

AN INTERVIEW WITH ABIDIN KUSNO

on "*Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture, Urban Space and Political Cultures in Indonesia*" (Routledge, 2000) and "*Appearances of Memory: Architecture, Spatial Politics and the Making of New Times*" (Unpublished book manuscript).

1. Realized on electronic mail, 26-28 March; 7 April and 14-15 April 2006; I owe special thanks to Gamze Ege and Sanem Güvenç-Salgırlı for their suggestions.

2. Anthony D. King, *Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social Power and Environment* (1976), *Urbanism, Colonialism and the World-Economy: Cultural and Spatial Foundations of the World Urban System* (1990), *The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture* (1995), *Spaces of Global Cultures: Architecture, Urbanism, Identity* (2004).

top right: Marketing Tradition: The Dutch Pavilion, Paris 1931; p. 27.

ABIDIN KUSNO

BEHIND THE POSTCOLONIAL: ARCHITECTURE, URBAN SPACE AND POLITICAL CULTURES IN INDONESIA

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Introductory Remarks

Abidin Kusno is Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair in Asian Urbanism and Culture at University of British Columbia (1). Kusno's work can be situated within an emerging tradition of writings on colonial and postcolonial architecture and urbanism, following the path opened by Anthony D. King's groundbreaking book, *Colonial Urban Development* (1976), as well as his subsequent and most recent contributions (2). *Behind the Postcolonial*, along with other recent publications from the discipline of architecture, constitutes an emerging scholarship critical of the mainstream architectural historiography (3).

Kusno's work on colonial and postcolonial Indonesia addresses broad themes through specific contemporary and historical cases and speaks to the Indonesian audience as much as it does to readers in other places experiencing (problematically) a condition of postcoloniality. Turkish readers will find in his political history of architecture and urbanism in Indonesia a narrative that engages with both local

politics and transnational power relations. Moving in and out specific contexts and asking broad questions in relation to colonialism, modernity and nationalism, Kusno's work on postcoloniality offers a particular way of thinking about other places.

Although Turkey's relation to "colonial history" and the "postcolonial condition" is rather ambiguous, the body of postcolonial literature offers new possibilities. Its theorization might allow Turkish architecture to be placed beyond the conceptual binaries of "periphery" and "center" and as product of a modernity, which is shared and mutually constituted both by "the western" and the "non-western" world. In this sense, there are many parallels between recent critical works in Turkey on the history of architecture and urbanism and Kusno's demystification of the colonizer / colonized binary in the context of Indonesian cities and other Asian countries (4).

Thus, the following interview can be seen as an attempt to forge a critical dialogue with other historical contexts. It is structured loosely by issues raised

3. *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasilia* (James Holston 1989), *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Gwendolyn Wright 1991), *Forms of Dominance: On the Architecture and Urbanism of the Colonial Enterprise* (Nezar Al Sayyad 1992), *Postcolonial Space(s)* (Gülsüm Nalbantoğlu and Wong Chong Thai 1997), *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations: Algiers under French Rule* (Zeynep Çelik 1997), *Postcolonial Urbanism: Southeast Asian Cities and Global Processes* (Ryan Bishop, John Phillips and Wei Wei Yeo 2003), *Indigenous Modernities: Negotiating Architecture, Urbanism and Colonialism* (Jyoti Hosagrahar 2005), *Writing Spaces: Discourses of Architecture, Urbanism, and the Built Environment, 1960-2000* (Greig Cryler 2005).
4. *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic* (Sibel Bozdoğan 2001), *Modernin Saati: 20. Yüzyılda Modernleşme ve Demokratikleşme Pratiğinde Mimarlar, Kamusal Mekan ve Konut Mimarlığı* (Ali Cengizkan 2002), *Mücadele Konut ve Yerleşimleri* (Ali Cengizkan 2004), *İstanbul 1900-2000, Konutu ve Modernleşmeyi Metropolden Okumak* (Uğur Tanyeli 2004).
5. Kusno (2000) *Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture, Urban Space and Political Cultures in Indonesia*, Routledge, London and New York; 212.
6. Ama Ata Aidoo, quoted in Andermahr, Sonya, Terry Lovell, and Carol Wolkowitz (1997) *A Concise Glossary of Feminist Theory*, Arnold; London, New York; 168.
7. Kusno, "Introduction.", in *Appearances of Memory: Architecture, Spatial Politics and the Making of New Times* (Unpublished book manuscript).

