ALL *GHOST* THAT IS SOLID MELTS INTO THE AIR
Violence, Imagination, and Representation in Urban Environment
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Untuk disampaikan dalam panel bertajuk: **Antisipasi budaya urban di Indonesia abad ke-21** pada SIMPOSIUM DAN LOKAKARYA INTERNASIONAL II, **GLOBALISASI DAN KEBUDAYAAN LOKAL: SUATU DIALEKTIKA MENUJU INDONESIA BARU, 18 - 21 JULI 2001, UNIVERSITAS ANDALAS, KAMPUS LIMAU MANIS, PADANG - SUMATERA BARAT**

Kata kunci: lingkungan urban, kekerasan, citra urban pasca kekerasan, interpretasi modernitas

abstrak

Pembahasan tulisan ini adalah mengenai keterkaitan lingkungan urban pada situasi pasca kerusuhan/kekerasan dan pembacaan fenomena makna/citra yang pada akhirnya membentuk imaginasi-imaginasi subyektif dalam menjalin dialog modernitas kontemporer. Citra lingkungan urban perkotaan dalam berbagai lapisan pemahamannya menjadi pembentuk kesadaran (personal/social) dalam menyikapi perubahan-perubahan yang terjadi, baik secara internal maupun eksternal, terlebih bila hal itu merupakan perubahan yang cepat dan terjadi tiba-tiba, berupa tindakan kekerasan.

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[start]
on modernity, the urban environment as the shape of civilization

> *"The chief function of the city is to convert power into form,*
> *energy into culture, dead matter into the living symbols of art,*
> *biological reproduction into social creativity."*
> - Lewis Mumford[i] -

Modernity is a strong word that has so many attraction that lure its participants, society(-ies). The evolutionary nature of the society is permanently in the tension of movement and settlement, and it always comes to a specific tension of making borders. Borders, the identification/representation of *territoriality*, have become the line(s) of contestation between dichotomies (space/form, exteriority/interiority, etc). Dichotomies, anciently posed by Parmenides (c.515-c.440 BC), severed the process of 'being' and 'becoming'. Any discussion on *border(*s) *as(/*of*) representations* becomes crucial issues relating to dichotomies and its rising phenomenon, urban environment. The ontological functions of the urban environment have been studied, observed, elaborated and (re)-defined over and over again along its existence in shaping the breath of modernity. The liberating urge of progress in history and cultural 'discourse' of modernity have been going, at first, through the cultural activities and resources to make the environment useful to society which it can gain control over and construct dwelling spaces. Violence has been the underlying frame of thought beneath urban environment, the materialised institution of human civilization. The history of urban development's history is built upon the tensions between controlling and avoiding violence.[ii] State and its apparatus, as institutional construction of modernity, in Deleuze & Guattari's term, has once become the '*war* machine' which are continually producing the *desire* through the process of *deterritorialization*.[iii] 'Civilization', as Freud once rationalised in terms of desire and the urge of modernity, was the whole sum of the achievements and the regulations which distinguish our lives from those of our animal ancestors. Arguably, it serves two purposes-namely to protect men against nature and to adjust their mutual relations.[iv] Under the same banner of civilization, 'national development' had become the legitimate mission, the *grand* purpose, as in Indonesia's case; not until the major political shift in 1998, when waves of violence acts fill Indonesia's culture with loathing.

[main]
on violence, pathology, the ideological ghost of the urban environment

Violence is one of the major contemporary reality(-ies) among Indonesians as participants in building the nationalistic 'self-false-conscious' identity. Violence, in its broad understanding, ranges from structural violence (ala Johann Galtung), symbolic violence (ala Pierre Bourdieu), political violence (ala Hannah Arendt), violence against political legitimacy and anarchism (ala Robert Paul Wolff), violence as a form of aggression has been psychologically analysed (by Sigmund Freud and later by Erich Fromm) to the more recent academic tendencies of 'post-colonial' violence (ala Arjun Appadurai). Violence in Indonesia, simplistically, can be categorized into three main underlying patterns of differentiation. They are the differentiations in political preferences/interests, the differentiations in socio-economical equality, and the differentiations in cultural inheritance.[v] These inductive analyses tie up contexts of different proportion together, especially when we try to 'read' urban environment that functions as the mnemonic traces or representation of violence. Differentiation, of course, serves the practical purpose of enabling one to defend oneself

