
 3. “Exhume that which is Empty?” (*Menggali Kembali yang Sudah Kosong?*) (Teguh Ostentrik, *Kompas*)
- >2 January 1994
 1. “Semsar Siahaan Firmly Rejects Postmodernism in Art” (*Semsar Siahaan Dengan Tegas menolak Post Modernisme dalam Seni Rupa*) (Agus Sularto, *Media Indonesia*)
- >4 January 1994
 1. “Jakarta Fine Art Biennale IX-1993, Scavenging for new Trends” (*Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta IX-1993, Upaya Mengais Kecenderungan Baru*) (Eddy Purnawady, *Pikiran Rakyat*)
 2. “Installation in the Stream of Postmodernism” (*Seni Instalasi dalam arus Pascamodern*) (Sri Warso Wahono, *Kompas*)
- >11 January 1994
 1. “Semsar, The Grave Digging Painter” (*Semsar, Pelukis Penggali Kubur*) (H. Sujiwo Tejo, *Kompas*)
 2. “The Biennale’s Relationship with Postmodernism (*Hubungan Biennale dengan Postmodernisme*) (Tommy F. Awuy, *Media Indonesia*).
 3. “More than Rp. 150 million Spent, the Fine Art Biennale at Tim, In a Serious State” (*Habiskan Rp. 150 juta lebih, Biennale Seni Rupa di Tim ‘parah’*) (Terbit)
 4. “Contemporary Art Seminar: Universalism in the Arts Already Lost” (*Seminar Seni Rupa Masa Kini, Universalisme dalam Seni Rupa telah Rontok*) (Republika)
- >12 January 1994
 1. “Many Artists: Fine Art Biennale without a Concept” (*Sejumlah Seniman: Biennale Seni Rupa tanpa Konsep*) (Republika)
 2. (*Seni Kontemporer Rangsang Keindahan Berproses bagi Seniman dan Puplicnya*) (Kompas)
 3. “Installation Art Rebels Against the Establishment” (*Seni Rupa Instalasi Berontak Kemapanan*) (Terbit)
- >13 January 1994
 1. (*Memungut Karya ‘Masterpiece’ Biennale, Pembantaian Hutan dan Manusia*) (Danarto,

Republika)

2. "Watch Out, Posmo Crabs!" (*Awas Kepiting-kepiting Posmo!*) (Bani Saksono, *Republika*)
3. "Looking for Posmo Art" (*Mencari Konsep Seni Posmo*) (Interview, Yos Rizal Suriaji with Tommy F. Awuy, *Republika*)
4. "When "young posmo people" are Shackled" (*Ketika 'Anak Muda Posmo' Dipasung*) (Ahmadun Y. Herfanda, *Republika*)
5. "Fine Art Biennale with a Big Idea" (*Biennale Seni Rupa dengan sebuah Ide Besar*) (Herry Dim, *Pikiran Rakyat*)
6. "From the Seminar of the Jakarta Fine Art Biennale, Indonesian Contemporary Art, Not Yet Legalized" (*Dari Seminar Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta IX, Seni Rupa Kontemporer Indonesia belum Terlegalisasi*) (Zaenudin H.M., *Merdeka*)

• >15 January 1994

1. "The Biennale Exhibition: An Intellectual Exercise with Potential" (*Pameran Biennale: Sebuah Medium Intelektual Exercise yang Potensial*) (Sugeng Bp., *Media Indonesia*)
2. "Jakarta Fine Art Biennale IX, New Domination, Postmodernism" (*Biennale IX Seni Rupa Jakarta, Dominasi Baru, Pascamodern*) (F.X. Harsono, *Kompas*)

• >16 January 1994

1. "The Jakarta Fine Art Biennale, A Big Exhibition full of Variation" (*Biennale Senirupa Jakarta IX, Pameran Besar yang Penuh Variasi*) (Susianna, *Suara Karya*)

• >19 January 1994

1. "Installation, the Language of Expression for Contemporary Artists" (*Instalasi, Bahasa Ekspresi Seniman Kontemporer*) (*Suara Pembaruan*)
2. "A Reexamination of the History of Modern Art" (*Mengkaji Ulang Tradisi Seni Rupa Modern*) (*Suara Pembaruan*)

• >20 January 1994

1. "Looking for the Concept of Posmo Art" (*Mencari Konsep Seni Posmo*) (Interview Yos Rizal Suriaji with Tommy F. Awuy, *Republika*)
2. "Track the Ghost's Origins" (*Melacak Asal-usul Sang Hantu*) (Ahmadun Y. Herfanda, *Republika*)
3. "Watch out! Anarchism Behind Posmo" (*Awas! Anarki di Belakang Posmo!*) (Yos Rizal Suriaji and Ahmad Syaify, *Republika*)

b) Besides this, a number of articles were published in books and journals, including:

• > Book "Syuga Derrida: Traces of Postmodernism in Indonesia" (*Syuga Derrida: Jejak langkah Posmodernisme di Indonesia*) Emmanuel Subangun, March 1994

1. "Loud Voices Surrounding Postmodern Art" (*Suara-suara gaduh di Sekitar Kesenian Posmodern*), by Emmanuel Subangun

• > The journal *Horison*, 02/XXVIII, 1994

1. "**Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta IX, Sebuah Cangkokan Barat yang Mental,**" by Hardi
2. "The Jakarta Fine Art Biennale, A New Alternative Guiding Art" (*Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta, sebuah Alternatif Pembinaan Seni Rupa*) by Sri Warso Wahono

• > The journal *Kebudayaan Kalam*, edition 3-1994

1. "After the 'Rebellion,' Art Taking Back (the Ideas) Jakarta Fine Art Biennale (*Setelah 'Pemberontakan' Seni Rupa, Mempertimbangkan Kembali (Pemikiran) Biennale Seni Rupa*)

Jakarta IX) by Yustiono

- > The journal *Asian Art New*, 1994
- 1. “Biennale Takes up the Fight for Emerging Artists,” by Linda Owen

- > The Journal of Fine Art vol. 1/1995
- 1. “Indonesian Contemporary Art and the Postmodern Wave” (*Seni Rupa Kontemporer Indonesia dan Gelombang Post-modernisme*) by Yustiono

From the observation of newspaper articles counted since the publication of “Plesetan..” by Agus Dermawan (12/12/1993), a picture can be garnered of the debate surrounding the issue of postmodernism, BSRJ IX, and Indonesian fine art. Within this debate limits of understanding, concepts, phrase usage, and theoretical references were both confusing and controversial, often rejected by one side or the other. A number of arguments that mark this debate are included in the following paragraphs.

Not long after the publication of the catalogue for BSRJ IX, Jim Supangkat opened the space for discussion through his article, “Menebak Postmodernisme, dan Terpeleset” in the newspaper *Kompas* on 26 December 1993. His main point was that in Indonesia unfounded criticism against postmodernism had already emerged—including the critique against BSRJ IX. It seemed Jim was responding to the statement launched by Agus Dermawan in his article “Plesetan...” (12/12/1993). As curator, Jim felt that he needed to straighten out a number of things that he said were based solely on invention. He began his writing by reasserting the statement:

“The IX Jakarta Fine Art Biennale, 1993...is a contemporary Indonesian fine art exhibition of the 1980s. The work of 39 young artists from Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, and Bali, in the form of installation, photographic realism, and sculpture, can no longer be called works of modern art. These works of contemporary fine art demonstrate postmodern characteristics.”¹¹⁴

A number of main points in this essay were indeed a repetition of what he had written in his curatorial introduction “Art of the 80s...” The following quote is an example of his explanation intended to “straighten” things out:

“The most fatal mistake is to situate postmodernism as a linear development of modernism, defining it as “ultra-modern” or more modern than modern. A number of aspects within postmodernism indicate the opposite.”¹¹⁵

Here Jim seemed to be trying to assert the importance of looking at postmodernism, primarily as thinking that believes in pluralism as opposed to “... universalism that believes in one standard of art that is universally accepted.”¹¹⁶ The universal understanding, Jim stated, has led to the assertion that “...art in developing nations is not yet modern because it still shows localism.”¹¹⁷ Universalism has already led to the marginalization of art in developing nations, as it is seen that this art only looks to social issues, the influence of tradition, and local identity. Within this framework Jim also refers to what he calls “...the final issue in the discussion of postmodernism,” namely: “...new internationalism where developmental differences and cultural identity is believed to constitute a part of contemporary art.”¹¹⁸

Jim Supangkat explained that the works displayed at BSRJ IX are works of art that developed in the midst of the postmodern condition. A number of the artists have already been

¹¹⁴ ¹¹⁴ Jim Supangkat, “Menebak Postmodernisme, dan Terpeleset,” *Kompas*, 26 December 1993.

¹¹⁵ ¹¹⁵ Jim Supangkat, (12/26/1993) *ibid.* The term “pemahaman awam” can be seen to refer to Agus Dermawan’s article “Plesetan...”

¹¹⁶ ¹¹⁶ Jim Supangkat, (12/26/1993) *ibid.*

¹¹⁷ ¹¹⁷ Jim Supangkat, (12/26/1993) *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ ¹¹⁸ Jim Supangkat, (12/26/1993) *ibid.*

tested in international forums and had not been abused like in their own country. While referring to the argument of “posmo critics” Jim wrote:

“Then, the view of posmo critics that, “we are not yet modern, let alone postmodern,” can be scrutinized from its point of origin. From there: the western modernists that construct modernist standards according to their traditions and history. If we believe in these standards and ignore our own way of becoming modern, you better believe that we will never become modern.”¹¹⁹

Jim asserted that the art of the 1980s did not appear suddenly, “[...] the base of these developments were against modernism, far before the issue of postmodernism had spread. Already in the 1970s with the late Sanento Yuliman who stated that the values of modern art were not universal.”¹²⁰

In Jim Supangkat’s curatorial essay the relationship of each work of art exhibited at BSRJ IX was not discussed. One of the works not included in the curatorial essay was the work of Semsar Siahaan entitled “**Penggalian Kembali**.” This work, which included the statement “You are entering a room free of the gravity of posmo” elicited an interesting controversy. The following is a quote from one newspaper that included an interview with Semsar:

“For me, the continual fuss about *postmodernism* amongst our artists is not important. I am not at all interested in *postmodernism*. In response to my statement it was actually a reflection of my suspicions towards our intellectuals, particularly amongst artists who wish to flirt with the term *postmodernism*. Amongst us there is most definitely a group of intellectual flirts that wish to claim that there are signs of postmodernist development within our fine art. They state, my work also is included in postmodernism.”¹²¹

119 ¹¹⁹ Jim Supangkat, (12/26/1993) *ibid*.

120 ¹²⁰ Jim Supangkat, (12/26/1993) *ibid*.

121 ¹²¹ An interview conducted with Semsar Siahaan conducted by Agus Sularto, *Media Indonesia*, 1/2/1994, *op.cit*. Italics the same as source quoted.

Semsar continued, that his rejection was based on the opinion that his artwork's journey possessed "...a structural development and clear rules within the history of Indonesian art."¹²² Further, "While many works of post modern art are complacent with outside influences, I am not! My works depart from social reality that is structurally oppressed (structural oppression). Postmodernism does not know structure. How can I receive such a claim? I suspect even that the people I call "intellectual flirts" could divide the thinking of the Indonesian nation. Postmodernism is an idea that emerged in Marxist theory, whose trajectory is anti-establishment, anarchism and developed in Paris, Francis. That is what is trying to be planted here. So in my opinion, people that want to sow such thoughts are depraved. Nah, Jimmy Supangkat, one of the Biennale's curators is one of the people to claim that this forum is a show of postmodern artwork. It seems that he only discusses art from the context of art, but is not drawn to the issue of its integration with other social problems. I am suspicious that Jimmy Supangkat does not know about the turmoil in our world of labor, which in fact is one of the starting points for my art. How then can he state that my work is characteristic of postmodern art? With force, I therefore state that this type of claim is a form of "impertinence" amongst a handful of intellectual snobs from our art world."¹²³ Semsar's disagreement with the curator of BSRJ IX was again repeated in other media outlets,

"There is word on the street that this event is going to be claimed as a display of artwork that possesses postmo characteristics. However, I do not agree with this. I do not understand this; moreover, postmo in the context of fine art. The history of Indonesian art is clear. The structure is clear, same with the emphasis of art that is structural. Just relate it to everyday issues, whether you care about postmo or not."¹²⁴

A few reviews about Semsar in the mass media attracted the attention of a University of Indonesia philosophy lecturer, Tommy F. Awuy. In the daily *Media Indonesia*, dated 11 January 1994, he wrote that Semsar should not close himself to the claims made by particular parties towards his work. Ideas such as human rights and individual freedom, constantly professed by Semsar when he spoke about his work, should also teach him that he must appreciate freedom of interpretation.¹²⁵ Although he did not express his support or agreement with the curator of BSRJ IX, Tommy argued that Semsar was a postmodernist for a number of reasons:

"I am one of those who has commented that Semsar is postmodern. But only from the side of form; namely his enthusiasm towards the deconstruction of modernism's custom to civilize itself with discipline and courtesy regarding the concept of aesthetic space. In this regard he becomes an anti-aesthetic elitist. This is what I mean by his spirit of postmodernism. From the side of form he has already dismantled the establishment of homogenous space. And, he has already "experimented" with the lines of the image through the entrenchment that is the key aspect of his installation, so that the impression in this space becomes heterogeneous pluralism."¹²⁶

Tommy then reviewed Semsar's statements that according to him were problematic as well as controversial:

"The most troubling thing is when he attempts to compare postmodernism with Marxism... In my opinion, postmodernism/post-structuralism, within the history of its country of origin, France, has already been soundly critiqued by Marxist philosophy and the formation of the Communist Party in the 1960s, precisely after the student revolution, which has been barren after the departure of key influential figures, until now with the development of post-

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structural thought via figures such as M. Foucault, J. Derrida, and J.F. Lyotard.”¹²⁷

Tommy also discussed in more depth the work of Agus Jolly, Tony Heryanto, Andar Manik, and Rahmayani. Like his comments regarding the piece “**Penggalian Kembali**,” he was of the opinion that these works “...in general from the side of form and enthusiasm...characterized postmodernist concepts.”¹²⁸ In spite of this, a number of arguments were clearly different than the explanations of postmodernism that were presented by the curator of BSRJ IX. Tommy mentioned specific aspects of postmodernism like “representative,” “structural,” “realistic,” “idea,” and “material,” “signified” and “signifier,” “late capitalism,” and “deconstructionism” within the framework of his explanation, which were different than Jim Supangkat’s explanation. At the end of his article was the conclusion:

“No matter what, in order to determine whether or not the work displayed in the Biennale could be classified as postmodern art, it seemed one must be careful, even if these works had already been viewed as a phenomenon of postmodernism. That is to say, the dismantling of homogenous space made plural, non-representative, a singular meaning, and arbitrary sign of reality where the concept is postmodernism, becomes familiar.”¹²⁹

Tommy F. Awuy was indeed one of the most active participants in the discussion surrounding BSRJ IX. His opinions were often quoted in newspapers that included articles about postmodernism. In an interview published on 13 January 1994 his argument was stated:

“This biennale was initially new art. Jim Supangkat who is more knowledgeable is the one who connected it with posmo. I see, however, that there is a connection between his position and his enthusiasm, namely the enthusiasm to go beyond “isms” towards something that is not rigid. In art there are a number of currents such as expressionism, naturalism, and cubism. Jim and his friends wish to move beyond this. I see, however, that this new art (biennale) does not yet have a concept that can support this. In order to make this exhibition more popular or related to an interesting issue, he connected it with posmo. This biennale definitely includes posmo art, but it cannot be stated that this type of art has clear roots in Indonesia. Theoretically the theory of posmo art belongs to the West. Of course one can connect Western theory with phenomenon here. However, in actuality, we need to create our own concepts. We are reliant on Western influence. There are a number of works that we can see as very influenced by art from there. But broadly speaking in terms of spirit, this biennale is the same as posmo spirit. It wants to break out of the confines of existing theories or isms. I see that they are still trying to enter the realm of postmodernism.”¹³⁰

His arguments also explained the history and “...presence of postmodernism in the cultural sector”:

“Seen from cultural factors, firstly in the realm of art, there was a rebellion of artists. In the 1960s the name Robert Rauschenberg emerged who rebelled against mandatory assessment that must only start from a particular point. According to Rauschenberg art was free expression. It could start from anywhere. What was important was how to create a work of art that could be enjoyed...”¹³¹

In regards to the IX Jakarta Fine Art Biennale he explained in more depth:

“...there are a number of things that we must see from the form and content of this biennale before it can be said that it displays posmo concepts. There are still those who strongly

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represent a single value. Postmo art is only “in fun” or “playful,” not playful in the sense anything goes, but playful in the sense of continual effort to demonstrate a type of art. If we look at the biennale there is one meaning that wishes to be expressed or to represent something. With this then, Semsar’s work is no longer posmo. His soul or spirit, however, is identical with the spirit of posmo. Semsar is still represents a value.”¹³²

At first glance, focusing on “posmo art,” the difference in opinion between Tommy and Jim can be seen. In Tommy’s article he does not touch at all on the problem of the post avant-garde or contemporary art. Whereas regarding “deconstructionism” he repeatedly mentions Jim’s catalogue essay, a portion of Tommy’s statements are explained here:

“...Anarchism and Fascism appear in modernism. It is that which posmo wants to hit. The negative things that have led to destruction want to be revamped into deconstructionism by posmo. People often misunderstand deconstructionism, which they think leads to destruction.”¹³³

Another fact that showed the presence of heated debate surrounding BSRJ IX was a number of articles that covered side events of BSRJ IX’s exhibition namely the “Seminar and Artist Meeting.” An article dated 11 January 1994 in the daily *Republika* put forward a report of the seminar that was held on 10 January 1994 where Jim Supangkat, Mara Karma, and Bambang Budjono appeared as speakers. Not much different than what was written in the catalogue of BSRJ IX and the article “Menebak _____” (12/26/1993), Jim returned to the question of the term “contemporary art”. The seminar reporter wrote:

“According to Jim, contemporary art constitutes the continuation of modern art but demonstrates different patterns of development. Linear growth patterns within modern art—with style, flow, and tendencies towards the continuation of the concept of universalism—were being abandoned by contemporary art. A review of all agreements or *discourse* in fine art, stated Jim, had appeared.”¹³⁴

In this seminar Jim stated, “There is no longer an international style of fine art. Universalism had dropped off.”¹³⁵ He also explained about “...standard pluralism and the types of trends in contemporary art, like local identity, local social capacities and the pluralization of mediums of expression...this type of heterogeneity is the strength of art to be able to compete in the international arena.”¹³⁶

No different than Jim, Mara Karma and Bambang Budjono also discussed things that were more or less the same as that which they had written in the catalogue. It was reported:

“...Jim, Mara Karma, and Bambang Budjono also summarized the implications of postmodernist thought in fine art. The tendency to redefine and de-define—which marked the end of the linear development of “isms” and the emergence of new concepts like minimal art, land art, pop art, and others—that led to the fundamental change in contemporary art. Especially with the presence of postmodernist thought in philosophy that has now spread to fine art.”