⁷Colonial Replica: The Institute of Technology at Baudung (ITB), p. 82



in Kusno's *Behind the Postcolonial* and a collection of his current essays which will be put together under a volume tentatively entitled, *Appearances of Memory: Architecture, Spatial Politics and the Making of New Times.*"

Time, Space and History: Colonialism and the Postcolonial World

1. *Dear Abidin Kusno. While your book Behind the Postcolonial (2000) locates architecture and urbanism within the social and political contexts of Indonesia, I think that it can also be put to use in addressing issues relevant to other places. In it, you raise significant theoretical questions central to the study of architecture of urbanism. Your arguments are rooted in and empowered by postcolonial criticism, but you simultaneously generate a different direction for thinking about issues around colonial culture and postcolonial conditions. In order to introduce the central concern of your study, allow me to start with the conclusion of the book. Here, you conclude by saying that the contemporary "dialogue with the colonial past", either in the form of forgetting or remembering, "has resulted, among other things, in the reproduction of a form of colonialism itself" (5). In this sense, do you agree with critics of postcolonial theory who insistently argue that "colonialism has not been 'post'-ed anywhere"? (6)*

You have underlined a central concern in the book one that deals with the politics, history and the representation

of time. The book was completed at the end of Suharto regime (which ruled from 1966-1998), in the midst of atrocities in the major cities of Indonesia and violence against the pro-Independence East Timor. It could therefore be seen as a form of cultural intervention critical of the recent past of Indonesia. It approaches the postcolonial Suharto regime as if it were a regime of colonial time which underwent a crisis not only in politics and economy, but also in culture. I used architecture and urbanism to tell such story and in my story, I point to the continuity between colonial time and the era after decolonization. On another level, the book deals with colonial and postcolonial continuum and shows how the issues that pre-occupied architects and planners of the colonial era are also those of our own time. Issues such as authenticity, tradition, identity, modernity, and modernization in architecture were as important back then as they are today in architectural debates. These are issues that seem to cut across colonial time and the era of Independence.

Whether "colonialism has not been 'post'-ed anywhere" is, I think, less a matter of fact than an intellectual position that one has to develop for matters of his or her concern. The notion of "postcolonial" (as I used it in my work) carries two contradictory consciousnesses. It indicates an awareness of a radically new era of "decolonization" which offers different constraints and opportunities. Yet, this sense of discontinuity on the part of decolonized nations is also haunted by a profound sense of continuity with their colonial past. The once-colonized countries continue to be dealing with historically situated forms of representation (such as architecture and planning practices) which traverse across both the past and the present. The standard nationalist historiography overcome this contradiction by resorting to a dichotomy of colonial past and the era of Independence – the former represents darkness and the later represents light. It is a story of how the sense of victimhood is overcome by heroic recovery in economic development under the guidance of a patrimonial state. It is this developmentalist framework that the book aims to be critical of. Instead of

8. Sideway, James D. (2000) "Postcolonial Geographies: An Exploratory Essay", *Progress in Human Geography*, 24/4, 2000; 593, 606.

9. Kusno (2000) *Behind the Postcolonial*; 8.

10. Kusno, *Appearances of Memory*, Chapter 2: "The Past in the Present: The Empire, the Indies and the Art Deco," (Unpublished book manuscript).

showing the discontinuity of the past and the present, I try to show their connection, or better, the present dialogue with the colonial past which would lead us to the politics of memory, forgetting and invention.

2. In *Appearances of Memory you seek to problematize the relationship between memory and buildings in the postcolonial world without "taking the colonial past as the point of departure." Otherwise, as you have pointed out, we are likely to "repeat the Eurocentric narrative that denies the spatial and temporal simultaneity between the colonizer and the colonized in their mutually constitutive attempts to make sense of modernity" (7). If what is defined as "postcolonial" could be seen as another form of the "colonial", to what extent has postcolonial theory been useful in developing the tools of "decolonization"? Some have argued that this process requires the dismantling of the "western (imperialist) forms of knowledge" transmitted through institutions such as geography, which evolved "as a western-colonial science" (8).*

The legacy of colonialism continues in various forms including the most explicit one, namely war and occupation today under various names. In this context it is important for academic disciplines (including architecture) to have a sense of geo-history and geopolitical economy of culture and to be sensitive to the ways in which knowledge could contribute to the exercise of power as well as a sense of injustices. We won't be able to immediately assess how oppressive, say, colonial spatial segregation based on race had been, but that form of knowledge would make us aware of how a discipline such as urban design can become part of colonial practices. To "decolonize" forms of knowledge is to acknowledge, expose and thus sensitize the connection between knowledge and colonialism. On the other hand, "decolonizing" knowledge could also be problematic. Quite often, it aspires for a transcendental, if not purified, uncolonized knowledge, a position which often opens up even more opportunity for "colonialism" to step in. I would rather suggest something modest, that we recognize the legacies and presences of colonialism as a basis

for thinking about decolonization. This recognition will pose a limit to the imperial nature of knowledge.