against the sensations of un-pleasure, which one actually feels or with which one is threatened. Violence occurs when the legitimate (when it's become a dominant ideology, an authoritarian-hegemonic ruler/culture, and so on so forth) feebly lost its aura to detach, to create borders of representations, over the dynamic society's self pathology. The weakening of the legitimate is the moment when the destructive aggressiveness waits for some provocation or puts itself at the service of some other purposes, whose goal might also have been reached by milder measures. The legitimate is perpetually threatened with disintegration, there is always a possibility for the work in common (e.g. the calls of national identity and development) would not hold differences together. Ethnic violence, as signs of disintegration, should not be read as 'the return of the repressed' of the artificially dictated multiculturalism – the nation's slogan "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*". It is directly generated by it, as the slogan concealed its true face.

Violence, covered as tragedy, has become the symbolic language of *neurotic* discontent in the process of civilization imposed on the phenomenon of urban life - culture - environment. In terms of psychoanalysis, neurosis in the name of "*narcissism of minor differences*" (Freud's term) is regarded as the outcome of the struggle between the interest of self-preservation and the demands of the libido, which always binds differences together, so long as there is *other* left over to receive the manifestations of aggressiveness.[vi] Violence has become the ritual to represent the discomfort rapid movements of modernity. Violence is a moment when the *border(s) as(/*of*) representations* are questioned*, when the *real* turns into the *unreal*, reality into reverie.

Just as what Ferdinand Tönnies (1855-1936), a German sociologist, has mentioned in the differences between the concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesselschaft;* [vii]

Gemeinschaft	*Gesselschaft*
Community	Society
culture	civilization
living organism	mechanical aggregate
rural	urban
life and soil	mind and reason

These are the dichotomies raised by modernity, which have led to the process of imagination, nostalgia, dreaming and remembering in society's understanding of the living/built environment. Ranging from fairy-tales to science fictions, nostalgia and imagination produces adaptations of the *real* that comes from everyday environment.

> *"You must make it your own world. And everyone must be able to feel it. I want a* **home***, here, that looks like my* **home***, feels like my* **home***, is a place where my family can be safe, where my friends-psychologists, engineers, ordinary people ... poets-can feel comfortable. Do you see?"*
>
> -Samuel R. Delany-[viii]
> (bold added)

On the side of *Gemeinschaft*, the inner intimation between human and world consists of a never-ending longing for a primal internal comfort mother's womb. Dwelling is the substitution for the intense desire of a The 'subtle' elements of violence can be found in the lost of our conception of *Gemeinschaft* within our primal instinctual *self*. This of 'losing' is a Heideggerian awareness that every dwelling in the familiar everyday universe is grounded in a violent/monstrous act of resolutely deciding/assuming one's fate: that since man is primordially of join', the very imposition of a 'home (*heim*)', of a communal site of dwelling, *polis*, in *unheimlich*, reposes on an excessive/violent deed.[ix] Kundera, a Czech novelist, put a poetic remark on how this sense of could be *textualized* prior to the act of violence itself;

> *Nostalgia? How could she feel nostalgia when he was right in of her? How can you suffer from absence of a person who is present? ... (you can suffer nostalgia in the presence of the beloved if you glimpse a future the beloved is no more; if the beloved's death is, invisibly, already present.)*[x]

Contemporary urban condition, historically, has led towards *Gesselschaft* more than any periods in the history off human settlement civilization. Traumatic gaze, in the act of nostalgia, is apparent once start to read (post-violence) urban environment as a perversion needed expose one's (memorable) ruin, one's ugliness, to parade one's misery (speculatively) to mirror the modernity crisis of a nation.

Two images[xi] (see photo 1) from one segment of (post-violence) urban environment, are showing street-level 'faces'. They are representing mosaic traces in the superimposed layers of meanings, intentions, and aspirations. These multitudes of façades are the palimpsest of an urban culture. Under the context of commercial spaces on the city, the 'faces' of (post-violence) urban environment are experienced under the submission of the potentially consuming spectators. This producing 'experience equation'; the historical traces of city's formation (and the formation caused by violence events) produce the mosaic of planes, intersections, spaces and symbols. The spectators submit themselves to city's form and spaces, which generates an inner experience on them. it is rather vulgar and too simplistic to expect the spectators to fully immersed identically to, or have anything to do with the 'real' of the environment. The 'unintentional' products shown by the multi-facets urban environment cannot be blatantly structured into spectators' experience. Urban environment might be signified, as if capable to be, certain order of invisible, organizing principle: *ideology*.[xii] This loose methodological way of reading could easily be judge as an over-simplification to answer the question whether it is possible to point a

photo 1

materialism of the mind, since this question is one of the basic inquiries of ideology in strictest sense defined as the study or knowledge of ideas.