After the seminar, the BSRJ IX artist meeting was held the following day in the same place. This event was reported in the daily *Republika*, published on 12 January 1994 carrying the news:

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“The IX Jakarta Fine Art Biennale was criticized. This criticism came from the painters Eddy Hara, Muryoto Haryoto – one of the originators of the New Art Movement, the painter Hardi and a number of participants from the *Seminar and Artist Meeting* that had been held in the Theater Arena of Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM) on Tuesday (1/10). This criticism emerged after the seminar that was part of the biennale, comprised of two sessions where almost every speaker (Mella Jaarsma, Tonny Haryanto, and Semsar Siahaan) was unable to explain the concept of their art.”¹³⁷

In this article a statement by the painter Hardi, one of the “plaintiffs” of BSRJ IX, was quoted stating: “It feels very much like this biennale does not depart from a clear concept. The concepts in works displayed remain vague. The artists could not even explain their concepts in the discussion.”¹³⁸ Hardi’s criticism was primarily directed at the exhibition curator, especially regarding the selection criteria for artists in BSRJ IX. Hardi stated that BSRJ IX is an exhibition without a clear target, seemingly without a concept. Whereas Tubagus Andre, another “BSRJ IX plaintiff,” commented that the works exhibited—especially those that were three-dimensional—were merely heaps of objects that did not express anything.”¹³⁹

At the artist meeting mentioned, the debate regarding “installation art” spread. This controversy began when a number of artists began to stutter in their explanation of the definition of installation art. One of these speakers, F.X. Harsono argued, “This phrase definitely became a debate. This means that we alone are not entirely sure about this term.”¹⁴⁰ At this gathering the definition of “installation art” became increasingly confused, even more so when different understandings began to emerge. For example Teguh Ostentrik stated that as far as his observation could tell the term “installation” was used for art that displayed particular objects in which there occurred a kind of “... transcendental transformation.”¹⁴¹ Teguh gave the example that a phrase such as “electric installation or “water installation” occurred because there was a type of transcendental transformation, namely energy.¹⁴² Whereas Rahmayani, also one of the speakers, asserted that installation art represented a balance between masculinity and femininity. While Jim Supangkat at this event refused to call BSRJ IX an exhibition of “installation art,” he stated firmly that, “the material in this biennale is contemporary Indonesian art. Not installation art, not postmodernism, and also not experimental art.”¹⁴³ As curator he stated that the choice of installation art over painting was meant to balance the domination of painting that had occurred up to that point.

The phrase “installation art” received special attention in the discussion surrounding BSRJ IX. Before the seminar, Sri Warso Wahono in particular had already taken up the topic of this discussion through her article entitled, “Installation Art within Postmodern Currents” (*Seni Instalasi dalam Arus Pascamodern*), published on 9 January 1994 in the newspaper *Kompas*. Sri Warso stated that in the organization of BSRJ IX a claim was made that connected the term mentioned with “... a form of art that emerges in postmodernism.”¹⁴⁵ In her article Sri Warso suggested that this claim constituted “cheap deviant”:

“But there is something absurd, when there is an interpretation that tries to connote installation art as a form of postmodern growth. This is clearly cheap engineering, without knowing the sophistication of installation art and its correlation with cultures of nations around the world. If it is articulated definitely to possess a historical thread with a particular philosophy: for example Derrida, Lacan, or other contemporary theories that in principle reject *High Art*, then clearly this possesses substantial though that deviates from the alignment of the human race. If

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such an instrument is broken in the process of healthy thinking, what tendency will then grow?"¹⁴⁶

This criticism of “engineers,” can be traced further, seemingly not unattached from Jim Supangkat’s claim in the catalogue of BSRJ IX, particularly the sentence:

“New idioms that indicate the postmodern era—especially installation and performance art—are widely practiced in circles of art.”¹⁴⁷

Sri Warso then wrote that long before the pre-modern era, the people who lived traditional lives in Indonesia already knew the form “installation art” in piles of offerings, by polishing the pillars of their houses with soot, lime and betel, breadfruit leaves, sugarcane, reeds, and pandan leaves.¹⁴⁸ Herry Dim, a Bandung-based writer and artist was not left behind in sharing his opinion by regarding the debate about installation art displayed at BSRJ IX. His article “Fine Art Biennale with a Big Idea” (*Biennale Seni Rupa dengan Sebuah Ide Besar*) was published on 13 January 1994 in the daily *Pikiran Rakyat Bandung*. For the shape of a newspaper article, this article was said to be very different than other articles, moreover this article utilized complete and clear references. Herry Dim stated that the exhibition BSRJ IX “...was intended to affirm the movement of postmodern philosophy, the choice form for its presentation was the phenomena of installation.”¹⁴⁹ He summarized that with BSRJ IX Jim Supangkat desired to “...bring Indonesian art within new international trends, while at the same time continuing the ideas that had already been developed previously through the New Art Movement (GSRB, 1975).”¹⁵⁰ Herry’s explanation opened with:

“This article, will first, try to see the dots connecting postmodern thought and criticism towards postmodernism, the phenomenon of installation art, and new internationalist trends. Along with this, it is hoped that we can also weigh the entire relevance of these ideas when placed back in the realm of social reality and our own cultural development. Finally, it is hoped that we can also see to what extent these ideas have reached their goals and to what extent they are dependent on mere ideas.”¹⁵¹

In the following paragraph he states:

“...recently within this long conversation about postmodernism, there are those who misplace postmodernism as a linear continuation of modernism, ultra-modernism, and/or an increase in the attitude of modernism. Such a placement is indeed confusing, because in principle postmodernism constitutes the antithesis of modernism; a critical tendency against modernism.”¹⁵²

Therefore modernism, Herry Dim writes, arose from the development of scientific knowledge that was pushed by the development of technology; and as an independent field, the first lawsuits of science and technology targeted centers of power and religion.

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He suggested at first glance the history of modernism is the same as liberal protestant movements, the emergence of nationalism, the collapse of feudal states—up until science, which resulted in industrial technology and a number of other developments in the social, economic, and historical cultural development of the world.¹⁵³ He then explained, that modernism gave birth to other consequences that became the target of postmodernists.

“Modernism is judged to have given birth to a number of acute social problems since the uncontrollable growth of the human population began including: racism, demonstrations and riots, the rise in crime, use of narcotics, pollution, monetary inflation, urbanization, to poverty and starvation on one hand and the accumulation of wealth on the other.”¹⁵⁴

Herry Dim’s explanation continued with a summary of Arthur Kroecker and David Cook’s book about postmodern culture entitled, *The Postmodern Scene* (1988). A number of theses from Crocker and Cook’s book were rewritten in sequence with translated terms including: *kebudayaan limbah* (culture of waste), *primitivisme postmodern* (postmodern primitivism), *hyper imaji* (hyper imagination), *panic seks* (sex panic), *panic filsafat* (psychological panic), and others.¹⁵⁵ Herry’s article explained, in greater depth, that postmodernism was not concerned solely with fine art, or further, one type of art. Herry connected Kroecker and Cook’s ideas about the “culture of waste” with the birth of dogmas or isms born out of modernism stating:

“Finally fine art dogma/isms born out of modernism...can no longer be received as universal truth, valid everywhere – an influence of the global communication network. Revealing the reality that there are still many other aesthetic tendencies, which are completely outside of the main currents of this dogma.”¹⁵⁶

One could in fact see that Herry Dim’s ideas were more or less the same with those repeatedly stated by Jim Supangkat: for example, regarding the “collapse of universalism,” “emergence of localism,” and the “disappearance of marginalization promised by postmodernist thought.” Herry Dim continued:

“By melting cultural dogmas’ main currents, one begins to melt the barriers of art. Here the boundaries between literature, theatre, music, painting, sculpture, graphic arts, begin to fade...BSRJ IX seemingly intends to take advantage of this moment of cultural change. This attentiveness must be value as this is an opportunity for Indonesian culture or further, the cultures of the Asia-Pacific that until now have been viewed as marginal in comparison to the cultures of modern Europe and America...39 artists are presented in BSRJ IX from Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, and Bali, displaying approximately 50 installation pieces. With this term installation legitimately becomes part of our artistic repertoire. However, this time it has already been recognized as a form of expression, and maybe (if it is later established) will become an aesthetic branch.”¹⁵⁷

Herry Dim tended towards the view that installation art was a sign of the melting of boundaries between fine art and theater. In the final part of his article, one finds a comment quite similar with Sri Warso Wahono:

“With that BSRJ IX had the conviction to carry the idea of postmodernism, with this it also had the conviction to wipe away the boundaries between high and low art, doing away with elitist art; however, with this BSRJ IX created new elites. An example is the village Nagrak, which was moved from one place to another, not by the people of the village itself, but rather by

153 ¹⁵³ Herry Dim in *Pikiran Rakyat* (1/13/1994), *ibid*.

154 ¹⁵⁴ Herry Dim in *Pikiran Rakyat* (1/13/1994), *ibid*.

155 ¹⁵⁵ See Harry Dim quoting Arthur Kroecker and David Cook *Pikiran Rakyat* (1/13/1994), *ibid*.

156 ¹⁵⁶ Herry Dim in *Pikiran Rakyat* (1/13/1994), *ibid*.

157 ¹⁵⁷ Herry Dim in *Pikiran Rakyat* (1/13/1994), *ibid*.

an artist named Krisna Murti. His thesis was that “it is time for the activities of academic fine art to return to the level of the dominant community, namely the lower classes,” however, his exhibition was at a biennale in an art center. We forget that postmodernism gives the opportunity to mamang- mamang pembuat pengusir hama burung di sawah, empu-empu yang menempatkan Blontang di Kalimantan, upacara ritual Brai di Cirebon, dan lihat susunan penganan pada upacara Nadran, para pengrajin krya, dll. Or maybe these forms are still considered inferior and too marginal to be included the criteria of installation. As we are forced to call celempungan music minimalist, we are not brave enough to call other types of art by their own name. Whereas this promise is an opportunity to join a new type of internationalism, the term installation is still foreign and only known to those that install cables and water pipes. We still are unable to contribute any term to the world.”¹⁵⁸

The interpretation of the term postmodernism in relation to the organization of BSRJ IX created many critics. Besides Semsar Siahaan, another critique came from F.X. Harsono, another artist also involved in this exhibition. He stated that Jim Supangkat’s way of thinking was a bit awkward, although he possessed a postmodern spirit, his mode of curation was totalitarian “... (read: modernist).”¹⁵⁹ His arguments can be read in a newspaper published on 16 January 1994:

“Postmodernism that is known with the spirit of deconstructionism towards modernist thinking that is totalitarian, dominates and legitimizes a theory that becomes ideology. Postmodernism exists with the spirit of pluralism, the desire to create something new, and reverse the principles of modern art – creating an unstable aesthetic, these are the primary characteristics of postmodernism. Theoretically speaking, Jim put forth these ideas, however, they have not yet become the attitude in this exhibition...the essence of postmodernism is to display local color, give opportunity to alternative thoughts, bravely assert the rejection of a singular truth, and to reject domination and centralization. This means that the artists’ ideas must be given a good place; one opinion does not dominate another. Is this the spirit reflected in the exhibition’s curation? I worry it is not...”

In general, Harsono questioned the relevance of postmodern theories that were explained in depth in the curatorial essay with the process of selecting works displayed in BSRJ IX. Harsono suggested that Jim ignored “...the opinion and ideas underlying the artists’ work...”¹⁶⁰ According to Harsono, the ideas and opinions of the artists can be said to indicate the spirit of postmodernism that their works are based on.

“For example doubts about Sudarisman, Agus Kamal, Melodia, and a number of other painters that have received awards in modern painting exhibitions, all of a sudden emerge in the postmodern biennale. This confusion is not addressed, as the idea of their art is not discussed. Similarly when analyzing the work of Nyoman Erawan, Nindityo, Andar Manik, Krisna Murti, and Heri Dono, which are seen to interact with traditional art, they must also be seen through the eyes of Douglas Crimp and Derrida. Are these artists considered incapable of representing their art?”¹⁶¹

Thus, the predicate, “the exhibition that carries the issue of postmodernism” was already attached to the organization of BSRJ IX. This claim often became the weapon of critics. Hardi wrote in a journal with heated words:

“...it appears that this Bienanle wants to show that the Indonesian art world is advancing, it

158 ¹⁵⁸ Herry Dim in *Pikiran Rakyat* (1/13/1994), *ibid.*

159 ¹⁵⁹ See F.X. Harsono, “Biennale IX Seni Rupa Jakarta, Dominasi Baru Pascamodern,” *Kompas*, 16 January 1994.

160 ¹⁶⁰ F.X. Harsono in *Kompas* (1/16/1994), *ibid.*

161 ¹⁶¹ See F.X. Harsono in *Kompas* (1/16/1994), *ibid.*

is not being left behind by the West, and the points of departure are not Wonogiri or Cihampelas, but rather of the civilized world, from a contemporary branch of philosophy, namely postmodernism. Anywhere art is an intense struggle by artists for artists...although it appears the production of art is easy, this does not mean that one can suddenly produce art and have an exhibition at TIM, then becoming a postmodern artist.”¹⁶²

Hardi saw BSRJ as a “ripe imitation of conceptual art” that had developed in the West, which he referred to as “...a reaction against the corruption of the art world because of its unreasonable commercialization.”¹⁶³

Dr. Emmanuel Subangun expressed directly criticism of postmodernism related to the organization of BSRJ IX in his book, *Syuga Derrida: Jejak Langkah Posmodernisme di Indonesia* (1994). This book was a collection of essays that drew attention to the problem of postmodernism in Indonesia, analyzing articles and essays written by Indonesian writers who discussed postmodernism including: a number of papers from a seminar held at Kristen Satya Wacana University, articles in the journal *Kebudayaan Kalam*, as well as the catalogue of BSRJ IX. In a number of ways, Subangun’s writing was different from that of other critics of BSRJ IX who in general problematized the relationship of the curatorial concept and the selection of artists without first looking more critically at the curation itself. Subangun—more fundamentally—questioned the “validity” of the rationale or explanations within the curatorial essay, specifically that related to postmodernism. His style of questioning can be seen in the paragraph:

“In the explanation of the Indonesian version of postmodern art, the curator busies himself with phrases or primary concepts like the term “avant-garde,” which is mentioned more than 60 times, the word “postmodernism” mentioned no less than 35 times, and the pair modern/modernization mentioned maybe as many as 40 times. Irregular concepts in art theory like installation are explored to the point of deconstruction more than a hundred times. Making such a text, overflowing with foreign terms, difficult to understand until it feels as if one is reading a script written in kanji in which neither the end nor the beginning are clear, moreover the meaning.”¹⁶⁴

The style of his comments, which tended to be cynical, included fragmentary quotes from Jim’s writing, which he then commented on directly with harsh frigid statements:

“An example of a quote when the problem of “language” in modern philosophy is to be explained:

Its written: “*Throughout the development of modernism, modern artists avoid writing and written statements...based on the belief: verbal description or language are unoriginal media and demonstrate a clear meaning, no longer opening a space for exploration (whereas) in poststructuralist philosophy, it is proven that language never shows reality. As is stated by Roland Barthes etc. etc...*”

Commentary: modernism and post-structuralism are they cousins or in-laws? The same blood; or different blood? Is the language of modernism understood within post-structuralism? Roland Barthes, who contracted TB and died in 1980, hit by a car, is placed in the same paragraph with post-structuralism. So historically he is a poststructuralist? It is recommended then: take any of the dozens of books by Barthes, then if you are not satisfied take Greimas, a language expert, and Levi Strauss, a cultural expert; then people will **nyahok** what is

¹⁶² ¹⁶² See Hardi, “Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta IX: Sebuah Cangkokan Barat yang Mentah,” *Horison* 02/XXVIII, 1994, p. 9.