Appearances of Memory thus could be seen as an effort to look at the "postcolonial" not only in terms of its temporal coordinate (as has normally been used), but in terms of the change in space and how the transformation of spatial and built environment help shape new social and political consciousness. It is in this sense then the "postcolonial" could be seen as another form of the "colonial" and similarly, during the colonial era, there are various politics of spatial control and different attempts to achieve liberation.

3. *Do you think, out of your studies on postcolonial architecture and urbanism that it will ever be possible for both scholars and people in postcolonial states to "recognize colonialism without colonizing [their] own imagination"?* (9)

I think one way to "recognize colonialism without colonizing our own imagination" is to consider colonial legacy as a "gift." In a way, *Behind the Postcolonial* tries to make use of that gift by repackaging it for the cultural intervention of the present. In a more general sense, "recognizing colonialism without colonizing our imagination" would entail an incorporation of historical and contemporary colonialism as contexts for thinking about architecture and urbanism. If, as an attempt to decolonize knowledge, we only write about our own space mobilizing only things considered as "local" and "authentic," then we would end up repeating, not only the metaphysics of binarism, but also what Edward Said used to call "compartmental view" of history and culture.

4. *In the second chapter of Appearances of Memory, you talk about the reappearance of "modernist Art-Deco" in contemporary Indonesia, which was one of the dominant colonial styles in the 1930s. In your account, Budi Lim presented modernist vocabulary as a possible route to define "Indonesian architecture" (10). Perhaps we, as architectural historians, share a common problematic with architects such as Lim, who resort to a (colonial) past to deal with issues of identity and authenticity in the architectural present. I think we*

11. Nicolai, Bernd (1998) *Moderne und Exil, Deutschsprachige Architekten in der Türkei 1925-1955*, Verlag für Bauwesen, Berlin.

12. This question was raised by Bülent Batuman in a personal conversation.

also need to problematize in the larger scale, how modernist art deco itself, as it has originated in the west, was shaped not independently from colonial or global relations. Similarly, it is not less meaningful to ask how "authentic" British, Dutch or French architecture is. But is there an answer?

There are perhaps various ways of challenging the mainstream stylistic and formalist readings of architecture which have prevailed in architectural history. There are works on stylistic hybridity and syncretic form of architecture in say, British, Dutch or French architecture, but I think one should go further to trace the geopolitical and historical relations within which the invention of architectural traditions are embedded. Another way is to go deeper by tracing the unconscious identification. This kind of tracing would assume the existence of a dimension "beneath" architecture one that supplies the reference for the "rationality" of "European" architecture even as this contribution is subjected to negation.

5. I would like to relate the case of foreign architects who came to Turkey from German-speaking countries during the 1930s, and were commissioned by the Turkish state to design significant urban and architectural projects (11). This period has mostly been researched for the purpose of determining the influence of these architects on the imagination of national, western or modern architecture in Turkey. What has not been very frequently asked, however, is the extent to which these architects were influenced by their own experiences in Turkey in relation to Turkey's architectural "traditions." This aspect of identity-formation could well be analyzed by tracing the practice and publications of these architects after they returned to their home countries or settled in other places (12).

Yes, indeed this inquiry can become quite interesting especially when we want to consider a history of architecture from a truly global perspective. This entails a study of "intertwined histories and overlapping territories" (Said) one that would not only studying the spread of western architects/architecture in various part of the world, but also the ways in which architectural discourses in Europe were

shaped by places outside "Europe." In this context issues of colonialism and imperialism (in a broad sense) become important. It is interesting that a most critical minded historian such as Kenneth Frampton does not take into consideration issues around colonialism in his critical history of modern architecture. I recently saw a book on architecture called Dutch Modernism, but in the book no where could one find an entry on Dutch East Indies even though H.P. Berlage gave a lecture and wrote a book on Indies architecture in Europe following his trip to colonial Indonesia in the 1920s. Today, there have been increasing interests among Dutch architects to study and preserve colonial buildings in the Netherlands's ex-colonies, from Colombo, Suriname, to Indonesia. Yet, (with few exceptions such as the work of Tony King on the (post)coloniality of Bungalow) very little has been done on tracing the ways in which the building cultures of these different places shaped the intellectual history and the architectural thinking of the metropole.

Politics of Binarism: Modernization, Localization and the Invention of Tradition

6. In Behind the Postcolonial, you question the dichotomy of colonizer and colonized in the writing of (post)colonial history. In what ways did you utilize architecture and urbanism in Indonesia to go beyond this dichotomy?