Daniel Dafoe (1660?-1731), English writer and journalist, wrote in his imaginative reconstruction of the Great Plague of London, after the face of London 'strangely altered' by the infectious plague;

*"**This ghost**, as the poor man affirmed, made signs to **the houses**, and to **the ground**, and to **the people**, plainly **intimating**, or else they so understanding it, that abundance of the people should come to be buried in that church yard, as indeed happened; but that he saw such aspects I must acknowledge I never believed, nor could I see anything myself, though I looked most earnestly to see it, if possible".* [xiii] (bold added)

The 'ghost', the delusion of the people resulted from a great tragic violence, could be read here as the underlying ideas of post-violence *ideology* where "all that is solid melts into the air". The borders of relationship between 'the ghost' (*the spiritualised matter*-Marxian term), 'the houses' (urban environment), 'the ground' (geographical concept of *place*), and 'the people' (socio-psychological *self*), due to violence act, melts into the emotional moment of 'recognition', when one becomes aware of their own *ground*, positions, belongings, and 'roots'.

This notion of ideology is a split. The celebrated 'end of ideology', and the foreseen 'clash of civilizations' are the first position offered resulting from inaugurated fall of Berlin Wall in Summer 1989. The new dangerous clashes of the future are likely to arise from the interaction between 'incompatible' Western Arrogance, Islamic intolerance, and Sinic assertiveness"-a wide ranging antagonism of civilization/cultural antagonism-[xiv]. On the other hand, the position of continuance and acceptance of ideology are becoming a more naturalized and more invisible *liberal capitalism*'s ideals, filling the reality of everyday realms and appearance[xv]. I would not enter to the debate relating to these here, but I would like to emphasize and focus on the latter as the rising phenomena from the limited example of urban segment that I mentioned earlier. Despite of the un-orderly appearance of a post-violence urban environment, the continuance of commercial character of the place is eminent. The big-yellow M, the almost cliché symbol of international franchise and globalization, came right after the cessation of violence. It crowns the symbol of one of the oldest commercial landmarks of the place (see photo 2a & 2b). On another level, prior to the big-M phenomena, the place have been incorporating a series of visual representation of globalization itself such as "Roma" (photo 3a), "Italy" (photo 3a), "Paris" (photo 3b), "Canada" (photo 3c), "Montana" (photo 3d). They are the products of

photo 2a & 2b

photo 3a

photo 3b

photo 3b

photo 3d

'place-naming-identification' to support the metaphorical way of a culture of liberating violence (reason) to facilitate the functioning of capitalism. These the free play of productive forces became the image-repertory (not to mention the over-exposed Baudrillard's terms of *hyper-reality*, sure the example shown here only serves the very banal level of this term)[xvi]. The market economy, which was perceived as the 'non-ideological', as 'the nature states of *beings*', now becomes the ideological *par excellence*.

The tension, between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesselschaft,* once again becomes apparent. The modernization / rationalization (Weberian term) of cooperative economic behaviour in the 'traditional' local economies is gradually contested by the 'modern' global economy. Daniel Dafoe's *ghost* is (t)here, can be seen, to be believed, and the deceased-'the traditional'- need to be buried under the celebrated ritual of violence.

photo 4a

photo 4b

> "*The brotherhood of man on earth will be possible only on a base of kitsch.*"[xvii]
> -Milan Kundera-

One more thing worth mentioning from our little example of (post) violence urban environment shown here is the much celebrated recovery process of the traditional representation by using specific architectural symbolism. 'Joglo'-roof, the feudal-originated traditional roof-form, is regarded as a representation of the 'ideal cure' of the populist's dream.[xviii] Roof –language-, is used not in its genuine spatial-structural function, but interpreted as a sentimental symbol of locality (photo 4a[xix] and 4b). The art or artwork characterized by the sentimental is often regarded as *kitsch*. Milan Kundera, represented by his novel; THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING, explains that kitsch is the absolute denial of things, and kitsch itself excludes everything from its purview which is essentially unacceptable in human existence. But, the feeling induced by kitsch must be a kind of the multitudes which can be shared; and might not depend on an unusual situation. Kitsch must derive from the basic images people have en*grave*d in their memories, in forms of identities come out from images, metaphors, and vocabulary; not from political strategy. Paradoxically, kitsch is an aesthetic ideal of the politicians to influence the mass to make a total-authoritarian power.[xx] By the end, the 'ideal cure' is still imbued with the value it once tried to banish.