¹⁶³ ¹⁶³ See Hardi, *Horison* 02/XXVIII, *ibid.* p. 7.

¹⁶⁴ ¹⁶⁴ Dr. Emmanuel Subangun “Suara-suara Gaduh di Sekitar Kesenian Posmodern” in “*Syuga Derrida: Jejak langkah posmodernisme di Indonesia*,” (Yogyakarta, CRI Allocita, 1994), p. 61.

structuralism and what is not, moreover with what is poststructuralism.”¹⁶⁵

Emmanuel Subangun’s criticism in general targeted “...inconsistent descriptions about many things...”¹⁶⁶ within Jim Supangkat’s curatorial essay. According to Subangun, in this essay there were a number of mistakes regarding the reading and explanation of postmodern theory, for example regarding “deconstructionism” and “...paradigms of the social sciences.”¹⁶⁷ No less heatedly compared with Hardi’s essay, the details of Subangun’s essay are as follows:

“And if there is a creature on this Earth of more than 5 million people that can understand postmodernism like this, the person involved is indeed either a genius or incredibly stupid. Postmodernism in Indonesian art is not food for most people. Because if people ask: *where* or *what* or *who* that is postmodern? They will be answered: That! Him! It! Asking again: it where? And the answer: thaaaaaaatttt.... That! That which occurs when art is engineered, like it is engineered by modernist ideology from that which is most basic until that which is most recent.”¹⁶⁸

Up until this point in the description of the debate, it cannot be denied that many of the responses regarding BSRJ IX arose due to the presence of postmodernism that was made into an issue and professed to be the base of the exhibition’s organization. Another article concerning the debate of BSRJ IX, no less important than others mentioned in this research project, is that written by Yustiono, which was included in the third edition of the journal *Kebudayaan Kalam* (1994). Although a bit different than Subangun, Yustiono also questioned the ideological base of BSRJ IX, specifically the category of the radical avant-garde that was connected by Jim Supangkat to postmodernism.¹⁶⁹ Yustiono’s analysis was done by re-reading references Jim Supangkat used in his essay. Based on this analysis Yustiono then asserts a number of disagreements.

According to Yustiono the premise that rebellion art of the 1970s was radical avant-gardism “...feels contradictive if compared with Jencks’s writing referenced by Jim Supangkat.”¹⁷⁰

“According to Jencks, the term avant-garde is a synonym of “modern art” or a “modern movement” that rests on modernism.”¹⁷¹

Yustiono re-quotes a number of important explanations from Jencks’s article, “The Post Avant-Garde,” and then analyzes them in length. He concludes that the attitude of rebellion art not only reflects the New Art Movement but also the emergence of PERSAGI, that “rebelled” against Mooi Indie; and the Bandung School that rebelled against PERSAGI who accused them of being “minions of the West.”¹⁷² This artistic system became the system that characterizes modern art and developed as the logical result of the basic views of modern art, namely modernism.¹⁷³

According to Yustiono one of Jim’s misunderstandings in his reading of Jencks is when he interprets the radical avant-garde as anti-modernism. According to Jencks’s explanation, quoted by Yustiono, the characteristic of this avant-garde was an extreme reflection of the principle of “creation” and “destruction” from modernism; the term avant-garde was a synonym of “modern art.” He translated one of Jencks’s comments, stating:

“The phrase “front guard” is a metaphor taken from military terminology as a more

165 ¹⁶⁵ Dr. Emmanuel Subangun, *ibid.* p. 62-63. Italics are the same as the source quoted.

166 ¹⁶⁶ Dr. Emmanuel Subangun, *ibid.* p. 63.

167 ¹⁶⁷ Dr. Emmanuel Subangun, *ibid.* p. 63.

168 ¹⁶⁸ Dr. Emmanuel Subangun, *ibid.* p. 65. Italics are the same as the source quoted.

169 ¹⁶⁹ See Yustiono, “Setelah Pemberontakan Seni Rupa Mempertimbangkan Kembali (Pemikiran) Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta IX,” in the journal *Kebudayaan Kalam*, edition 3 1994, p. 112-113.

170 ¹⁷⁰ Yustiono, journal *Kebudayaan Kalam*, edition 3/1994, p. 115-116.

171 ¹⁷¹ Yustiono, in journal *Kebudayaan Kalam*, edition 3/1994, p.116.

172 ¹⁷² Yustiono, journal *Kebudayaan Kalam*, edition 3/1994, p. 114.

173 ¹⁷³ Yustiono translates Jencks (1994), in *ibid.*, p. 114.

malleable replacement for the term “modern” or modern movement, while for some, sociologically, “front guard” described a class for individuals without patronage.”¹⁷⁴

Yustiono stated that the premise comparing the radical avant-garde with the New Art Movement made sense, at least in terms of the comparison of these two things based on the similarity of thematic characteristics displayed. He argued, “For example the idea to associate art with the people through daily themes that are characteristic of the era, specifically consumer culture and recreation; attention to sensual elements, appropriating elements of mass culture into the flow of ‘art,’ and the slippage of fine art.”¹⁷⁵ However, there were also included explanations that were clearly opposite of Jim Supangkat’s arguments. Yustiono argued that the New Art Movement did not have an anti-modernist attitude. As previously stated, Jim argued that the emergence of 1970s rebellion art was a result of the “Black December” protest, which rejected the trend of decorative art.¹⁷⁶ From this viewpoint Yustiono argued, that the premise to conflate the decorative trend with modernism was a mistake.¹⁷⁷

“Modernism that developed in the West clearly was against objects that were decorative or ornamental. Artists and above all modernist architects, held the view that ornamentation was the same as evil.”¹⁷⁸

Therefore, Yustiono argued that the base of Jencks’s theory quoted by Jim—regarding the relationship of the radical avant-garde with the post-avant-grade—in order to declare the relationship of 1970s rebellion art with Fine Art of the 1980s (BSRJ IX), and postmodernism did not have an accurate base. Yustiono’s argument and review regarding the phenomenon of BSRJ IX and postmodernism continued in an article published in 1995 entitled, “Indonesian Contemporary Art and the Postmodernist Wave” (*Seni Rupa Kontemporer Indonesia dan Gelombang Post-Modernisme*), published in the Journal of Fine Art (edition 1/1995). This article can be seen as relatively reflective, considering the period of its publication following the height of the BSRJ IX debate. Yustiono observed that since BSRJ IX there was “...a dynamic as well as confusion within the Indonesian contemporary art world related to the issue of postmodernism.”¹⁷⁹ He looked specifically at the confusion present in articles that were published in newspapers. He gave the assessment:

“Articles such as this generally did not give references in their statements, thus tending towards a simplistic explanation that was difficult to account for. As an example, the series of debates about fine art and postmodernism in the daily *Kompas*, leading up to and during IX Biennale Fine Art Jakarta, December 1993 – January 1994, gave the impression that writers remained confused and were still not familiar with the relatively new subject matter.”¹⁸⁰

He concluded:

“Facing this wave, it can be concluded that there is an attitude of ambivalence: on one side, met enthusiastically, while on the other side, met with resistance suggesting that the Indonesia people had only just entered the “modern world” and were not ready for the arrival of postmodern art. Outside of these opposing arguments, there were also a large group who did not care about this issue or did not want to be bothered with postmodernism.”¹⁸¹

174 ¹⁷⁴ See Yustiono, journal *Kebudayaan Kalam*, edition 3/1994, p. 116.

175 ¹⁷⁵ See Yustiono, journal *Kebudayaan Kalam*, edition 3/1994, p. 118.

176 ¹⁷⁶ See again Jim Supangkat’s article in the BSRJ IX at TIM catalogue (1993), p. 15.

177 ¹⁷⁷ See Yustiono, journal *Kebudayaan Kalam*, edition 3/1994, *op.cit.* p. 119.

178 ¹⁷⁸ Yustiono, journal *Kebudayaan Kalam*, edition 3/1994, p. 119.

179 ¹⁷⁹ See Yustiono, in journal *Fine Art*, edition 1/199, *op.cit.* p. 10.

180 ¹⁸⁰ Yustiono, journal *Kebudayaan Kalam*, edition 3/1994, p. 119.

181 ¹⁸¹ See Yustiono, in journal *Fine Art*, edition 1/1995, *ibid.* p. 10.

According to Yustiono one positive thing that arose from this debate surrounding postmodernism, was the emergence of the phrase “postmodernism;” especially when placed in the development of art generally and fine art specifically. This was seen as “positive” given that there was actually a foundation of values or views that had already penetrated modern art for a relatively long time, namely “modernism.” The appearance of “postmodernism,” therefore pushed efforts to identify a process through which to infuse the ideology of modernism into Indonesian fine art.¹⁸²

Yustiono continued further, explaining about the intellectual tendency of postmodernism that could be divided into three groups: philosophy, social, and cultural. He suggested that the confusion surrounding the issue of postmodernism was a result of a lack of understanding regarding this factor.¹⁸³ These three groups, as suggested, come together in their critique of modernism, particularly in the United States, France, and England. He then described the thought processes of these groups, mentioning the names of thinkers who represent the different tendencies. The grouping includes:

“The first group, which consists of thinkers from France like Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Franocis Lyotard, Jacques Lacan, and Deleuze who attacked the “modern project” based on the concepts of 18th century Enlightenment thinkers... the second group, social theory experts, included names like Daniel Bell, Alain Touraine, Jean Baudrillard, McLuhan, and Alvin Toffler...the third group, who attacked modernism, originated with critics, art writers, and artists...including names such as Ihab Hassan, Charles Jencks, Peter Fuller, Robert Venturi, Andreas Huyussen, Fredric Jameson, and the generation of post-Greenbergian critics such as Kim Levin and Rosalind Krauss.”¹⁸⁴

In the following paragraphs, Yustiono put forth a number of specific terms—along with an explanation—from postmodern discourse including: *post-industrial society*, simulation, intertextuality, eclecticism, *Metaphysical Classicism*, *Narrative Classicism*, “*shock of the old*,” and others. Based on this explanation he then stated “...the historical extent of the interpretation and evaluation of the wave of postmodernism has reached Indonesian contemporary art.”¹⁸⁵ The following explanation is a summary from his writing.

For Yustiono, the rupture of postmodernism within Indonesian contemporary art from the end of 1993 to the beginning of 1994 was not an isolated event. Rather it was the result of various voices calling for political and social decentralization; the attitude of anti-universalism and pluralism as its replacement; value of local culture; to the elimination of rational scientific thinking made widespread through print media, discussions of and seminars on culture throughout 1993. He argued that the claim “principles of postmodern art had influenced the art of the 1980s” was not entirely wrong if what was meant was the relationship of postmodernism with the concepts above.¹⁸⁶ Further, according to Yustiono, this environment also led to the birth of art accentuating the local, comprised of resistance in other realms including literature, theatre, music, and dance—specifically during the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s.

In art, this attitude revealing ideas in line with the principles of postmodernism seem to exist in the exhibition of the New Art Movement, “Shopping Mall Fantasy World,” at Tim, Jakarta in 1987. Yustiono argued that the appropriation of objects associated with mass consumerism or mass culture as art objects is one of the most telling principles representative of postmodernism.¹⁸⁷ This tendency in fact appeared in the work of the New Art Movement during the 1970s that believed in the influenced of Pop Art in America. Continuing, Yustiono explained that the tendency of postmodernism in Indonesia had already appeared in the 1970s, although it can be said the phrase

182 ¹⁸² See Yustiono, in journal *Fine Art*, edition 1/1995, *ibid.* p. 11.

183 ¹⁸³ See Yustiono, in journal *Fine Art*, edition 1/1995, *ibid.* p. 11.

184 ¹⁸⁴ See Yustiono, *ibid.*, p. 10-18.

185 ¹⁸⁵ Yustiono, see journal *Fine Art*, edition 1/1995 (1995), *ibid.* p. 18.

186 ¹⁸⁶ Yustiono, see journal *Fine Art*, edition 1/1995 (1995), *ibid.* p. 18.

187 ¹⁸⁷ Yustiono, *Journal of Fine Art* 1/1995 (1995), *ibid.*, p. 19.

postmodern was not yet known in Indonesia or the West.¹⁸⁸ This assumption is based on the conclusion of individuals like Huyssen, Jameson, and Jencks who agree that the tendency of postmodernism in art began with pop art, although the artists did not know or use this term. Therefore the “interpretation and historical evaluation” done by Yustiono that, “from that event, it seems that the postmodernism is an inevitable trend. It enters following the pattern between Indonesian culture and Western culture.”¹⁸⁹ From the last two paragraphs of Yustiono’s article there is an explanation that is important to note here:

“Like modernism, the present of postmodernism in the Indonesian art work occurred unconsciously. It appeared as a logical result of the historical-cultural relationship between the modern Indonesian art world and western art. Because of this, the claim that postmodernism’s association or presence with IX Jakarta Fine Art Biennale was not clear is not entirely wrong. The problem of the Indoensian contemporary art world is not situated within a claim like this or even in its rejection, because in fact, postmodernism had already appeared without being rejected. In the last two decades, whether recognized or not, postmodernism has influenced cultural discourse in Indonesia. It would be best to try and understand and realize the arrival of groups that exhale new cultural climates. Realize the consequences and impacts that might arise in order to then respond appropriately with the needs and goals of our culture. That is the cultural discourse that becomes a barrier to the inevitable entry of the information era.”¹⁹⁰

During the second half of 1995, the publication of articles that specifically questioned the issue of postmodernism and BSRJ IX began to recede, losing their resonance. This did not mean that the “debate” was “finished” or that a conclusion had been reached, which constituted an “out from the crisis of postmodernism.”

That which was stated by Yustiono was no exaggeration, let alone the various opinions, significant to the discussion described above. Based on the observations above, the discussion surrounding BSRJ IX, specifically that related to the issue of postmodernism, led to a dilemma that until now is not yet resolved, namely the misuse of a number of terms, concepts, ideas, and theories. The next chapter will include an explanation—with a wider viewpoint—that attempts to read and rewrite a number of articles concerning postmodernism as a group of ideas that in fact has already developed and been debated in the West for more than three decades. It is hoped that through this reading, a number of problems that have led to confusion within discussions of BSRJ IX and postmodernism in Indonesia can be mapped in a more clearly structured way.

188 ¹⁸⁸ Yustiono, *Journal of Fine Art* 1/1995 (1995), *ibid.*, p. 19.

189 ¹⁸⁹ Yustiono, *Journal of Fine Art* 1/1995 (1995), *ibid.*, p. 20.

190 ¹⁹⁰ Yustiono, *Journal of Fine Art* 1/1995 (1995), *ibid.*, p. 23.

CHAPTER 4

Observation of the IX Jakarta Fine Art Biennale Debate and its Relationship with the Discussion of Western Postmodernism

Scrutinizing the explanation two chapters ago, we have already obtained an overview of the discussion regarding postmodernism and its relationship to the organization of BSRJ IX, and the repertoire of postmodernist discourse that has developed amongst writers in the Western hemisphere. The approach of chapter three can be considered useful, because through it, a number of problems, specifically concerning the discussion of postmodernism and BSRJ IX in Indonesia, were reviewed discursively.

As already written in the introduction and pointed out by Yustiono, debate in Indonesia demonstrates confusion amongst the spokesmen of Indonesian art in regards to the issue of postmodernism. This factor is demonstrated by a number of different arguments that point out various topics within this debate. One of the reasons for this “confusion,” is the postmodernist discursive attitude, which is open to pluralistic interpretations.³⁷⁶ However, despite the discursive nature of postmodernism, it is necessary to reexamine the interpretation of the products of postmodernist discourse within the BSRJ IX debate. Therefore, this section, intends to critically and selectively, reexamine the interpretations that exist within debate of BSRJ IX by comparing this debate with references to postmodernist debate in the West.

4.1 Observations of Various Problems within Postmodernist Debate and BSRJ IX in Indonesia

Based on the genealogy of events, the phenomena of postmodernist debate within the Indonesian art world is as follows:

- The issue of postmodernism developed at the beginning of the 1990s, influenced by debate that developed in the West. This issue continued with the organization of discussions, seminars, and the publication of articles about postmodernism.
- The publication of BSRJ IX’s press release, which was said to be based on the principles of postmodernism.
- Responses appear in mass media to the publication of the BSRJ IX press release.
- A number of publications appear about BSRJ IX, reiterating the same issues presented in the press release.
- BSRJ IX opens on 21 December 1993. Its curatorial essay states that it is an exhibition influenced by the principles of postmodernism.
- Responses, reviews, and objections from various sides appear regarding the arguments that developed or the debate that persisted regarding postmodernism, BSRJ IX—specifically its curatorial essay—and further, about the development of Indonesian fine art. These articles appeared via mass media, journals, and books.