Like other works critical of colonial urbanism, I was trying to show the operation of architecture (its rational choices of styles and organization of space) as a kind of "soft power." As an aesthetic of hidden persuasion speaking through unspoken language of form and space, architecture nevertheless needs to come up with a language with which it could communicate with people it seeks to serve and shape. To communicate most effectively, the form of communication would need to be one that is connected to both the psychic and the intelligibility of particular person or public. This kind of architectural strategy often (even though not always) demands a technique of localizing the significant form of, say, modernist architecture, by blending it with local "familiar" elements.

13. In fact this position resonates with some of the concepts used variously in postcolonial literary studies (such as mimicry, hybridity, and translation). Anthony D. King, as we know, has also written about the production of bungalow as colonial "third culture" that was specific to the social environment of the colony. Gwendolyn Wright and others have also written about architecture strategy of association.

14. "Localizing modernities" connotes postcolonial possibilities to reflect on the "European modernism", its "association with nationalism" and the way it crafted national subjects, by means of reflecting on diverse cases and sources in the world. Smith, Michael Peter and Thomas Bender, "The Localization of Modernity", in Smith, Michael Peter and Thomas Bender, eds. (2001) *City and Nation, Rethinking Place and Identity*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick and London; 1-14.

15. Here I am using these terms only from a "postcolonial" point of view, in an attempt to decentering the "center."

16. Rabinow, Paul (1995) *French Modern, Norms and Forms of the Social Environment*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London.

17. Kusno (2003) "The reality of One-Which-is-Two"- Mosque Battles and Other Stories: Notes on Architecture, Religion, and Politics in the Javanese World, *Journal of Architectural Education*, 2003; 57-67.

I started to look at this point through the optic of the early twentieth century colonial Indonesia, when architecture as a profession first entered the colony. Several Dutch architects were working with the architectural problematic of how to communicate their work to the public. These architects came at the time when the Netherlands just decided to change its strategy of rule by promoting and cultivating "local" cultures. This form of governance was conducted under the notion of Ethical Policy which sought to turn colonial exploitation into colonial civilizing mission through the nurturing of local cultures.

The official merging of culture and politics generated a dynamic in the architectural world of colonial Indonesia especially in the context in which some Dutch architects working under this mandate were in fact socialist democrats with "anti-colonial" inclination. Some of them were born and grew up in the colony before they were sent to the metropole for their degree in architectural engineering. When they returned to the colony as architects, their subjectivities could no longer be understood through a binary opposition of colonizer / colonized. They were suspicious of Europe, and yet they worked for the government and private enterprises under the aegis of the Ethical Policy. They had "gone native" and genuinely believed in their mission to promote "indigenous" culture. And perhaps if we go deeper into their visions, we would not be surprised to see that some of them saw the colony as an ideal place for the creation of a "third" space, one that would belong to neither Indonesia nor the Netherlands. Through the case of Dutch architects working in the Indies, I was trying to dispose the narrative of domination (which is based the colonizer/ colonized binarism), and develop a way to understand the complexity and ambiguity which often formed colonial relation without undermining the importance of power relations (13).

7. Perhaps, that is the reason why "localizing modernities" should be seen a conceptual tool to challenge the universalistic conception of European modernity (14). Yet, I also want to underline the "universalist" character of modern architecture and urbanism, through which, not only colonizers but

also "colonized subjects" have located themselves as the "modernizing selves" (15).

I agree with your observation. *Behind the Postcolonial* in fact shows the reemergence in the era after decolonization of modernizing elites which constructed categories of "others" in the urban space of Jakarta. To add to your point, these "others" were not meant to be modernized. Instead, they were created for the self-formation of the "modern" elites. This formation of "internal" other follows the logic of colonial "civilizing mission" which in its attempt to modernize the colony still maintained a distance or a gap necessary for hierarchal identification. This mechanism of identification justifies the continuous discourse of modernization. If the "others" could be fully absorbed into the "self," gone would be the need for modernization and dependency. This raises the whole issues of the parallel between "colonial" and "national" development as well as the inner contradiction of "modernization."

8. Paul Rabinow's discussion on specific intellectuals who combined their "utopist" visions with imperialist projects of colonial regimes can also be applied here (16). However, what is more interesting to me is seeing how architects and planners in "third world" countries assumed a similar role in relation to their own modernization. As you have underlined elsewhere, "we also, a lot of times, use our own universal modernist architectural framework to understand the strange and the incomprehensible" (17).

Rabinow points out that besides "middling modernism," there is another strategy called "techno-cosmopolitanism" that was used to develop the colony. Like "middling modernism," "techno-cosmopolitanism" is also a technique of modernization, but its strategy is to use "local" cultures as the basis for modernization. This anthropological take on development assumes the importance of cultural difference. In *Behind the Postcolonial*, I show how these two paradigms were used in both colonial and postcolonial contexts. "Techno-cosmopolitanism" while investing development with "tradition," has also become a tool for conservative politics under postcolonial



"Burden of Representation: Towards an Indonesian Architecture", p. 187.