[end]
on substance, ontology and urban culture

> "*The world is all seeing, but it is not exhibitionistic - it does not provoke our gaze. When it begins to provoke it, the feeling of strangeness begins too.*"
> -Jacques Lacan-[xxi]

Imagining, fantasizing, and understanding violence and the city are never-ending processes, similar to Žižek rationale of the problem in *the ontological incompleteness of 'reality'*

itself[xxii]. Is there any *substance* for violence in social (urban) experience of violence? How should we rethink about the ontological existence of our urban environment/culture?

Urban environment is the palimpsest, the site of materialized civilization. Once the mirror process of civilization, violence, provokes our hegemonic-stable visions of reality, it becomes the emotional moment of 'recognition', along with its awareness of subject's 'roots', of subject's true belonging, of 'a home'. The Postmodern's xenophobia of "*Other*"/"*The other*" existence should not be regarded as the socio-process of *misrecognition* and illusionary reading of the borders of representations/identities, but as the need to redraw a new ontology, which lies by positioning the lacking socio-symbolic order.

The increasing private-interests and global-capital universalized image of spatiality, in a rate, might be understood to become the escapism, the refuge, a temporary response towards protection during a transitional era. The *ghost* of the capital, even when its presence is apparent, is not the inspirational source for a social agenda of constructing a symbolic order. However, it becomes burial agent of diminishing traditions. The paradox lies in the capacity of global economy in linking the different representations/identities. So it becomes difficult if we try to oppose a unique-traditional-fundamentalism of identity with a more pluralist postmodern position, since capitalism's blind-circular movement disguises itself under the 'new' cultural awareness.

So, how could all these flourish in the 'construction' of urban culture? There is a misunderstood concept of 'urban culture', when our urban living is metaphorically understood as a person who's denying the *genuineness* of his/her own true love (e.g. by abusing them with *kitsch* in a *re*-birthday present). The person does not really love the purest spirit inside but lives under the ideal mirror of the loved one (while the loved one giving all his/her resource purely). Urban culture is dreamt of becoming the *ideal*, so much hope is put on the 'beautification' of the urban environment. Yet it never reaches the peak of satisfaction. The loved one has become so *ordinary*. On some cases the process has followed the process of hyper-artificial cosmetic development. The beauty of urban culture may be defined, just as novelist Milan Kundera's term, as 'beauty by mistake'; the unintentional beauty, which might become the final phase in the history of beauty itself; a utopian beauty. This final phase would become the reason why we still long for an urban culture. For this very same reason, urban environment still has chances to exist.

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[i] Mumford, Lewis, 1961, THE CITY IN HISTORY; It's Origins, It's Transformation, and It's Prospects, Penguin, London, p.650

[ii] For a brief history of relations between modern urban development and the *fear* of violence see Ellin, Nan, SHELTER FROM THE STORM OF FORM FOLLOWS FEAR AND VICE VERSA, in Ellin, Nan, ed., 1997, ARCHITECTURE OF FEAR, Princeton Architectural Press, New York

[iii] see Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, NOMADOLOGY: THE WAR MACHINE, trans. Brian Massumi, Semiotext(e), University of Minnesota Press, New York

[iv] Sigmund, Freud, 1930, 1961, CIVILIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS, tr. and ed. By James Strachey, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York, p.42