It can be concluded that one of the problems that occurred within the scope of debate about BSRJ IX and postmodernism in Indonesia, was also one of the “classic” issues within the debate of postmodernism (in Indonesia or the West). Namely, the issue concerning the interpretation of definitions, concepts, theories, and thought processes within “major developments”—or more

376 ³⁷⁶ Yasaraf Amir Piliang (1998), *op. cit.*, p. 286.

appropriately, the “jungle”—of postmodernism.

The confusion within the debate of postmodernism and BSRJ IX in Indonesia included the question: Is postmodernism a continuation of the critique of modernism? An article by Agus Dermawan T. (“**Plesetan Posmodernisme di Seni Rupa**,” *Kompas*, 12/12/1993)—that responded to the press release of BSRJ IX—contained an opinion regarding the prefix *post* within the phrase postmodernism through a lexical understanding, namely as a continuum or continuation of modernism. By quoting the opinion of Denny J.A. that was more or less the same, Agus Dermawan wrote that Indonesian artists were “not yet modern” and therefore were not capable of being called postmodern. Therefore, that which was professed by the press release regarding the presence of postmodernism in the practice of Indonesian fine art was no more than a “joke,” for show, or at the least, an intellectual *trend*.³⁷⁷

As already covered in the previous chapter, within a number of explanations or writings from the West, the definition of “postmodern” remains problematic. This opinion was also put forth by a number of thinkers like Dick Hebdige and Ihab Hassan. The writer Yasaraf A. Pilang suggested that there was not a single consensus that asserted a definite definition of postmodernism.³⁷⁸ It was also stated by Hassan, that this term has an unstable semantic character,³⁷⁹ whose definition is determined by the context where it is being debated. “Postmodern,” defined as “already modern,” feels like a contradiction if we are reminded of the epistemology of postmodernism that nullifies a linear mapping of history. While in fact other views offer postmodernism as an ideology that views the modern era as finished and postmodern as a part of this modern.³⁸⁰

On the other hand, Sri Warso Wahono put forth a view that was almost emotional. Without adequate explanation, she used as example, a number of art practices that she suggested possessed a “postmo” character such as the work of Max Ernst, Man Ray, and Alexander Calder. Conflict occurred when another art observer, Yustiono, suggested that this explanation had no base or further could be called “**keterlaluan ngawurnya** 4”³⁸¹ because, according to him these works were created during the modern era:

“...for those who have already studied closely the development of Western art during the 20th century, this statement will feel fabricated or without a base. Both Many Ray and Max Ernst are surrealists who were active during the 1920s and 30s. As surrealists they are grouped as modernists. Further, they were present during an era far from the postmodern era, which emerged only at the beginning of the 1970s. In addition, the work of Max Ernst is not installation, because of this, it is crazy if Max Ernst is called a “postmo” artist, or becomes a “barometer for global postmo.” Similarly, Alexander Calder, although originating in a closer era if we take the period of Kinetic Art that emerged at the end of the 1950s, reaching its peak in 1967, and receding at the beginning of the 1970s, was never included as an artist of the postmodernist era.”³⁸²

Yustiono’s interpretation was based on the discourse of linear history, which viewed the era of postmodernism as the “era after modernism.” However, it is not so easy to categorize a work of art or an artistic practice as “postmodern.” The categorization put forth by Wahono was clearly erroneous, simply because it was not based on an appropriate, elaborated explanation. Yustiono’s disclaimer could be seen as reasonable because it utilizes a tool that categorizes works of art based on specific periods within the historical (art) discourse of the modern era. However, the explanation within this disclaimer should be seen as one of the methods of categorization that has developed until now. As written by Harrison and Wood, the classification of a piece of art as “postmodern” is in fact always based on a particular interpretation of the rules within postmodernist discourse, be it

³⁷⁷ See Agus Dermawan T. (*Kompas*, 12/12/1993), *op.cit.*

³⁷⁸ See Yasraf A. Pilang (1999), *op.cit.*, p. 13. As a comparison read also Cahoon (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 1.

³⁷⁹ See Ihab Hassan in Docherty (ed.), p. 148.

³⁸⁰ See J.F. Lyotard (1979), *op.cit.*, p. 81.

³⁸¹ See Yustiono, (*Kalam*, 3-1994), p. 117.

³⁸² See Yustiono, *Journal of Fine Art* edition 1 (1995), *op.cit.* 7.

aesthetic, philosophical, social, political, or historical.³⁸³ Meaning, these categories are always dependent on this epistemological background. Craig Owens explained that modernism (Greenbergerian) had already mistakenly interpreted the practice of modern art that is in fact complex and contains allegorical elements.³⁸⁴ Besides Owens, Christopher Reed also wrote that within modernist works there were in fact always characteristics that could be considered “postmodern.”³⁸⁵

Another discrepancy can be seen when scrutinizing Wahono’s explanation about the category of postmodern art, explained as that associated with works which use “...new forms designed by computers, videos, or the findings of technological transfer...”³⁸⁶ It seems here that she has quoted the writings of Judith Axier Turner and Peter Drucer from the 1985 magazine *Titian* that stated “...the broad influence in the growth of postmodern art is connected to contemporary technology, packed with speculation.”³⁸⁷ Within Wahono’s article the understanding of “postmodern” as “after modern” is also implied. For example in the sentence:

“It is not impossible if Beuys, Calder, Rui Sekido, Yoon Young Suk, and Man Ray are received and supported by the public as part of postmodernism whose mindset and roots are within modernism. Their background is fixed and cannot be challenged. Beuys is an artist who has meddled in politics since he was small. Calder is an American fighter jet navigator, Christo a geological expert and topographer. Besides this, they grew up in a pure modern society.”³⁸⁸

Maragret A. Rose’s explanation about the overlap in the use of the terms “modern,” “modernity,” and “modernism”—that ultimately caused the overlap in understanding of postmodernism—is evident in the debate that occurred in Indonesian, including within Dermawan and Wahono’s articles. Within their questioning of postmodernism, neither departed from an adequate explanation of modernism within fine art discourse or touched on the development of modern art in Indonesia. The claim that Indonesian artists—specifically those that participated in BSRJ IX—are “still agrarian” is a narrow conclusion with no base. The word “agrarian” refers to a specific condition that demonstrates the level of modernity in Indonesia, not in relation to the development of modern fine art.

Confusion regarding the problematic definition of postmodernism stood out in daily newspaper articles that responded to, criticized or included news about the organization of BSRJ IX. On 26 December 1993, in a national newspaper, an article by Jim Supangkat was published entitled “**Menebak Postmodernisme, dan Terpeleset**,” aimed to respond to Wahono’s and Dermawan’s disclaimers. He included the definition of postmodernism writing “The term postmodernism is trapped, fishing for a definition that is completely upside down, if viewed from a common understanding. The fatal problem is the placement of postmodernism as a linear development of modernism, defined as “ultra modern” or more modern than modern.”³⁸⁹ Rather than thinking about the trap of the prefix “*post-*” within postmodernism, the way that this trap is understood becomes the explanation itself. Regarding the meaning of “*post-*,” J.F. Lyotard, in a 1985 article, stated that the meaning of “*post-*” within postmodernism could be understood as a “new direction from the previous one,” which in fact is not far from the understanding “ultra-modern,” like that which Jim Supangkat rejected.³⁹⁰ Besides the inclusion of this problematic definition, another discrepancy can be found in Jim Supangkat’s article, namely when he groups Michel Foucault within the Frankfurt School of Philosophy:

383 ³⁸³ See Harrison and Wood (eds.), *op.cit.* p. 989.

384 ³⁸⁴ See Harrison and Wood (eds.), quoted by Owens, *ibid.* p. 988.

385 ³⁸⁵ See Reed in Stangos (ed.), *op.cit.* p.271.

386 ³⁸⁶ Sri Warso Wahono (*Kompas*, 12/19/1993), *op.cit.*

387 ³⁸⁷ Sri Warso Wahono (*Kompas*, 12/19/1993), *op.cit.*

388 ³⁸⁸ Sri Warso Wahono (*Kompas*, 12/19/1993), *op.cit.*

389 ³⁸⁹ Jim Supangkat (*Kompas*, 12/26/1993), *op.cit.*

390 ³⁹⁰ See “Note on the Meaning of ‘Post’-“ by J.F. Lyotard, in Thomas Docherty (ed.), *op.cit.* p. 48.

“At this time anti-modernism in architecture and fine art are in contact—and find a base because they are similar—with the development of the Frankfurt School, specifically the ideas of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Roland Bathers, Jean Baudrillard, and Jacques Lacan.”³⁹¹

Despite this “false interpretation,” Jim’s explanation was not avoided within the debate about the definition of modern art. The source of Jim’s explanation, mentioning the various names above, was not traced. From a number of articles about the Frankfurt School, postmodernism and post-structuralism, the names Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, “Roland Bathers,” Jean Baudrillard, and Jacques Lacan are never mentioned as theorists from *Institut fur Sozialforschung*. The four names mentioned are pioneers of structuralism and post-structuralism. Moreover, in the debate about the poststructuralist “controversy” within the Frankfurt School, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida are the figures that are directly criticized by Habermas.³⁹² A number of articles state that the Frankfurt School philosophers, specifically Habermas, constitute a fortress clearly at odds with, even contradictory to the poststructuralists, primarily in their views regarding the project of modernism. While it cannot be denied that the Frankfurt School was involved in postmodernist discourse—specifically Adorno and Horkheimer whose ideas are often seen as the embryos of critical thinking against Enlightenment ideas, and later in the writings of Lyotard—the last generation, specifically Habermas and the Frankfurt School can more appropriately be seen as critics of the ideas of “postmodernists *par excellence*” like Lyotard and Derrida.

Jim Supangkat’s explanation above can be seen as an error that is quite fatal in the explanation of postmodernism. It is surprising that in its capacity as an article published in a national newspaper this error did not receive any type of response or rebuttal.

Another “interpretive error” in response to postmodernism in Indonesia can be seen in the statements of Semsar Siahaan, namely those related to postmodernism and Marxism. Semsar’s statement is as follows:

“While many works of post modern art are complacent with outside influences, I am not! My works depart from social reality that is structurally oppressed (structural oppression). Postmodernism does not know structure. How can I receive such a claim? I suspect even that the people I call “intellectual flirts” could divide the thinking of the Indonesian nation. Postmodernism is an idea that emerged in Marxist theory, whose trajectory is anti-establishment anarchism and developed in Paris, Francis. That is what is trying to be planted here. So in my opinion, people that want to sow such thoughts are depraved.”³⁹³

The truth of Semsar’s statement cannot be accounted for. This is why it is referred to as an “interpretive error,” or an exaggeration of the controversy. The claim “...postmodernism does not know structure...” is a narrow interpretation. Is this assumption made because postmodernism is seen as identical with post-structuralism? Then, if this is true, post-structuralism does not know structure? Further, what is meant by “anarchism” as stated by Semsar? The idea of “anarchism” is in fact similar to the principle of “*anything goes*” where there is not a single dominant principle.

The existence of opinion that identifies postmodernism with Marxism is an issue that has become relatively dominant in Indonesia.³⁹⁴ Fortunately regarding this, Tommy F. Awuy, another individual involved in the debate of BSRJ IX and postmodernism in Indonesia—corrected Semsar’s

391 ³⁹¹ See Jim Supangkat (*Kompas*, 12/26/1993), *op.cit.*

392 ³⁹² See Jurgen Habermas, “The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,” specifically the chapter “Beyond a Temporalized Philosophy of Origins: Jacques Derrida’s Critique of Phonocentrism” or the chapter “Some Questions Considering the Theory of Power: Foucault Again,” (Massachusetts, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1996). For additional reference, read also Fransisco Budi Hardiman (1993), specifically the chapter “Diskusi dengan Pemikiran Postmodern,” *op.cit.* p. 177.

393 ³⁹³ See the interview by Agus Sularto with Semsar Siahaan, *Media Indonesia* (1/2/1994), *op.cit.*

394 ³⁹⁴ See articles such as “Mencari Konsep Seni Posmo” (*Republika*, 13 January 1994), or “Awas Anarki di Belakang Posmo” (*Republika*, 20 January 1994).

statement regarding the relationship between postmodernism and Marxism. In an interview dated 11 January 1994 in the same newspaper Awuy stated:

“The most vulnerable thing is the effort to equate postmodernism with Marxism. I shutter when I hear this.”³⁹⁵

In another article in the form of an interview dated 13 January 1994, Awuy again stated that there was a misperception about the relationship of postmodernism with the “voices of Marxism that try to manipulate art,” or the idea that “posmo constitutes another form of Marxism.” Awuy fully blamed these assumptions, explaining that such a perception was presumably because of Lyotard, a founder of postmodernism, who was also a Marxist.³⁹⁶

The writer K. Bertens states that Lyotard was a member of the Paris-Based French socialist group known as *Sosialisme ou Barbarie*³⁹⁷ (the name *Socialism or Barbarity* was taken from the title of a novel by a famous female Marxist...). However, Lyotard’s ideas about postmodernism were published after he left the organization mentioned, and in initiating postmodernism, did not in anyway suggest a road to anarchy or anti-establishment. He even criticized Marxism as a “grand narrative”—the substitution of myths about Gods in pre-modern society—that must be abolished. Lyotard criticized Marxism because he believed that Marx’s inspiration to create a homogenous society could not be done without violence.³⁹⁸ This fact was also confirmed by a number of French poststructuralist critiques of the basic principles within Marxism.³⁹⁹

395 ³⁹⁵ Tommy F. Awuy, *Media Indonesia* (1/11/1994), *op. cit.*

396 ³⁹⁶ See the interview of Tommy F. Awuy with Yos Rizal Suriaji, *Republika* (1/13/1994), *op.cit.*

397 ³⁹⁷ See K. Bertens (1996), *op.cit.*, p. 344.

398 ³⁹⁸ See Madan Sarup, *op.cit.*, p. 132.

399 ³⁹⁹ The disappointment of French intellectuals in the 1950s with Marxism was spread evenly, particularly amongst Foucault, Baudrillard, and Lyotard. It was believed Marxism did not give an answer to various sosio-political explosions in France, specifically leading up to the May 1968 student revolution. See K. Bertens (1996), *op.cit.* p. 344. See also Lawrence E. Cahoon that sees poststructuralism as the attack of the French academy against Marxism, Phenomenology, Existentialism, Psychoanalysis, and Structuralism, Cahoon (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 5.

Besides Lyotard, other postmodernists, like Jean Baudrillard for example, were known as critics of Marxism, namely in regards to Marx's concept of commodity fetishism;⁴⁰⁰ whereas Michel Foucault nullified Marx's concept of "social class." Foucault suggested that "the party that dominates" and "those that are dominated" (as stated within the teachings of Marx) do not exist in a binary relationship.⁴⁰¹ Within poststructuralist discourse (or postmodernism), Marxism is seen as a dogmatic intellectual tradition—even instrumentalist, because it is often used as a tool of political domination and power.⁴⁰²

It is clear that the assumption about postmodernism as "another form of Marxism" is an erroneous interpretation. It is surprising that this assumption developed in Indonesia, where at that time the ideas of Karl Marx and Marxism were not very well known, whether in educational contexts or intellectual and academic debates. The political trauma related to the destruction of the Indonesian Communist Party, led to the New Order's ban on the spread of communist teachings. It can be estimated that the vague issue of postmodernism, which offered an "equality of views,"⁴⁰³ was coupled with a narrow understanding of Marxism, because a number of groups in Indonesia at this time equated the two isms.

The existence of controversial statements or definitions of postmodernism related to the organization of BSRJ IX put forth the image that there was not an accurate understanding. Besides this, as is known, the issue of postmodernism crossed a number of disciplinary debates making it impossible for those involved in this debate to consider all of the various references and interpretations put forth. Tommy F. Awuy tended to look at the tools of philosophical discourse in the organization of BSRJ IX. According to him, the spirit of postmodernism within BSRJ IX—can be seen through an explanation of Semsar Siahaan's piece, "Penggalian Kembali"—located within his spirit to "...deconstruct the injustices of artistic modernism that civilized itself with discipline and courtesy regarding the concept of aesthetic space."⁴⁰⁴ He judged that BSRJ IX, from the side of form and its spirit, was characterized by the concepts of postmodernism because of: "...the destruction of homogenous space, made into pluralist space with no singular representative meaning." Through the expression of such concepts, postmodernism becomes familiar.⁴⁰⁵

In his article, Awuy did not touch on the particulars of modernism in fine art, Formalism, Clement Greenberg, or about the continuation of Kantian ontology. In a long winded manner he mentioned the work of a number of artists including Semsar Siahaan, Rahmayani, Andar Malik, Tony Haryanto, and Agus Jolly as works of art in BSRJ IX that were most representative of postmodernism.⁴⁰⁶ From his writing it can be known that by claiming these works as "postmodern," Awuy saw that there were elements of postmodern/post-structural discourse within the concept of the artist's work. He did not review whether the works mentioned represented the tendency to "leave modernism" or that of the "radical avant-garde" as had stated by the curator of BSRJ IX. A part of his argument is quoted in order that this can be made clear:

"...Agus Jolly's installation represents the subjective psychology of the artist himself...my impression of Agus is quite involved with a number of elements or texts within art, although he did not want to know whether his work could be called postmodernist or not...whereas Tony's work describing the noisy roar of information through the display of a number of televisions fits perfectly with an understanding of the rupture of homogenous space or centralism in deconstructionism's program. Information is everywhere and everyone has the right to receive it, within the simultaneous motion of advanced capitalism's lifestyle...Andar Manik's

400 ⁴⁰⁰ See the work of Jean Baudrillard "For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign" (1981) that critiques Marxism and Saussurean Structuralism.