18. Michelle Facos and Sharon L. Hirsh, "Introduction" in Michelle Facos and Sharon L. Hirsh, eds. (2003) *Art, Culture, and National Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York; 1-15.

19. Smith, Anthony D. (1993) *National Identity*, University of Nevada Press, Reno, Las Vegas, London; 103.

20. Bozdoğan, Sibel (2001) *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic*, Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

Suharto's regime. In this context, "middling modernism," in its radical call for universalism, quite often threatens the state's "essentialist" assumption of cultural identity and difference. In other words, we cannot assume that "middling modernism" is essentially colonial and imperial for its universalistic claim and that "techno-cosmopolitanism" is less dominating since it is attentive to local cultures. Both can be used and abused in any context. Both can create oppressive hierarchy and their own form of binarism.

I think it is fine to use binarism (such as self and other) as a way to write history for this will allow us to talk about difference and power relations. The important thing is to avoid seeing only the "self" as the maker of history. We do not want to repeat the problem of privileging the "self" (as in the writing of the 20th century modern architecture without connecting it to the colonial world within which it is embedded). The key issue is to show how the "others" contribute to and constitute the "self." In *Behind the Postcolonial*, I use several binarisms to structure my argument and to show how they mutually constitute each other even though in many instances one ended up dominating the other. Exposing this dynamic could be seen as both recognizing and decolonizing colonial power.

9. Michelle Facos and Sharon Hirsh write that the evolution of "modern nationalism" in Europe is largely a late nineteenth century phenomenon (18). One conclusion drawn from this argument in relation to the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey may be that not only Turkish national identity was a response, in the 19th century, to the loss of a vast amount of the Empire's land following the birth of nationalist movements within its territories (19). But also, national identities in Europe were shaped through the self-images of Europeans against its "other," such as the Ottoman Turks. Assuming an ambivalent position, both as a colonizer and colonized, the Ottoman Empire was not a distant land that the west brought into civilization. The Ottomans had a considerable amount of military presence in Europe. It was perhaps the only instance in world history that

Europe itself was, for centuries, under the threat of being "colonized" by an "eastern" force. In that sense, it would be interesting to tease out the constructive elements in "European" identities of Ottoman image, culture and identity.

It is indeed interesting especially when we consider how the geographical proximity to Europe might complicate and enrich the case of Turkey. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, South or Southeast Asia was still a distanced sea and land from Europe even after the opening of the Suez Canal. In those places, there were perhaps more opportunities for the local to take over the global. The notions of "localization," "ambiguities," "ambivalent," "translation," "going native" that we find in postcolonial studies that sought to "provincialize Europe" (Chakrabarty) might have developed out of this sense of distance. There are plenty of opportunities for Turkey to develop new concepts out of its specific geographical and historical circumstances.

For me, the transformation from Ottoman Empire to the Republican Turkey from "within" is interesting – especially the issues around the making of "national" subjects. So you think Turkey's national consciousness stemmed from an attempt to align with the "civilization" of Western Europe (instead of, say, identification with Islam), for example through romanization, visual environment and so on. Following your thought, this enterprise of heightening Turkish nationalism (via an alignment with Europe in the earlier or later stage of "modernization") might have an effect of shaping or strengthening "European" identities?

10. I must say that the question or rather, the speculation on the effect of Ottoman identity on European identities was not formulated with modern Turkey in mind. But we might also address here what one would refer to as Turkey's "self-colonizing" process, where the nation created its own "selves" and "others" by replicating the European national-models on a different scale (20). It was the relocation of the European identity, or better, its image, within the context of Turkey that gave form to the construction and search of

21. Kusno (2000) *Behind the Postcolonial*, Chapter 3: "Recreating Origins: The Birth of 'Tradition' in the Architecture of the New Order"; 71-94.

22. Kusno's comment, 03.01.2004.

Putting the Final Touch: Sukarno Explains the Model of the Main Thoroughfare, p. 58.

Sukarno Instructs: "Set the Wings Back 30%" and Wisma Nusantara Approved!, p. 58.

an "authentic" Turkish identity.

So the search and construction for an "authentic" Turkish identity could be seen as stemming from a much deeper cause related to the positioning of Turkey as a reference for European "self." This is quite an interesting line of inquiry. Do you think that the Turkish's "self" (as Europe's "others") was an unconscious move that existed "beneath" the sovereign power of Turkey? Could we say that this position warrants the sense of superego for Europe? I said "unconscious", partly because I thought that this was not the option for which Turkey would formally aspired. The position as the "other" exists only when other prevailing forms of identifications were somewhat denied by Europe?