[v] Gunawan, Undi, 1999, DECODING THE STATE IDEOLOGY, AND VIOLENCE AS AN AGENT OF NEGATIVE PLURALISM: The Indonesian Social de-production in the phase of political transition, paper presented on Sites of Recovery Conference, 25-28 October 1999, Lebanon, Beirut
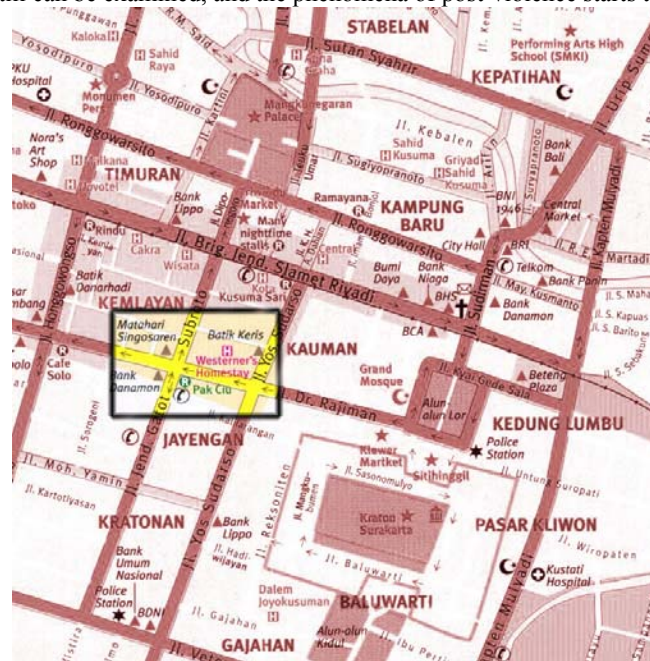
[vi] Sigmund, Freud, op.cit. p.72,76

[vii] quoted from Leahey, Thomas Hardy, 2001, A HISTORY OF MODERN PSYCHOLOGY, Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, p.74 which referring to Harrington, A., 1996, REENCHANTED SCIENCE: HOLISM IN GERMAN CULTURE FROM WILHELM II TO HITLER, Princeton University Press, New Jersey

[viii] Delany, Samuel R, 1974, DHALGREN, Vintage, New York, p.226

[ix] see Žižek, Slavoj, 1999, THE TICKLISH SUBJECT, Verso, London, p.49

[x] Kundera, Milan, 1998 translated from the French by Linda Asher, IDENTITY: a novel, HarperFlamingo, New York , p.40

[xi] These images are series of façade analysis from an urban street segment in Solo-West Java-Indonesia, showing the south and north side of the street (see boxed area on the map below). Solo a city rampaged by violence during the resignation process of Soeharto in May 1998. The images are taken in November 2000, when the traces of the violence still can be examined, and the phenomena of post-violence starts to emerge.

[xii] on orders of *signification* refer to O'Sullivan, Tim., Hartley, John., Sounders, Danny., and Friske, John, 1983, KEY CONCEPTS IN COMMUNICATION –(Studies in Communication), Routledge, London, p.217.

[xiii] Defoe, Daniel, 1986, 1995, A VISITATION OF THE PLAGUE (extract from A JOURNAL OF THE PLAGUE YEAR, Penguin, London, p.33

[xiv] See the works of: Fukuyama, Francis, 1992, THE END OF HISTORY AND THE LAST MAN, Penguin, Harmondsworth and Huntington, Samuel, 1996, THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS AND THE REMAKING OF THE WORLD ORDER, Simon and Schuster, New York.

[xv] See the works of: Eagleton, Terry, ed.,, 1994, IDEOLOGY, Longman, UK and Žižek, Slavoj, ed., 1994, MAPPING IDEOLOGY, Verso, London.

[xvi] See Baudrillard, Jean, THE BEAUBIURG-EFFECT:IMPLOSION AND DETERRENCE, trans. R.Krauss, A Michelson, *October*, 20,pp.3-13 reprinted in Leach, Neil, 1997, RETHINKING ARCHITECTURE, Routledge, London.pp.216-217
[xvii] Kundera, Milan, 1984, THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING, Perennial Classic, New York, p.251
[xviii] Murtidjono, SINGOSAREN = PASAR HANTU, Suara Merdeka, 12 June 1999
[xix] taken from Suara Merdeka, 20 December 1999
[xx] These descriptions of kitsch are extracted from Kundera, Milan, 1984, op.cit., pp.248-261
[xxi] Lacan, Jacques, 1973, THE FOUR FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF PSYCHO-ANALYSIS, trans. Alan Sheridan, 1977, Vintage, London, p.75
[xxii] Žižek, Slavoj, 1999, op.cit., p.60