401 ⁴⁰¹ See Madan Sarup, *op.cit.*, p. 87-88.

402 ⁴⁰² See Pauline Marie Rosenau, *op.cit.*, p. 6. See also Mada Sarup, *ibid.*, p. 101.

403 ⁴⁰³ The assumption regarding the "equation of views" in postmodernism can be seen in Jim Supangkat's article "Menebak Postmodernisme, dan Terpeleset," *Kompas* (12/26/1993)

404 ⁴⁰⁴ Tommy F. Awuy, *Media Indonesia* (1/11/1994), *op.cit.*

405 ⁴⁰⁵ Tommy F. Awuy, *Media Indonesia* (1/11/1994), *ibid.*

406 ⁴⁰⁶ Tommy F. Awuy, *Media Indonesia* (1/11/1994), *ibid.*

ceramic installation gives the impression of how the reality we face is only a fragile sticker where the ceramic stickers are signifiers of a fixed world, certain and stable, displayed on signified walls. Life is like an unstable relationship between two signs. I feel that there is a nuance of deconstructionism that is quite strong within this work...another installation that was no less interesting was the work of Rahmayani. This piece displaced pieces of dead bodies that had already been overgrown by red bean plants, while on the walls several paintings were plastered of unidentifiable faces...in terms of form she dismissed the ideal forms of artistic modernism or anything essential.”⁴⁰⁷

It is clear that Awuy’s article tends more towards an explanation of works from BSRJ IX that are seen to possess a relationship with particular topics from postmodernist discourse like the “spirit of deconstructionism” and “advanced capitalism.” This model of categorization resembles one of the variants within the discourse of postmodern art in the West, as stated by Christopher Reed.⁴⁰⁸ For example, the work of Agus Jolly that was said to be involved with “various texts within art” was seemingly equated by Awuy with opinions—specifically within poststructuralist discourse—which state that a work (text) constitutes a combination, an intersection of signs, in which none are original (Kristeva-Barthes).

Different than interpretive principles within modernism that emphasize the certainty of meaning in a text, namely the idea of the artist, Awuy apparently believes that a giant coffin, a fish pond, a frog, a sand dune, plastic, and other objects—added to the presentation of performance art—in the work of Agus Jolly is a characteristic of postmodernism.⁴⁰⁹ While a claim such as this is valid, its accuracy must be traced further. Awuy does not specifically explain what is meant by, “diverse media.” Further, Awuy does not elaborate his explanation about “spirit to free one’s self from the isms of modern art.” This can be considered evidence that theoretical tools and the history of fine art are not used within Tommy F. Awuy’s interpretation.

From another perspective, Herry Dim’s article argues that works of art within BSRJ IX possess postmodern characteristics stating, “...as a result of the large currents melting, borders between art forms melt. Here borders refer to those between literature, theater, music, painting, and “traditional art.” This criticism is expressed with the statement:

“With that BSRJ IX had the conviction to carry the idea of postmodernism, with this it also had the conviction to wipe away the boundaries between high and low art, doing away with elitist art; however, with this BSRJ IX created new elites. An example is the village Nagrak, which was moved from one place to another, not by the people of the village itself, but rather by an artist named Krisna Murti. His thesis was that “it is time for the activities of academic fine art to return to the level of the dominant community, namely the lower classes,” however, his exhibition was held at a biennale in an art center. We forget that postmodernism gives the opportunity to mamang-mamang pembuat pengusir hama burung di sawah, empu-empu yang menempatkan Blontang di Kalimantan, upacara ritual Brai di Cirebon, dan lihat susunan penganan pada upacara Nadran, para pengrajin krya, dll. Or maybe these forms are still considered inferior and marginal to be included in installation criteria. As we are forced to call celempungan music minimalist, we are not brave enough to call other types of art by their own name. Whereas this promise is an opportunity to join a new type of internationalism, the term installation is still foreign and only known by installers of cable and water pipes. While we still are unable to contribute any

⁴⁰⁷ Tommy F. Awuy, *Media Indonesia* (1/11/1994), *ibid*.

⁴⁰⁸ See Reed in Stangos (ed.), *op cit.*, p. 271, Detalis, “Thus phenomena (including art) arrive in the category of postmodernism in two ways: first, by occurring in the postmodern era; and second, by demonstrating particular forms associated with postmodern thought.

⁴⁰⁹ “...Agus Suwage’s work demonstrates patterns of postmodernism. We cannot determine a singular meaning in his work. The meanings are many. People are free to search for their own interpretation of this work. The media and the idiom are diverse. It is also free from the isms of fine art,” commented Tommy F. Awuy as quoted by *Republika*, see the article “Ketika ‘Anak Muda Posmo’ Dipasung,” 13 January 1994.

term to the world.”⁴¹⁴

Herry Dim’s criticism can be traced further, departing from an understanding of postmodernism as “...a critical tendency against modernism” as seen in the first paragraph of his article. By applying this understanding from the definition of postmodernism, Herry Dim concluded that certain artifacts of Indonesian traditional culture such as those mentioned above deserved the opportunity to be seen as postmodern works, capable of being displayed at BSRJ IX. This assumption regarding traditional artifacts labeled as “installation” or “postmodern,” that must be displayed within the exhibition of BSRJ IX, was certainly not impossible to realize as long as their display was conceived of and elaborated on by the appropriate discourse. It is quite possible for traditional forms such as **pengusir hama burung di sawah, upacara Brai Cirebon**, or craft objects to be claimed as “postmodern.” Nevertheless, this type of categorization cannot simply be based on the assumption that postmodern art erases the boundaries of art, therefore as Herry Dim states, “...it is time for fine art in the academy to come down to the level of the masses.”

The opinion that BSRJ IX produced a new elite was a criticism directly related to the curatorial process, specifically that realized by Jim Supangkat based on the ideas in his essay “Art of the 80s.” Adanya “**proses penjembaan**” is a key factor in understanding BSRJ IX’s curatorial intent. As explained, the process of “**penjembaan**” was interpreted not merely as, “exploring or searching, but a type of exploration followed by the activities of selecting, embracing, digging, and development that needed to be deconstructed.”⁴¹⁵ The curatorial concept of BSRJ IX was intended to stimulate a discussion about the development of a particular practice—called Art of the 1980s—that was believed to be “...distanced from the attention of critics and fine art institutions, left unnoticed.”⁴¹⁶ It can be said that the organization of BSRJ IX intended to stimulate a discussion about the practice of fine art that at that time was called “marginal” or “marginalized” within the dominant discourse in Indonesia, although it was also stated “...that it succeeded in catching the attention of international curators...and was displayed in international exhibitions.”⁴¹⁷ This desire for the practice of (a type of) “genealogical principle” was seen as the clear direction and mission of the exhibition.

Herry Dim’s criticism regarding the birth of a new elite within fine art demonstrated a basic narrow assumption. This is because the discourse highlighted by Jim Supangkat was only associated with the practice of art that was previously underway. When he then mentioned the people of Nagrak Village or **-mamang pembuat pengusir hama burung di sawah**, who had not previously been incorporated within the repertoire of Indonesian art—as “marginal” artists and representative of trends in postmodern art practice—his approach no longer made sense.

Therefore, from the perspective of “**penjembaannya**” the curatorial concept of BSRJ IX seems at least to represent the spirit of postmodernism, in its intention to stimulate a discussion about the practice of fine art “...whose existence in our nation has not been questioned.”⁴¹⁸ However, BSRJ IX’s process of “**penjembaan**” was then faced with a “methodological, if not “epistemological” problem. This problem relates to the curatorial effort to interpret theories, concepts, or ideas within Western discussion (specifically about postmodernism and theory/categorization of the avant-garde), and then applying these theories to the context of development in Indonesia. From these articles, a number of explanations, which explain or “claim” the existence of the practice of fine art in Indonesia, believed to have a discursive connection with discussion about the avant-garde, postmodernism, and postmodern art in the West can be seen. Before moving to a number of interpretative errors within the article “Art of the 80s,” a number of primary ideas within the article must be noted, including:

- The concept of “**penjembaan**” or the curation of BSRJ IX, believed to be an effort to

414 ⁴¹⁴ Herry Dim (*Pikiran Rakyat*, 1/13/1994), *op cit*.

415 ⁴¹⁵ Jim Supangkat (BSRJ IX catalogue, 1993), *op cit*, p. 13.

416 ⁴¹⁶ Jim Supangkat (BSRJ IX catalogue, 1993), *ibid*, p. 13.

417 ⁴¹⁷ Jim Supangkat (BSRJ IX catalogue, 1993), *ibid*, p. 13.

418 ⁴¹⁸ Jim Supangkat (BSRJ IX catalogue, 1993), *ibid*, p. 13.

confirm the existence of characteristics seen within works of fine art that emerged during the middle of the 1980s—referred to as Art of the 1980s, namely, art that tended to use alternative idioms like mixed media, installation, video art, and performance.

- Art of the 1980s is post-rebellion art, which constitutes the continuation of tendencies that developed in the 1970s and cannot be disconnected from the context of art's depoliticization, specifically during the 1960s.
- Indonesian art demonstrates developments outside of Western modernism.
- Art of the 1980s—as it is called—no longer opposes modernism or further, departs from it, this type of art is believed to be postmodern art.
- There is a claim regarding the assertion of the terminology “Indonesian contemporary art” as art that no longer uses principles of modernism, based on the premise that using the term contemporary is an effort to avoid the use of “modern art.”
- There is a claim that the emergence of contemporary art in Indonesia is most clearly seen through the development of 1970s rebellion art, which tore apart the principles of modern art.
- The relationship of Art of the 1980s with postmodernism can be seen by scrutinizing the history of rebellion art of the 1970s, which possessed traits of the radical avant-garde.
- According to Jencks, postmodernism is a characteristic of the post-avant-garde where the base of rebellion against modernism begins to show a clear attitude, until Art of the 1980s that can be called postmodern art—which is understood as a continuation of rebellion art of the 1970s.

It is worth noting here, that one of the intensely debated topics within discussion of BSRJ IX included the relationship of the radical avant-garde in Indonesia, postmodernism, and the practice of 1980s art. In the article “Art of The 80s” it is stated:

“Following new theories about the avant-garde in art, 1970s rebellion art is categorized as the radical avant-garde. Within these theories the radical avant-garde appears separately in various countries throughout the development of modernism.”⁴¹⁹

In another section Jim continues: “The radical avant-garde” is one attempt to purify art, returning it to life. Because of this mission, the radical avant-garde, according to Jencks is also anti-avant-garde, specifically avant-gardism.⁴²⁰ The emphasis on the development of the radical avant-garde that appears and develops “...separately in various countries,” seems here to become an important premise within the curatorial essay “Art of the 80s.” It can be traced, that this assertion originates from “...new theories about the avant-garde in art,” that constitute no other than the ideas in the article by Jencks entitled “The Post-Avant-Garde,” published in 1985 in the journal, *Art and Design*.⁴²¹

419 ⁴¹⁹ Jim Supangkat (BSRJ IX catalogue, 1993), *ibid*, p. 13.

420 ⁴²⁰ Jim Supangkat, *ibid.*, p. 19.

421 ⁴²¹ See the article by Jencks “The Post-Avant-Garde,” in Andreas Papadakis (ed.), the *Journal of Art and Design* titled “Art in the Age of Pluralism (London: Art & Design, 1987), that explains “...the radical avant-gardes—the Futurist, Dadaist, and Constructivists—sought to do away with all distinctions, all nationalities, all standards and professions (including in a sense themselves) and thus they were not only radical, but anti-avant-garde as well.” P. 12.

Jim interprets Jencks's theory about the radical avant-garde as an avant-garde movement that resisted modernism as an institution, and as a concept that "...strove to open all boundaries between professions and resist all standards, which included suspecting their own sensitivities. Basically, to destroy boundaries, which separate art from life."⁴²² The radical avant-garde is explained as a movement that resisted the development of modernism that had become centralized in museums in New York—MoMa, the "Vatican of Modernism." A number of artists in Europe who launched this attacked included: Alan Kaprow, Joseph Beuys, and Nam June Paik, who conducted art activities with students in reaction to the Vietnam War. Whereas in America, the movement of the radical avant-garde was led by Pop Art that developed from local culture "...at the same time as the growth of the "craze" of the American public towards popular art, the worship of comic book characters like Charlie Brown, Batman, Superman, and Flash Gordon."⁴²³ Again quoting Jencks, Jim also explained the particulars of the radical avant-garde movement as resistance towards the concept of *High Culture*.

Explanations that claim the existence of the radical avant-garde in Indonesia, amongst others, can be seen in Jim Supangkat's explanation about the New Art Movement, which he writes, "...resisted *fine art*...demonstrating the attitude of the radical avant-garde..."⁴²⁴ Besides this "rebellion art of the 1970s" is exemplified through the example of the "Black December Statement" that "...showed mechanisms opposing the anatomy of modernism..."⁴²⁵ that were also seen to constitute characteristics of the radical avant-garde, namely resistance to the depoliticization of art. Besides this, Jim wrote, that Mulyono—the artist who chose to live amongst the poor in peripheral regions with the goal of raising the value of their lives through the practice of art—

422 ⁴²² Jim Supangkat (BSRJ IX catalogue, 1993), quoting Jencks, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

423 ⁴²³ Jim Supangkat (BSRJ IX catalogue, 1993), *ibid*, p. 19.

424 ⁴²⁴ Jim Supangkat (BSRJ IX catalogue, 1993), *ibid*, p. 21.

425 ⁴²⁵ Jim Supangkat (BSRJ IX catalogue, 1993), *ibid*, p. 20.

also demonstrated a characteristic of the radical avant-garde: make art and life one.⁴²⁶

In the process of “*penjembaannya*” the article, “Art of the 80s” implies a type of “borrowing.” Borrowing devices that allow for the identification of the narrative flow of Western art in order to identify the practice of fine art occurring in Indonesia. To be sure, this is not something that is forbidden, but rather is something that must be reexamined here, specifically in regards to how far the practice of Indonesian fine art can be explained within a particular claim or category of Western debate. It must be recognized that a more in-depth comprehensive study must be done of the interpretations of BSRJ IX’s curator in the article “Art of the 80s.” The various dynamics of Indonesian art practice, can indeed be identified with a variety of theoretical tools.

Through the journal *Kebudayaan Kalam*, edition 3-1994, Yustiono, one of the individuals who with relative intensity, reviewed BSRJ IX and postmodernism in Indonesia, wrote that the categorization of the New Art Movement as part of the radical avant-garde is key in understanding whether or not the art of the 1980s in fact represented a continuation of 1970s rebellion art. This statement indirectly pointed to the explanation of Jencks’s theory, regarding the relationship of the radical avant-garde and postmodernism.⁴²⁷ By reading and rereading the references within the curatorial essay “Art of the 80s,” specifically Jencks’s view of the avant-garde, Yustiono stated that in his application of Jencks’s theory, there were a number of disagreements within Jim Supangkat’s grouping, labeling, and categorization of the avant-garde. According to Yustiono, Jim also mistakenly interpreted the concept of the radical avant-garde as anti-modern, a label, which was then applied to the New Art Movement.⁴²⁸ His argument was as follows:

“As a manifestation of the avant-garde, the New Art Movement did not have an anti-modernist attitude. The statement, which concluded that the New Art Movement had the desire to reject all modernist traditions, had no base within Jencks’s theory. In actuality, the radical avant-garde revealed the principles of modernism, which reacted against the modern world and the world of bourgeois capitalism, namely the principle of production and deconstruction like that seen in cycles of fashion or concepts of “creating and destroying” within modern art. If the New Art Movement’s origin associated with the 1974 protest of a jury’s decision declaring “decorative” painting superior, the above statement becomes invalid. Western modernism is clearly anti anything with decorative or ornamental characteristics. Painters and moreover modern architects are of the opinion that ornamentation is the same as evil. The term “new” within the New Art Movement expresses the spirit behind this movement.”⁴²⁹

Although he had no objection New Art Movement’s categorization as part of the radical avant-garde,⁴³⁰ Yustiono saw that the misinterpretation of this movement as “anti-modern” as a contradiction, “...the use of Jencks’s theory as a support for the premise that asserts the relationship between the radical avant-garde and postmodernism, or between art of the 1970s and the 1980s, actually has no base.”⁴³¹

Further, in Yustiono’s article he shared his opinion, which highlighted the contradiction between an understanding of the avant-garde and modernism referred to by Jim Supangkat through the ideas of Charles Jencks:

“...the second premise—that the program of 1970s art or rebellion art was a total rejection of modernist traditions and should be grouped with the radical avant-garde—feels contradictory if compared with Jenckc’s article, which is referenced. According to Jencks, the term avant-

426 ⁴²⁶ Jim Supangkat (BSRJ IX Catalogue, 1993), *ibid.*, p. 24.