11. *I would agree with your argument, but let us explore this by discussing*

issues around political cultures and the construction of tradition and customary life. One approach perhaps, as you did in the third chapter of Behind the Postcolonial is to trace the "origins" of contemporary architectural imaginations in the nation's own past (21).

The discussion on "recreating origins" has two purposes. First is to demythologize "tradition" mobilized by the conservative turn in Indonesian political cultures during the reign of Suharto, especially after the 1980s. The increasing authoritarian measures under the state ideology of (capitalist) "development" came in tandem with the promotion of (feudalistic) Javanese "tradition" as the political cultures of the nation. The purpose of that chapter is to show the fabricated nature of "tradition" and the inventedness of what was considered as "authentic cultures." The context for the invention was the state's increasing sense of insecurity as the country began to experience various unprecedented challenges and protests against its authoritarian rules.

This phenomenon has been studied in other fields. My contribution was merely to illustrate the condition through series of events and discourses related to architecture and urbanism. I look at the ways in which various often unrelated discursive moments in the architectural life of Indonesia constituted nevertheless a more or less "unified" discourse that meditated on the state's obsession with identity and tradition. The second purpose is to make sense of how the intellectual framework of these discursive events might have been overdetermined by those of the colonial time. Linking the postcolonial invention of tradition with that of the colonial past would demystify the originality of the state's search for origin. Whereas the state would claim its origin in the presumably golden age of the precolonial era, I show that its origin could be found during the colonial time – a connection that the state and its nationalists would prefer to negate.

12. *It is tempting for architectural historians to theorize the processes of subject-formation on the basis of practice or everyday experience, or*



23. Crysler, C. Greig (2003) *Writing Spaces, Discourses of Architecture, Urbanism, and the Built Environment, 1960-2000*, Routledge, London and New York; 97-99.

seeing the everyday as site of resistance. On the other hand, as you have also pointed out in a previous discussion, it is difficult to put the everyday in the realm of the past, particularly because it resists museumization (22).

It is interesting that you brought up the issue of everydaylife here – a subject that I haven't thought about for this chapter. But I think you have an interesting point here if we read the chapter on "recreating origins" as basically a chapter tracing a series of discourses that have led to a museumization of cultures and everyday life. The argument for this chapter would then be about the loss of familiarity as the city, the nation and its subjects have increasing been displaced by capitalist development. In response, the state thus felt the need to retrieve "traditional – spiritual" order to restore its authority. The everyday life since then has been felt as becoming more artificial (and moving according to developmental projects) even though "cultures" continues to be represented as "authentic" and timeless. In this sense too, what constituted the everyday has also changed especially when people begin to look at the "replica" as the "original" – as this has been played out in some experiences of visiting the Beautiful Indonesian in Miniature.

I can see the theoretical investment of conceiving the "popular," or the "everyday practices" as the realms of the authentic which can serve as a platform for resistance against power, orthodoxy and reification, but I have

been wondering for a while if the everyday has ever escaped power? Can the everyday ever be autonomous? What would happen if the everyday has been colonized; will it come back in its "original" form? I was trying to avoid a romantic idea of the everyday as the realm of the authentic even though I respect such attempts on the ground of cultural strategy.

13. In colonial texts, and also in the mainstream architectural history writing in the west, tradition was seen as the realm of the anonymous or the "collective architect." In the same way, building traditions that did not depend on or primarily determined by the profession were categorized as vernacular architecture: it was "architecture without architects." Do you agree with Greig Crysler that the separation of modern and traditional as "two contrasting models of social organization" has resulted in the universalization of tradition as a category in opposition to the modern? Crysler also argues that this is how the "constructed landscapes of tradition" were created (23).

There are several assumptions behind the categories of "modern" and "tradition." And all the assumptions are constructed for various purposes some of which are more conservative (or progressive) than others. I don't have a problem with the invention of binary oppositions especially the ones that create creative comparison, connection and tension between the opposite poles. The binary opposition of tradition and modernity allows us to talk about crisis, displacement, and loss – terms that are essential for conceiving social change, different political formation and transformation. It is better than a category that only stands on its own or one that got stuck in a permanent equilibrium. Binarism becomes a problem when one pole overcomes the other and claims its position as the embodiment of truth, the origin, or the righteous. Often, under this circumstance, the other pole would play into the game by resisting or also claiming another truth for its own sake.

This is how I see the formation of series of architectural discourses around notions such "organic," "body" "memory," "anthropology," "tradition," "vernacular," "dwelling," and "place."

Representing the Nation: Territory, Place and Identity in the Miniature Park, 1975, p. 76.