427 ⁴²⁷ See Yustiono (Kalam, 1994), *ibid.*, p. 119.

428 ⁴²⁸ See Yustiono (Kalam, 1994), *op. cit.*, p. 119.

429 ⁴²⁹ See Yustiono (Kalam, 1994), *ibid.*, p. 119.

430 ⁴³⁰ Seen in the sentence, “...so that the opinion that positions the New Art Movement as part of the radical avant-garde definitely makes sense.” See Yustiono (kalam, 1994), *ibid.*, p. 118.

431 ⁴³¹ Yustiono (Kalam, 1994), *ibid.*, p. 119.

garde is a synonym of “modern art” or “modernist movements” that rest on modernism.”⁴³²

Yustiono continued that the three concepts of the avant-garde (heroic, pure, and radical) found by Jencks constitute a representation of modernism, because all of these assert a specific direction, often referred to as “spirit of the time” (zeitgeist) or “style of the time” (zeitstil). This explanation was further strengthened by the inclusion of quotes from the article “The Post Avant-Garde” by Jencks, which includes a translation of the term “front guard,” a term that in fact has an odd meaning. For some, the “front guard” is a metaphor taken from military technology in exchange for a “mild” reference to “modern.” Whereas for others, sociologically, the term “front guard” illustrates a patronless class of individuals.”⁴³³

Thus, Yustiono’s response to Jim Supangkat’s curatorial essay based on sentences within the opening paragraph, which he translated from Jencks’s “The Post-Avant-Garde.” In order to see more critically the contention between these two figures, this study finds it necessary to look again at the writing of Jencks:

“The avant-garde is a curious term and idea; partly a military metaphor applied to the art and cultural worlds, partly a synonym and substitute for the more anodyne “modern or “modern movement,” partly a sociological description of a patronless class of individuals. To some extent it is also a pseudo concept used to confirm the reputations of those who have arrived safely in the Vatican Modernism, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, that quasi official institution which turns former acts of invention and destruction into fairly permanent icons to be studied, classified, and on occasion, worshipped.”⁴³⁴

Interpreting this statement, it can be seen that Jencks does not state that an understanding of the avant-garde as a synonym of modernism is absolute. The word “partly” indicates Jencks’s intention to point readers to an understanding of the term avant-garde that is different according to different parties. According to Jencks this understanding is based on earlier changes in art practice.⁴³⁵

Jencks states, “...partly a military metaphor applied to art and cultural worlds...” in order to point to heroic understandings of the avant-garde, namely an understanding of the avant-garde that emerged first: as a movement of artists and culture that precedes society, pointing out the route that must be taken in order to reach a positive future, *Serving the Destiny of Humanity*. This first trend constituted a replacement of elite institutions—intellectuals, professionals, and aristocrats—who created various “styles” or cultural forms, which ultimately were imitated by society, creating a standard for mass production. This process continues, endlessly repeatedly, and at its most extreme, the products of this movement become mass taste.⁴³⁶ Whereas Jencks’s statement “...it is also a pseudo concept used to confirm the reputations of those who have arrived safely in the Vatican Modernism, The Museum of Modern Art in New York...” leads the reader to the explanation included in the following paragraphs about the second avant-garde grouping: the purist avant-garde whose path was laid out by the first group of the avant-garde. Jencks used as an example the style of abstract modernism to late-modernism, which he stated had dominated the political practice of art and architecture since the 1980s.⁴³⁷ The contradiction regarding this group, is that after being coopted by art institutions like MOMA, this movement intended as a new discovery with a rebellious attitude became a permanent icon that was studied, classified, adored, and traded at a fantastic price. Then, with the statement “...partly a sociological description of a patronless class of individuals,” Jencks points towards the third category, namely the radical avant-garde, which was

432 ⁴³² Check Yustiono (Kalam, 1994), *ibid.*, p. 116.

433 ⁴³³ Yustiono translating Jencks, see Yustiono (Kalam, 1994), *ibid.*, p. 116.

434 ⁴³⁴ Charles Jencks in Papadakis (ed., 1987), *ibid.*, p. 5.

435 ⁴³⁵ “By looking, briefly, at the four main stages of the 1820s to the present, we can see how the world and practice have come, through a series of subtle alternations, to change the meaning entirely,” See Jencks in Papadakis (ed., 1987), *ibid.* p. 8.

436 ⁴³⁶ See Jencks in Papadakis (ed., 1987), *op cit.*, p. 9.

437 ⁴³⁷ Jencks in Papadakis (ed., 1987), *ibid.*, p. 12.

manifested through the socio-political acts of various European and American artists during the 1980s.

The opinion that equates modernism with the avant-garde in fact cannot be found in Jencks's writing. In the opening paragraph he only writes, "...partly a synonym and substitute for the more anodyne "modern" or "modern movement..." Meaning, that Jencks only equates the avant-garde with the term "modern" (as an adjective that precedes another word) or as a "modern movement." Yustiono's response then constitutes a further interpretation of this sentence.

Two of the terms discussed with significance within debates of postmodernism in the West include "modernism" and "avant-garde." Modernism and the avant-garde constitute two concepts, which both reflect the spirit of aesthetic modernity. Debate that questions this is closely related to postmodernist discourse, specifically in regards to how understanding of these two categories of cultural modernism are used as referential terms within the writing of postmodernists.

A number of art historians referred the term "avant-garde" as "...a rebellious political movement that was at the same time artistic, initiated by artists at the end of the 19th century."⁴³⁸ The existence of blurred boundaries between understandings of modernism and the avant-garde as stated in the above definition becomes problematic when forced to consider postmodernism. Boundaries of understanding are related to the grouping or categorization of artistic trends that emerge during particular periods. With the understanding of "rebellion" here does it mean that every work of avant-garde art can be called modernist or vice versa? For example, in 1939 Clement Greenberg put forth a definition of the "avant-garde" that was not too different than understandings of "modernism" and "formalism"; namely, as "art that is constantly innovative and introduces society to new things, while also remaining responsible to the values of the specific art form."⁴³⁹ At a glance, this understanding of the avant-garde seems to be what Yustiono expresses, namely that the avant-garde is a synonym of modernism.

Moving to another reading, the theoretician Peter Burger, in his work "Theory of the Avant-Garde," claims that there is a contrast between concepts of modernism and the avant-garde. In a review that was socio-historic, Burger identified the avant-garde as a rejection of the institutionalization of art that had occurred because of modernist autonomy.⁴⁴⁰ According to Burger, modernism is the rejection of traditional styles that had developed previously. This understanding of "modernism" tends towards Adorno's understanding of "high-modernism," intended as an attack on the status of art that had been commercialized by institutions where art is produced, distributed, and received by the bourgeois. According to Burger "institutional art," also mentioned by Huysen, constitutes the manifestation of Kant and Schiller's principles of aestheticism that want autonomy for all artistic production.⁴⁴¹

"The European avant-garde movements can be defined as an attack on the status of bourgeois society. What is negated is not an earlier form of art (a style) but art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men. When the avant-gardistes demand that art become practical once again, they do not mean that the contents of the works of art should be socially significant. The demand is not raised at the level of contents of individual works. Rather, it directs itself to the way art functions in society, a process that does as much to determinate the effect that works have as does the particular content."⁴⁴²

According to Burger, the avant-garde movement in the extreme sense constitutes a radical rejection of individual artistic creation within modernist discourse. In his article, "The Theory of the Avant-

438 ⁴³⁸ See for example Eric Fernie (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 328.

439 ⁴³⁹ See Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939) in "Art and Culture, Critical Essays," (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 8 Greenberg mentions artists like Picasso, Braque, Mondrian, Miro, Kandinski, Brancusi, Klee, Matisse, and Cezanne as avant-garde artists. See also Eric Fernie (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 328.

440 ⁴⁴⁰ "Foreword: Theory of Modernism versus Theory of the Avant-Garde," introduction by Jochen Schulte-Sasse, in Peter Burger, "Theory of the Avant-Garde" (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. xv.

441 ⁴⁴¹ Andreas Huyssen, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

442 ⁴⁴² Quoted from Peter Burger, *op.cit.*, p. 49.

Garde,” Burger uses Marcel Duchamp’s “Fountain by R. Mutt” as an example of avant-garde tendencies. The writer Yasraf A. Pilang elaborated on Burger’s explanation that the everyday objects displayed by Duchamp were not displayed as works of art, but rather as manifestations.⁴⁴³

Andreas Huyssen who also elaborated on the ideas of Burger stated that the goal of the avant-garde was to reunite art and the praxis of life.⁴⁴⁴ Indeed there is a gap between art and life that has not been bridged since the end of the 19th century, specifically since art and artists had detached themselves from church patronage and religious dogma. Referring specifically to movements like Russian Constructivism, Dadaism, Berlin Expressionism, and Futurism, Huyssen argued that the avant-garde wanted to release itself from the motto “art for art’s sake” in order to free itself of an isolation from reality, becoming a rebellion that actively pushed for social change.⁴⁴⁵ The avant-garde within this understanding attacks art that is used as an end in and of itself.⁴⁴⁶

Usut punya usut, in Charles Jencks’s article “The Post-Avant-Garde,” there is in fact an explicit explanation that shows reference to the terminology radical avant-garde as explained. The radical avant-garde as identified by Jencks as an attack against the “institutionalization” of art clearly points to Peter Burger’s understanding of the avant-garde:

“The radical avant-garde of the 1910s and 1920s grew out of the attempt to overcome the final boundary, that is the dividing line between art and life... This attack on the institutionalization of art within museums and the attendant notion of the autonomous work of art disconnected from society is the essence of the avant-garde for those materialist such as Peter Burger who write on the subject today.”⁴⁴⁷

Thus, if we look at the references used by Jencks in his identification of the radical avant-garde, we see a sense of conformity with Burger’s concept of the avant-garde, as is directly recognized by Jencks and explicitly included as a foot note in his article. And if this is true, Jim Supangkat’s claim regarding the avant-garde as a movement that resists “modernism that is institutionalized” or “high-modernism” (Adorno) can be validated.

From the disagreement that occurred between Yustiono and Jim Supangkat a difference in reference can be seen in the identification and use of terms like modernism and avant-garde. As already included in the previous chapter’s explanation quoting Huyssen, in the context of fine art, there is a concept of “high modernism”—the successor to ideals of the Enlightenment—that is highly relevant and congruent with the concept of “Greenbergerian modernism” (that is often referred to simply with the term “modernism”). It is this modernism that has been legalized as the most “official culture” of this era. High-modernism (Adorno) and Greenbergerian modernism are the intended targets of the avant-garde movement (Burger) or the radical avant-garde (Jencks).

The view that sees modernism as a synonym of the avant-garde can in fact be traced through Huyssen’s review. In his work “After the Great Divide, Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism” Huyssen elaborates on the developing of thinking and practice related to the term avant-garde in Europe and America. In general critics in the United States often interchange the terms “modernism” and “avant-garde” whereas most European critics have the tendency to differentiate these terms.⁴⁴⁸ There is often confusion in the differentiation between modernism and the avant-garde. As an example Huyssen describes the situation when Renato Ponggioli, an avant-garde theoretician from Italy published the book “Theory of the Avant-Garde” in 1986.⁴⁴⁹ Following this, publishers in America published a translation of the book with a review about modernism. A similar example occurred when John Weightman published the book “The Concept of the Avant-Garde,”

443 ⁴⁴³ Yasraf A. Piliang (1999), *op.cit.*, p. 41.

444 ⁴⁴⁴ Andreas Huyssen, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

445 ⁴⁴⁵ See Huyssen, *ibid*, p. 8.

446 ⁴⁴⁶ Peter Burger, *op.cit.*, p. 51.

447 ⁴⁴⁷ Charles Jencks in Papadakis (ed., 1987), *op.cit.*, p. 12.

448 ⁴⁴⁸ Andreas Huyssen, *op.cit.*, p. 162.

449 ⁴⁴⁹ Huyssen, *op.cit.*, p. 162-163.

which was given the sub-title "Explorations in Modernism."⁴⁵⁰ According to Huyssen, this confusion could be overcome if we scrutinize the differences between the relationship of these terms to mass culture in Europe and America, which each possesses a particular sociological character.⁴⁵¹

Huyssen explained by quoting Matei Calinescu, that the European understanding of the avant-garde refers more to extreme forms of artistic negativism, meaning art institutions that become the target of these artists' attack; whereas modernism is understood as a concept that wants to guard the purity of high-art from mass culture, through art institutions that become an extension of the bourgeois.⁴⁵² This history is not separate from the social and political upheaval that occurred in Europe from 1910 until the 1920s, which forced artists and writers to create work that was more politically radical. The situation in America, however, was slightly different. When in Europe the avant-garde movement meant to create a bridge that connected art with the praxis of life through political art forms created outside of the gallery and museum, in America, the avant-garde was manifested by movements like Pop Art that intended to bridge high art with popular culture.⁴⁵³

450 ⁴⁵⁰ Huyssen, *ibid.*, p. 163.

451 ⁴⁵¹ See Huyssen, *ibid.*, p. 162.

452 ⁴⁵² See Huyssen, *ibid.*, p. 163.

453 ⁴⁵³ See Huyssen, *ibid.*, p. 165. This opinion shows the agreement of Jencks, see Jencks in Papadakis (ed., 1987), *op.cit.*, p. 13.

When Pop Art tried to reject Abstract Expressionism—as the latest manifestation of Greenbergian modernism—and in turn was coopted by institutions of fine art like MoMA, it was then that the American avant-garde became identical with modernism.

Beyond this point, it can be concluded that Yustiono did not elaborate further on the understanding of the radical avant-garde as referenced by Jencks. However, although his interpretation is relevant to the theories of Jencks and Burger, it does not mean that the article “Art of the 80s” has been separated from the methodological/epistemological problems that burden it. By claiming Indonesian rebellion art as part of the radical avant-garde Jim Supangkat appears to be set on the premise that a radical avant-garde developed “separately in various countries.” Regarding this topic, Yustiono is of the same opinion that Jencks can be used as a tool through which to see the phenomenon of Indonesian modern art, because at its base, cultural development in the west and that in other countries that participate in intense cultural dialogue with the west, at a certain point give birth to the same patterns.⁴⁵⁴ Yustiono suggested that manifestations of the three types of avant-garde described by Jencks—heroic, purist, and radical—could also be found in Indonesia, specifically in the form of PERSAGI, the Bandung School, and the New Art Movement, although within a different time span. What escapes Yustiono’s explanation, however, is how Jim Supangkat interpreted various theoretical tools within poststructuralism/postmodernism within his process of selecting artists and works of art to be displayed.

Emmanuel Subangun’s response constitutes the only article that critically questions Jim Supangkat’s understanding of poststructuralist theories quoted in “Art of the 80s.” Subangun attacked the following points:

- The relationship of modernism and poststructuralism that were confused in the BSRJ IX curatorial essay;
- Roland Barthes who is referred to by Supangkat as a poststructuralist;
- Derrida, Foucault, and Barthes who Jim groups as social scientists.⁴⁵⁵

According to Subangun, Jim Supangkat’s thinking was also “...unorganized...” in his analysis of concepts and key words related to postmodernism. For example, Subangun was correct that names like Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida had never been grouped as social scientists, even though their ideas ultimately impacted various changes within social science disciplines.⁴⁵⁶ Then, related to the explanation of Agus Suwage’s work, there was confusion regarding the understanding of terms like “deconstruction,” allegory, “signified,” and “signifier” that in fact caused irregularity in the explanation of artist selection. For example, in the explanation of Agus Suwage’s work:

“At the most basic level he displays a personal expression. But, on top of this expression, he plays with collage and text that extend into three-dimensional space. This is a sign of allegorical impulse. The result, his personal expression experiences deconstruction.”⁴⁵⁷

As illustrated by various explanations of artist selection, it seems that the curator attempted to match the various characters that could be found in the work of Indonesian artists with terms or concepts that had already been used by a number of American critics like Craig Owens and Douglas Crimp. What can be concluded here is that Jim Supangkat used the methods of Owens, Krauss, and Crimp in his identification of western artwork as postmodern, without elaborating further the epistemological theories used by these critics. Hence, while the relevance can still be debated, accompanied by such limited explanation, his placement of terms (like deconstruction, grammatology or ideological signified) is odd, especially in regards to terms that in western poststructuralist discourse generally necessitate dozens of pages of explanation for just one term.

454 ⁴⁵⁴ See Yustiono (Kalam, 1994), *op.cit.*, p. 118.

455 ⁴⁵⁵ Emmanuel Subangun, *op.cit.*, p. 62-65.

456 ⁴⁵⁶ See Pauline Mare Rossenau, *op.cit.*, p.

457 ⁴⁵⁷ See Jim Supangkat (BSRJ IX catalogue, 1993), *op.cit.*, p. 26.

One mistake in his placement of terms can be seen in his effort to translate “signifier” as “tanda-tanda” (signs) and “signified” as “pengkonsepan” (drafting).⁴⁵⁸ In short, there are many distortions or discrepancies in the use of these terms. As far as Subangun’s criticism mentioned above is concerned, the sentence, which reads, “And if there is one creature on this earth of 5 billion that can understand postmodernism like this, the person concerned is our comrade that is an incredible genius or excessively stupid,”⁴⁵⁹ in fact, should be called excessive.

An example of the inaccuracy in the explanation of post-structuralism in the BSRJ IX catalogue can be seen in the sentence: “This development is the direct result of the translation of poststructuralist philosophical theory from French and German to English in the 1970s, specifically the writing of the Frankfurt school, Roland Bathers, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Lacan.”⁴⁶⁰ This sentence contains the understanding that post-structuralism originated in France and that the Frankfurt school was a part of post-structuralism. This is astonishing, even if this is a misprint, how could this opinion return, again launched in an article by Jim Supangkat dated 26 December 1993?

Subangun’s criticism regarding the claim that Barthes was a poststructuralist, in fact resembles a debate in the West about the difference between structuralism and post-structuralism. As it was already explained in the previous chapter, this issue is still widely debated through the study of works created by those called structuralists and poststructuralists. In a number of philosophical texts like that by K. Bertens (1996) Barthes is grouped within structuralism; however, Barthes crossed many fields like literature, film, photography, and philosophy. On the other hand, there are also writers that group Barthes as a poststructuralist.⁴⁶¹ Certainly this difference will always be relevant to debate. In general writers refer to Barthes as a structuralist, because of his thoughts about “the death of the author,” which in fact constitutes an old proposition within structuralism about “the death of the subject.” Meanwhile as a poststructuralist Barthes also contributed to the rejection of Saussure’s linguistic method that prioritized the enduring link between the signifier and signified.⁴⁶²

Another topic for discussion here is the controversy surrounding installation, claimed by the curator of BSRJ IX as “...a new idiom that signifies the postmodern era.”⁴⁶³ While it seems that on one hand this claim is believed to be true by figures like Herry Dim, on the other hand this term provoked debate. Sri Warso Wahono wrote:

“...there is something absurd, when there a statement that tries to connote installation art as art (that) grew out postmodernism. This is obviously cheap engineering, without knowledge of the sophistication of installation and its correlation with cultures of other nations throughout the world. If articulated definitively to possess a historical thread with a particular philosophy: for example Derrida, Lacan, or other contemporary theories that in principle reject High Art, then clearly this engineering possesses substantial thought that deviates from the alignment of the human race. Derrida and Lacan’s concepts explicitly want to overturn the dominance of High Art returning it to society. Breaking the established structure...to be known, Derrida and Lacan are left-wing figures in France...this deconstructionist ideology has spread, becoming the latest talk in the postmodernist debate. Various phenomena that grew out of this include social protest, activist art, installation suggestive of protest with the pretext of renewal or contemporary initiative – art for democracy and freedom and so forth.”⁴⁶⁴

It is clear that by rejecting installation as “art that grows out of postmodernism,” Wahono seems to target the claim of BSRJ IX’s curator. This article appears at first glance as a critical response.

458 ⁴⁵⁸ Jim Supangkat (BSRJ IX catalogue, 1993), *ibid*, p. 25.

459 ⁴⁵⁹ Emmanuel Subangun, *op.cit.*, p. 65.

460 ⁴⁶⁰ Jim Supangkat (BSRJ IX catalogue, 1993), *op.cit.*, p. 21

461 ⁴⁶¹ See for example Bertens (1996), *op.cit.*, p. 185. Compared with Jean Jacques Lecercle “Postmodernism and Language” in Boyne and Rattansi (eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 84.

462 ⁴⁶² See Yasaraf A. Piliang (1998), *op.cit.*, p. 199.

463 ⁴⁶³ See Jim Supangkat (BSRJ IX catalogue, 1993), *op.cit.*, p. 14.

464 ⁴⁶⁴ Sri Warso Wahono (*Kompas*, 1/9/1994), *op.cit.*

However, after reexamining this article, understanding of the term “installation” in the eyes of this writer, in fact is very different than the level touched on by the curator of BSRJ IX. Installation in Wahono’s article is exemplified by Bade, offerings and processions that lead towards temples in Bali, pillars on the houses of Javanese that are polished with betel leaf and soot at the time of ceremonies, breadfruit leaves assembled (Wahono uses the term “installed”) at the four corners of a house, and finally Dayak people that dance on top of gongs with their bodies covered in paint.⁴⁶⁵ Wahono explained that the unfamiliar definition of installation was then taken up as part of *High Art* “...that constantly fills cultural cycles, so as not to stop the human mind’s intellect.” About “high art” she also wrote, “In 3000 BC, the Inca had already developed the philosophy of *High Art*, which was continued from the Egyptian era until 500 BC, and emerged in China leading up to the first century BC until now in all hemispheres...don’t be surprised. Balinese people until now make installations everyday that are artistic.”⁴⁶⁶

At a glance, Wahono’s opinion is the same as Herry Dim who suggested “**mamang-mamang pembuat pengusir hama burung di sawah**” could also be included in a postmodern exhibition. The difference between these two lies with their opinions whether or not installation art is something that grows out of postmodernism or not. In Herry Dim’s article there is a statement that asserts installation art grew out of postmodernism, even though his understanding of postmodernism is only explained narrowly as a critical review of modernism.

Within Wahono’s statement is an explanation of installation as a fluid term—even tending to be “not clear at all”—because it is compared with Borobudur and the Egyptian pyramids. This shows that there is a discrepancy between modern art discourse that is touched on by Jim Supangkat and anthropological discourse touched on by Wahono. From the perspective modern art discourse, Wahono’s definition can be seen as invalid. Whereas from the perspective of anthropological discourse the term installation has never been used to describe Borobudur or the Egyptian pyramids. Is this due solely to Wahono’s interpretation as a writer? However, if one is to look at Wahono’s critical intent in expressing objection to the curatorial essay “Art of the 80s,” installation must be looked at as specific terminology that represents understanding within modern art discourse. Further, the notion of *High Art*, touched on by Wahono, does not point to the notion of “*Artes Liberales*,” as the ancestors of European high culture. It must be added here that the explanation about Derrida and Lacan as “overturning high art and returning it to society” or as French leftist-philosophy as that which “...breaks the universalist network that is blamed on the engineering of capitalism...,” about deconstructionist ideology that fertilizes the growth of installation art, constitutes a statement that is no less inconsequential.

Regarding installation Yustiono also published a review of theory. In his article from 1995, he responded by pointing out that the assumption installation is an idiom of postmodernism refers to Rosalind Krauss’s “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” that groups works similar to “Spiral Jetty” (Robert Smithson) or “Running Fence” (Christo) as postmodern.⁴⁶⁷ However, by quoting Jencks, Yustiono also concludes that the tendency to use the idiom of installation is not dominant within postmodernism, because postmodernism tends towards the category “Late Modern” and is still close with the principles of “shock of the new.”

Whereas in the article “Art of the 80s” Douglas Crimp is used as a reference to explain installation art. Jim Supangkat quotes Crimp’s explanation about the infiltration of theatrical aesthetics into fine art as an important sign of postmodernism.⁴⁶⁸ Both Crimp and Krauss, active in the journal *October*, are part of a generation of post-Greenberg critics who took part in the theorization of postmodernism in the United States. The publication of each of these critics’ writing constitutes an important development in the discussion of postmodern art. Along with criticizing the views of modern art, both Crimp and Krauss often reviewed works of art that before were

465 ⁴⁶⁵ Sri Warso Wahono (*Kompas*, 1/9/1994), *ibid*.

466 ⁴⁶⁶ Sri Warso Wahono (*Kompas*, 1/9/1994), *ibid*.

467 ⁴⁶⁷ Yustiono (*Jurnal Seni Rupa*, 1995), *op.cit.*, p. 18.

468 ⁴⁶⁸ See Jim Supangkat quoting Crimp (BSRJ IX catalogue, 1993), *op.cit.*, p. 25. Review Jim Supangkat’s references, Douglas Crimp never wrote about the critic Michael Fried writing about the theatrical paradigm that is seen to be a “threat” to abstract modernism. See Douglas Crimp “Pictures” in Brian Wallis (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 176.

marginalized within the paradigm of modernism.⁴⁶⁹

By quoting a portion of Robert Atkins's argument in *Art Speak* (1990), Yustiono describes the medium of installation as a reaction against modernism, postmodernism, at its base rejects all forms or experimental medium like performance and installation.⁴⁷⁰ On the other hand, the article by Douglas Crimp—used as a reference by Jim Supangkat—includes a different opinion. Crimp groups media such as film, video, and performance art as postmodern because of the assumption that the modernism to which it refers is rooted in the concept of symbolist aesthetics that was realized by Mallarme,⁴⁷¹ the details as follows:

“The work I have attempted to introduce here is related to a modernism conceived differently, whose roots are in the symbolist aesthetics announced by Mallarme, which includes works whose dimension is literally or metaphorically temporal, and which does not seek the transcendence of the material condition of the signs through which meaning is generated.”⁴⁷²

Meaning, in Crimp's opinion medium is not the only issue to be questioned when looking at criteria of postmodern art. Further, in this regard, Crimp references the view of the critic Michael Friend, referred to as “a very particular and partisan conception of modernism,” which states that film, video, and performance art, even in the most experimental form, is not modernist art.⁴⁷³

Clearly, Crimp's question, refers to the postmodern epistemological level, concerning the way that a piece of art must be interpreted, “Needless to say, we are not in search of source of origins, but structures of signification: underneath a picture there is always another picture.”⁴⁷⁴ Crimp looks at the concept of code or decoding that developed within modernist epistemology—which can be traced to Mallarme—as something that is not possible. Crimp's statement shows the relationship of theories with poststructuralist semiotic theory regarding the unstable relationship of the signifier and the signified (Derrida-Lacan-Barthes).

In the curatorial explanation of works by Nyoman Erawan, Krisna Murti, Nindityo Adipurnomo, and a number of other artists who displayed installations—although not detailed, tending towards generalization—Jim Supangkat seems to use Crimp's explanation or theory about postmodernism (and/or works of art that are called “postmodern”). **Melihat adanya proses “penjembaan” dalam “Seni Rupa Era 80,” kurasi Jim Supangkat sudah menampakkan prosedur yang memadai sebagai sebuah kerja kurasi, meskipun dalam “menjemba” karya-karya yang dipamerkan,** the curators are merely appropriating—which can be translated as “imitating” or “borrowing”—the method of epistemological-theorization done by postmodernists or “postmodernist theoreticians” in the West like Rosalind Krauss or Douglas Crimp (as has been explicitly stated in this study) in order to authorize the works of art in BSRJ IX as postmodernist.

Related to the issue of grouping installation art with postmodern art, a number of things must be considered. Put simply, these considerations, must at least include: a) how did this tendency emerge within modern art discourse: does this medium relate to the rejection of patrons or modernist standards (Greenbergerian) as “institutional art” that manifests itself through MoMA (Krauss, Foster⁴⁷⁵)? Is installation a medium that is marginalized by modernism? Or put differently,

469 ⁴⁶⁹ In Crimp's articles there is a great deal about photography (Sherrie Levine and Cindy Sherman), performance art, film, and video (Robert Longo, Jack Goldstein), installation (Laurie Anderson). Also with Krauss who reviews the work of Richard Serra and Robert Smithson.

470 ⁴⁷⁰ Yustiono quoting Atkins (*Jurnal Seni Rupa*, 1995), *op.cit.*, p. 17.

471 ⁴⁷¹ Mallarme, or Stephane Mallarme, is a French writer who initiated the movement of Symbolism (often referred to as *Symbolist*) in France. His work—much of which was translated by Edgar Allan Poe—inspired many musicians, writers, and artists during this time in France. What is special about his work is how he expresses something (truth) through symbols, not direct narration like the Naturalists. *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2000*.

472 ⁴⁷² See Douglas Crimp in Wallis (ed.), *op.cit.*, p.186.

473 ⁴⁷³ Crimp quoting Michael Fried, see Crimp in Wallis (ed.), *ibid.*, p. 186

474 ⁴⁷⁴ The last sentence was translated and quoted by Jim Supangkat in the BSRJ IX catalogue as “Beneath an image is always another image,” Jim Supangkat (BSRJ IX catalogue, 1993,) *op.cit.*, p. 25. For reference, see Douglas Crimp in Wallis (ed.), *ibid.*, p. 186.

475 ⁴⁷⁵ See the essay “Re: Post” by Hal Foster in Wallis (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 201.

is this medium seen as “contamination” of the purity of modernism because of the “theatrical-idiom” that it brings (Crimp)? b) How is it that installation has come to be seen as a medium that relates to postmodernist discourse, specifically its disclosure of meaning, for example: regarding its sign system, can installation be read as a work of art that reveals its structure within semiotic poststructuralism? Is there a particular meaning that can be read in a work of installation art, related to postmodernist discourse, for example, the death of the grand narrative? A few of the basic assumptions and questions above can help us see the problem of grouping installation art as a tendency of postmodernism. This study will not address this particular issue. A more intense study is needed to attend to all of these questions.

During the period of debate regarding BSRJ IX, the topic of installation became a hot issue.

Somehow the issues of postmodernism that had emerged far before BSRJ IX then became associated with the discussion of installation art.

Various opinions recorded in mass media stated these things.⁴⁷⁶ The debate became more intense when an “Artist Meeting” was held at TIM on 11 January 1994. At this event a number of artists were “indicted” because they could not answer questions regarding the definition of installation art.⁴⁷⁷ There was disagreement amongst a number of artists regarding this definition. Rahmayani for example, proposed that the term “installation art” be replaced with the terms “sculpture” or “assemblage,” whereas Teguh Ostentrik stated that the requirements for a work of installation art included a transcendental transformation. Further, Goenawan Mohamad as moderator expressed the impossibility of defining this term.⁴⁷⁸ This confusion demonstrates the discrepancies that existed with the curators who had already explained the meaning of this term in the essay “Art of the 80s.”

The confusion or gap in understanding between artists and curators also needs to be touched on in this study. The opinion of F.X. Harsono, in his article, expressed criticism towards BSRJ IX, specifically regarding the curatorial procedure of Jim Supangkat. Returning to the problem of methodology, the following quote from F.X. Harsono should be examined:

“The organization of IX Jakarta Fine Art Biennale, the selection of art and artists was based on the ideas of postmodernism...all activities were done from this curatorial base...however, if we examine further the exhibition’s curation based on the ideas of postmodernism and the development of Indonesian contemporary art as well as the event’s organization there is a particular awkwardness. There are discontinuities within Jim Supangkat’s way of thinking. This discontinuity resulted in the association of postmodernist thinking with a practice that is based on a dominating and totalitarian spirit (read modernist).”⁴⁷⁹

What is meant by Harsono is that the curatorial process did not heed to the ideas of the artists who participated in the exhibition. It also mentioned that in the analysis of art works included in the curatorial essay “Art of the 80s” there is only one fragmentary quote from an artist, which expresses his powerlessness in relation to technology.⁴⁸⁰ According to Harsono this is contradictory to the spirit of postmodernism carried by the BSRJ IX exhibition. Harsono argued that within almost all analyses of artist work there is no inclusion of an artist’s thoughts. He continued: “If this is said to be a discussion of a theoretical nature, the question emerges, does a theoretical discussion built on theory (postmodernism) insist on the negation of artists’ opinions and ideas that are based on their own works of art that are being discussed?...where is the space for alternative thought, local colors, and renewal in this discussion?”⁴⁸¹ Further, Harsono questioned whether or not there were characteristics of postmodernism, specifically in the works of artists like Melodia, Suarisman, Agus Kamal, and a number of other artists, that he stated “...had won awards, participating in exhibitions of modern painting...”⁴⁸²

A response to Harsono’s criticism was included in an article by Emmanuel Subangun. Seeing a conflict of interest between the curators and F.X. Harsono, Subangun wrote, “The clash of terms and ideas used by organizers is confusing, well-structured and scientific, in contrast to the artists who were fierce and never stopped being mad. What happened was indeed strange, while art experts mentioned the frequency of exhibitions, the price of art, and other facilities; the artists

476 ⁴⁷⁶ See for example “Mengkaji Ulang Tradisi Seni Rupa Modern” (*Suara Pembaruan*, 1/19/1994), “Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta IX-1993, Upaya Mengais Kecenderungan Baru” (*Pikiran Rakyat*, 1/19/1994), “Mengkaji Ulang Tradisi Seni Rupa Modern” (*Suara Pamaruan*, 1/19/1994), “Instalasi Bahasa Ekspresi Seniman Kontemporer” (*Suara Pembaruan*, 1/19/1994), “Seni Rupa Instalasi Berontak Kemapanan” (*Terbit*, 1/12/1994), “Memungut Karya ‘Masterpiece Biennale, Pembantaian Hutan dan Manusia’” (*Republika*, 1/12/1994), “Awas Kepiting-kepiting Posmo!” (*Republika*, 1/12/1994).