24. Kusno (2000) *Behind the Postcolonial*; 4.

25. Kusno (2000) *Behind the Postcolonial*; 14.

Some people use these notions in an essentialist way while others are more strategic and dialectical in the usage (- "strategic essentialism" of Spivak). Regardless of whether this vernacular-turn in architecture is mobilized to counter particular, presumably, modernist approach, to create another hegemonic practice or to preserve or carve a distinctive new identity for architecture, it is definitely an "invented" tradition.

I think there is something liberating in the fact that "traditions" are always more or less invented, for this would allow counter invention and further invention of traditions. On the other hand, there are discourses in architectural world claiming "nature," "culture," "body," "custom," and "everday life" in an ahistorical way. But the question is not only how do one know that one has designed on those terms, but how one is in fact involved in the "invention" of those terms. Instead of encouraging the search for authenticity in architecture, it would be more interesting to see how one could acknowledge his / her involvement in the construction of "authenticity," a reinvention of a tradition that is always already an invented one. Greig Crysler has shown us how the knowledge of the "vernacular" has been constructed and how it has become as hegemonic as the "modernist." Greig also indicates how this presumably "organic" architecture cannot stand outside power relations.

14. In this sense, "tradition", "local" and "modern" do not only exchange meanings in different contexts and times; they cannot be defined or explicated as universalistic, unitary concepts either.

Indeed, the categories of "modern" and "tradition" depend on the temporal and spatial contexts within which they operate. While shaped by the context, the categories also, in turn shape that context. For example, in the early twentieth century under Dutch colonial power, young Indonesians aspired to the idea of the "modern" and they did not associate the term with "colonialism." In fact, in their minds, modernity carried the idea of anti-colonialism. Yet, few decades later, some of their children and grand children (grew up under the social environment of postwar development)

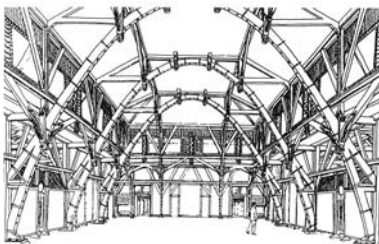
associated the idea of "modern" with the "colonial," and aspired to practices of "tradition" that their parents and grand parents sought to leave behind (of course the meanings of the terms changes over time). On the other hand, members of the Dutch colonial government back then also felt the threat of "modernity" and they tried to domesticate it by creating "traditions" for the colonized. These are crude and simplified examples. We can perhaps think of more delicate and subtle cases.

In any case, it is important to pay attention to the local dynamics when we deal with terms that try to capture a totality of experience. The presence of, say, "international style architecture" in particular place might indicate to us the spread of certain global culture, but the significance of this statement could only be reflected through questions of how and why it is placed and received in particular ways and with what social and political implications for that place. Similarly, it would be problematic then to assume that "tradition," the "organic" or "the vernacular" is beyond politics and more truthful.

Architecture, Urban Space and the Formation of National Subjects

15. In *Behind the Postcolonial* you wrote that "the shaping of the built environment is also a writing of the history of a nation." And writing the history of a nation, as in the case of postcolonial Indonesia, is "concerned with the articulation of sequences, of finding an appropriate time and space" (24). At this point, architecture and urban design appear as significant entry points for us in tracing this process of "reinventing" the nation during the postcolonial period.

Nationalism, as Benedict Anderson indicates, works through a range of representations that act on human imaginations. Architecture and visual environment could be seen as one of such form of representation which, either intentionally or unintentionally, attempt to mold social practices, values and imaginations. For example, I show the syncretic building of Dutch architect Maclaine Pont as an embodiment of the territorial integrity of the vast areas of Indonesian archipelago and ponder how this ostensibly pan-Indonesian



Interior Design of Henri Maclaine Pont's Bandoeng Technische Hoogeschool, 1920, p. 46.

26. This is an insight from Gwendolyn Wright.

27. Kusno, "Introduction", *Appearances of Memory*.

28. Kusno, "Introduction", *Appearances of Memory*.

29. Vale, Lawrence J. (1992) *Architecture, Power, and National Identity*, Yale University Press, New Haven.

architecture might contribute to national imagination. In the post-colonial era, I indicated the ways in which modernist architecture were contextualized to form nationalist imagination. But how was this architectural strategies received by Indonesians of various backgrounds?

In many respects, this is an issue of subject formation. I aim to show the importance of reception by indicating the *connection* between architecture, urban space and formation of national subjectivity. I argue for the *possibilities* of such connection even as I couldn't claim if the connection has been successful. This type of inquiry is different from works that center on the intentions and products of architects or the state with little or no interpretation of how they might be received and invested with different meanings.