477 ⁴⁷⁷ See *Republika* (1/12/1994), *op.cit.*

478 ⁴⁷⁸ See *Republika* (1/12/1994), *ibid.* See also *Suara Pembaruan* (1/19/1994), *op.cit.* see again *Kompas* (1/12/1994).

479 ⁴⁷⁹ See F.X. Harsono, *Kompas* (1/16/1994)

480 ⁴⁸⁰ What is meant by Harsono here is that the statement by Iwan Koeswana is that the ringing of the telephone causes far more stress in comparison with the voice of azan that reverberates loudly near one’s home. See Jim Supangkat (BSRJ IX catalogue, 1993), *op.cit.*, p. 27.

481 ⁴⁸¹ F.X. Harsono, *Kompas*, (1/16/1994), *op.cit.*

482 ⁴⁸² F.X. Harsono, *Kompas*, (1/16/1994), *ibid.*

replied with statements like “I have a migraine” and “kau main tunjuk.” Whereas regarding the concept, the discussion of modernism and postmodernism was received with the angry shriek: the area of my work was “free of the gravity of posmo,” because “the artists essence is the human right of freedom”...⁴⁸³

Considering Harsono and Subangun’s opinions, there are various sides that must be studied here. Essentially, within the curatorial process there was a procedure was used that justified the curators’ interpretation of the works that were analyzed and exhibited, however, the accuracy of this must be reviewed in more depth. In this regard, one of the curator’s tasks is the work of “signifying” or re-interpreting various aspects contained within a work of art, for example, its historical development or the sosio-political background of the artist. This must be done without having to pay heed to the creator’s thoughts. Seen from this perspective, then the labeling of the organization of BSRJ IX as “totalitarian (read modernist)” is wrong as far as it refers to the curatorial method, because in fact within postmodernist discourse a work of art is seen as a “text” and as stated by poststructuralists “a dead subject.” According to Barthes, “text,” is a combination of signs, both verbal and visual, a multi-dimensional space that is made up of a diverse network of mixed quotes, overlapping, without a single original.⁴⁸⁴

Harsono apparently had already narrowly defined “spirit of postmodernism” as the spirit whose essence is “...the display of local color, providing opportunity for alternative thoughts, the bravery to reject a singular truth, the rejection of domination and decentralization.”⁴⁸⁵ Because at its base, that which is done by a curator—is claimed as the “suppression of an artist’s thoughts”—it is also understood as the “decentralization” of thoughts (subject) of the artist. Besides this, Harsono also did not consider that in the process of “penjembaan” BSRJ IX, in fact there was already a “mission” to decentralize discourse that before had been dominant. This was done by including works of art that had before “escaped attention.” So, in this regard, not including the thoughts of artists within the curatorial essay was not a relevant problem to dispute—or to claim as “totalitarian (read modernist).” That a number of BSRJ IX artists had participated in modern painting exhibitions and won awards, means that the criteria used to interpret their work was different for Jim Supangkat and for the modern painting exhibitions where they had been shown previously. This is reflected in Jim Supangkat and F.X. Harsono’s interpretations regarding the work of Sudarisman, Melodia, and Agus Kamal as works of art with the right to be displayed at BSRJ IX. However, it is certain, that in the realization of a quality curation, an in-depth and complete study of history is necessary.

On the other hand, Harsono’s recommendation to “give the thoughts of artists an appropriate place” indeed constitutes a criticism that must be considered by the curator of BSRJ IX. The understanding of “give the thoughts of artists an appropriate place” must be defined through a process of communication between the curator and artists. If this is realized, then controversial statements from artists such as “postmodernism is rooted in Marxism” or about how installation can be seen as a postmodern tendency related to electrical installations will not be made. If there is not good communication, then Harsono’s criticism that claims “totalitarianism” or that which was written by Emmanuel Subangun will become relevant: “The answer: there is no tolerance, there is only main tunjuk.”⁴⁸⁶

Thus, there were a variety of responses to the organization of BSRJ IX with “Art of the 80s” as its curatorial base, which marked the continued development of Indonesian modern art discourse. Various other responses such as that from Hardi included in the journal *Horison* (no 02/XXVIII – 1994), has more or less the same tone as the heated criticism of BSRJ IX and its curation. This is indeed the dominant type of criticism:

“With thoughts that are always formulated through strong logic, conceptual art quickly gains support from arts that are anti-establishment...if such art appears here, it is reasonable

483 ⁴⁸³ See Emmanuel Subangun, *op.cit.*, p. 55.

484 ⁴⁸⁴ Yasruf Amir Pliang (1999), *op.cit.*, p. 71.

485 ⁴⁸⁵ F.X. Harsono, *Kompas* (1/16/1994), *op.cit.*

486 ⁴⁸⁶ See Emmanuel Subangun, *op.cit.*, p. 55.

if the question appears: Is that which we inherit solely in terms of its form or idea? Because in terms of form, we have not yet reached the stage of the total incorporation of the artist, we are still amateurs. ...It is as if this biennale is limited to one project: all of a sudden, a little argument, and the artist who is barely visible, except at the opening and closing that smells of officials. Perhaps if we want to take the spirit of conceptual art, the pleasantries are far from the goals of the art that are raised like an ancient social flag in this Biennale...it appears that this Biennale merely wants to show that there is a development in the Indonesian art world, it is not being left behind by the West, its point of departure is not Wonogiri or Cihampelas but rather world civilization, as well as a contemporary branch of philosophy, namely postmodernism. Whereas everywhere there is art there is an intense struggle by artists and for artists... although the results of an artist's work appears easy, it does not mean that anyone can hold an exhibition at TIM, becoming a postmodern artist.⁴⁸⁷

Hardi seems adamant that art must remain connected to self-expression and *art for art's sake*, which in fact is a manifestation of modernist discourse's concept of individualism.⁴⁸⁸ Hardi's view of BSRJ IX that—surprisingly—is identical with conceptual art in fact is more or less the same as the erroneous combination of installation with postmodernism. In Hardi's article there are also various opinions that do not depart from an understanding of art history of postmodernist discourse, for example in his reference to performance art, exemplified by the work of Marina Abramovich.⁴⁸⁹

An article that questions postmodernism and the context of Indonesian art practice with a sufficient theoretical framework is Yustiono's article "Indonesian Contemporary Art and the Postmodernist Wave" in the *Journal of Fine Art* vol. 1/1995. In the final section of this article Yustiono reviews the exhibition "Shopping Mall Fantasy World" held at TIM Jakarta, which displayed basic ideas in line with the principles of postmodernism.⁴⁹⁰ This opinion was based on the fact that the works displayed in this exhibition embraced the principles of *kitsch*, simulating every day objects. Somewhat contradictory with the opinion written in his 1994 article, he saw GSRB as the first instance of Indonesian art leaning towards postmodernism—shown with the display of *double coding*—which can be understood as the impact of Pop Art.⁴⁹¹ However, on the other hand, as a movement that expressed a pioneer attitude or avant-gardism, GSRB cannot be separated from the reflection of modernist principles that emphasize newness.

It is possible that Yustiono's article is the most sufficient review of BSRJ and the phenomenon of postmodernism in Indonesia. In various parts of his explanation, Yustiono also includes explanation regarding how modernism is a logical response to the cultural relationships that have occurred between Indonesia and the Western world. And just as modernism, Yustiono continues, postmodernism must also be understood within such a frame of reference.⁴⁹² Views that include reference to writings on art and the history of modernism in Indonesian like this are rare amongst those that responded to BSRJ IX.

In general other articles printed in mass media did not use—and did not note—reference to specific texts about Indonesian art history or western art history.⁴⁹³ So that what emerged was only heated criticism, explosive and emotional. For sure if traced further within various articles that address BSRJ IX and postmodernism, it would be impossible to review such misinterpretations one by one. Beyond the opinions already presented above, there are still many types of articles published as reports or short analyses that often include problematic opinions—meaning: they

487 ⁴⁸⁷ See Hardi, *Horison* 02/XXVIII, 1994, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

488 ⁴⁸⁸ This is implied in Hardi's statement, "No matter where there is always an intense struggle by artists and for artists." See Hradi, *Horison* 02/XXVIII, 1994, *ibid.*, p. 9.

489 ⁴⁸⁹ "Performing art" is used specifically in reference to art performed in the contest of theater and dance. In art discourse the term "performance art" is known as a term that refers to the understanding of artistic expression of artists that reject commercialization of art (specifically painting) by using their own body's as a medium. See "Performance Art From Futurism to the Present," Rose Lee Goldberg (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1979), p.8.

490 ⁴⁹⁰ See Yustiono, *Journal of Fine Art* (1995), *op.cit.*, p. 18.

491 ⁴⁹¹ See Yustiono, *Journal of Fine Art* (1995), *ibid.*, p. 19-23.

492 ⁴⁹² See Yustiono, *Journal of Fine Art* (1995), *ibid.*, p. 23.

493 ⁴⁹³ This topic was already discussed days before by Yustiono, see Yustiono, *Journal of Fine Art* (1995), *ibid.*, p. 7.

require lengthy reconsideration—specifically regarding postmodernism. These opinions, on average, are connected to the definition of postmodernism, the explanation of historical context, or actual phenomenon that claim a relationship with postmodernism. A few misinterpretations can be noted here:

- “...post-modernism is opposed to any form of tyranny, supports egalitarianism, and believes that every person possesses truth” (*Republika*, 1/13/1994).
- “Be careful, the postmodern movement threatens the global establishment and dominant values from the center. The domination and authority of these values begin to be undermined by postmodernist (posmo) crabs...The posmo movement is used as a means to liberate writers and artists from central hegemony.” (*Republika*, 1/13/1994)
- “Posmo does not completely reject the entire modernist project.” (*Republika*, 1/13/1994)
- “Through posmo the needles of anarchism and Marxism infiltrate...” (*Republika*, 1/20/1994)
- “This means that movements of the 1970s that rejected universalism and deconstructed the principles of modernist art production, cannot be called postmodern, the 1980s is the most postmodern.” (*Kompas*, 1/16/1994)
- There are a number of other opinions that cannot be explained one by one here.

Nevertheless there are a few conclusions that can be drawn from this illustration of the discussion surrounding BSRJ IX and postmodernism in Indonesia.

3. Although refuted by the curator himself, the claim that organization of BSRJ IX was built on the principles of postmodernism seems to have already become popular amongst the mass media. The publication of the press release and the essay “Art of the 80s” are two initial reasons;
4. Most of the response towards BSRJ IX in general appeared as objection to the validity of the essay “Art of the 80s,” which can be divided as such:
 3. Rejection of the curator’s claim that the works in BSRJ IX were postmodern;
 4. Disagreement related to the concepts or topics within postmodernist discourse (for example about: the avant-garde, poststructuralism, installation) that were used by the curator in the essay “Art of the 80s”;
 5. Besides protest, support or agreement regarding the postmodernist claim of BSRJ IX generally came from articles that were reports, which did not elaborate on the problem of postmodernism and the claim of BSRJ IX’s curator.
6. In a specific discussion forum, through infrequent articles, a debate occurred—or a difference in argument—between spokesman of Indonesian art that questioned topics within western postmodernist discourse and their relationship to the practice of art in Indonesia, in general this was caused by different interpretations of postmodernist discourse and western postmodernism, which also led to disagreements regarding various assumptions;
7. The issue of postmodernism that appeared within debate about Indonesian art led to further

debate about the practice of Indonesian modern art, specifically about its relationship with modernist discourse and western postmodernism.

It must be acknowledged that within this short time span, the debate surrounding BSRJ IX and postmodernism resulted in few conclusions adequate for the assessment of art and thinking in Indonesia now, in the future, and even in the past. This debate left a trail of questions that have not been clearly answered, leaving confusion regarding the same dilemmas that arose at the time of the debate. It is as if traces of this conversation are left “floating.” This can be seen with the decline in debate or publication of articles that try to reexamine these problems in more detail and depth within the last two or three years.

One of the opinions of interest and a bit different was Yustiono’s article published in *Kalam*, edition 3-1994, which used a viewpoint for his study not included in other articles. According to his opinion, the issue of postmodernism within Indonesian art was the result of the social environment of Indonesian art at the beginning of the 1990s that at that time was stagnant, when:

5. Some important art events in the context of Asia began to glance at Indonesian artists yet, senior artists were still sent as representatives; while,
6. Participants from other Asian countries mostly consisted of young artists that displayed new tendencies in their work including installation art; and,
7. Old figures situated in a “bureaucratic position” must retire, while young artists of the 1970s were already developed enough to interact with outsiders.

From this perspective, Yustiono continued, that various claims about the connection between 70s art and that of the 80s, postmodernism or contemporary art, in fact constituted the “tip of the iceberg that appeared” due to the pressure of the social environment.⁴⁹⁴

4.2 Analysis of the Postmodernist Debate and IX Jakarta Fine Art Biennale

As has been apparent in the previous explanations, what is striking about the approach of various problems within the debate of postmodernism and BSRJ IX in Indonesia, is the presence of confusion, if not better referred to as “chaos.” It can be seen from various archives left by the debate of BSRJ IX and postmodernism in Indonesia that articles published in the mass media were dominated by debate rather than theoretical, discursive analysis. This is important to note because it is connected to the assessment of the phenomenon of postmodernism within Indonesian art discourse.

Such a problem might be considered “cliché” in Indonesia. The small number of journals published in Indonesia that are involved specifically in the world of discourse leads to an impoverished intellectual climate. It is not surprising if theoretical debate with a truly discursive attitude rarely occurs, or might even be considered “impossible.” Hence, the postmodernist debate in Indonesia was in fact taken up more by newspapers and weekly magazines that led to distorted opinions and misunderstandings. It is almost impossible that a newspaper column would clearly reference which references or theories were used by the writer in their explanation of postmodernism. It is a fact that newspapers limit the quantity of articles published in a certain column. In general, newspapers wish to attract as many readers from as many groups as possible. Because of this articles that are included must involve all types of news.

The issue of postmodernism—as a subject of debate—that appeared in Indonesia cannot be separated from the cooption of mass media. In actual example of this can be seen if one reexamines one archive of this debate:

“This new wave is often linked with the emergence of new lines of thinking, which are

494 ⁴⁹⁴ Yustiono, (*Kalam*, 1994), *op.cit.*, p. 121.

becoming idolized, namely postmodernism.”⁴⁹⁵

The image that one gets from an understanding of postmodernism as an “idol” indeed constitutes a style of persuasive writing intended to persuade readers to want to know in more depth the meaning of such a word. In general, newspaper readers are interested in “new idols,” because they are afraid of being called “old-fashioned” or “left behind.” The use of strange terms like “posmo crab” or “ghost of posmo” or even the acronym “posmo” lead to ambiguous interpretations that are used as means effective means of persuasion in attracting as many readers as possible. In the hands of the mass media, the issue of postmodernism is no different than news about succession, elections, or other political issues that are currently hot topics of debate.⁴⁹⁶

The postmodernist debate is wide and complex in the west. When this debate arrived in Indonesia it became more complex. It can be concluded that the various articles mentioned can in fact be said to represent the practice of interpretation of postmodernist discourse, that emerged first in the west, and is currently being debated in Indonesia. The epistemological inequality that exists between the repertoire of postmodernist debate in the west with that in Indonesian is something that cannot be denied. What is meant by epistemological refers to the fundamental presupposition’s scope, accountability, reasoning and genealogy of knowledge, possessed by speakers involved in discourse about something. Discussions of postmodernism that involve long theoretical explanations in the West, in fact experience many distortions in Indonesia because they are only covered in short simple newspaper columns. Although there a few relatively long articles can be found in journals and books, the number can be counted on one hand. However, this must be recognized as an obstacle that is impacted by the emergence of other more complex problems. The attitude of postmodernist discourse that is open to plural explanations is made more chaotic by “**unsur mediatik**” postmodernism in Indonesia—borrowing Emmanuel Subangun’s phrase. “No matter how it happened, postmodernism has arrived in Indonesia, like hamburgers, hot dogs, and pizza. Young people have accepted it and are boisterously enjoying it.”⁴⁹⁷ In this regard, it can be conveyed here, that one of the basic problems, which led to the chaotic debate of postmodernism and BSRJ IX in Indonesia can be related to the sociological barriers and epistemological discrepancies.

If connected with Foucault’s discursive analytic method, the curation of BSRJ XI will become more relevant with the “spirit of postmodernism” if an analysis of artists as subjects formed by the discourse of modernization in Indonesia is included, not only an analysis about art discourse, specifically that which is related to history and postmodern aesthetics.

495 ⁴⁹⁵ *Kompas*, (12/3/1993), *op.cit.*

496 ⁴⁹⁶ One newspaper, published on 8 January 1994, included a discussion of postmodernism in the editorial column.

497 ⁴⁹⁷ Commentary from Emmanuel Subangun, *op.cit.*, p. 32.