16. *Where then should we place architects in the possible making of national consciousness?*

Architects are not only specialists of their field, but they are also members of particular social orders. They are not above anyone even as they often imagine themselves as beyond power. I see them as working for as well as against the interests of economy and the state. They could be seen as "nationalist" helping to give form to as well as fighting against "nation-state." Here, as far as the discussion of nationalism is concerned, it is important that we make clear that the state is not the same as the nation. Ben Anderson's book is in fact an attempt to show the

difference between the nation and the state and how they have merged into one as well as failed to come together. He is intrigued by the fact that many alternative and oppositional discourses against the state have mostly been nationalist discourses. Perhaps we could consider again his discussion on the difference between official and popular nationalism and find within this context a place for architects. The question for us then is where to put architects, planners, and designers in the struggle between the state and the nation.

17. *A significant goal of Behind the Postcolonial is to show the pivotal role architecture plays in creating collective subjectivities, as well as representing their various appearances. My question concerns the issue of method, or approach, to studies of architecture and urbanism in relation to nation-making and subject formation. How can we, as architectural historians, study the built environment in a way that architecture and urban design are not understood as direct translations of state power but spatial mechanisms that "mediate the relationship between social structures?" (25).*

This issue of method specific to architecture as a built environment is certainly an interesting one. When we see architecture as a medium for an inquiry into power, we are talking about not merely stylistic appearance of a building but also functional spaces which is part of everyday life. Foucault has talked about the space of panopticon to illustrate how users of space (such as the inmates) *might* follow the instruction of the space and thus become the subject of power without him or her realizing it. Yet Foucault also talked about how people might change space constructed for them by architects. Space (or say architecture) is an amorphous technology of power that is shaped and reshaped by all kinds of forces ranging from macro political economy to specific psycho-cultural. It has "elements" (such as doorway, walls, and windows) which form a "language" of its own one which demands a response from users. Yet, this formal language is subjected to different perceptions and experiences of various social actors.

Analyzing architecture thus poses many methodological challenges and invites

Representing Authority: The Rectorate Tower of the University of Indonesia, p. 87.



30. Kusno, *Appearances of Memory*, Chapter 5, "Colonial Cities in Motion: Visual Environment and Popular Radicalism" (Unpublished book manuscript)

31. Shaw, Wendy (2003) *Possessor and Possessed: Museums, Archaeology and the Visualization of History in the Late Ottoman Empire*, University of California Press, Berkeley; 148.

32. Abidin Kusno's comment, 22.03.2004; for a discussion rethinking the late Ottoman Empire as a colonial power, please see Selim Deringil, "They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery": The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* vol. 43. July 2003.

creative approaches. For us who focus on the social and political aspects of architecture, we know that architecture cannot in itself form identity and change society, but it can *contribute* to identity formation and social change by addressing particular issues in its architectural discourses (26). Moreover, architecture is merely one among many technologies that inform our world. Without the cooperation of other practices, architecture in itself cannot articulate a unified discourse powerful enough to form or contest a hegemonic identity. Knowing this limit opens up opportunities for architecture to be understood along with other discourses and practices.

18. *Appearances of Memory problematizes the ways in which "people with various memories internalize a particular hegemonic version of memory as their particular past." (27). You argue that people refashion their built environment in order to deal with various situations in the present (28). I find this an interesting problematization. It is perhaps a common practice among architectural historians to study certain building forms as transmitters of official ideology. I remember here Lawrence Vale's work on major Capitol buildings (29). But how were these messages rearticulated or negated by their users is a different question, which cannot be easily answered. How can we make visible this process of memorizing / forgetting through architecture and urbanism?*

Indeed one of the main objectives is to consider the ways in which various social classes (-the ruling class, the architects, or the state) adapt their political communications (through architecture and visual environments) for the shaping of the everyday life of the urban population, and how people in turn adapt to that power in various ways. Instead of seeing power as a scheme imposes from above, the idea is to see how power translates itself to gain local effects. As power translates itself into the practices of everyday life, it also shapes those practices and conditions the possibility of both subjectivation and resistance.

The concepts of memorizing and forgetting allow us to talk about the embodiment of power in the everyday

life and the ways this process is contested. Memories can be the item of surplus that, after power-effect, lies below or beyond subjectivation. It can also be a component that can emerge accidentally in an unpredictable way when various discourses, strategies and regimes of power contest for hegemony. It is however important to avoid the idea that memory exists independently outside power, society and material environment. There are various ways to make visible processes of memorizing and forgetting. Architecture and the visual environment are one of the various sites through which we could talk about the process of memorizing and forgetting because, as we could argue, the politics of memories are mediated by the built environment.

This process could be visualized, for instance, by comparing different times and spaces while making connection between them. We can trace the intention of the architects, the clients, the state through the building programs, but how much did they really shape the consciousness of the public? How much did the multitude respond positively to the unifying project of nationalism? We would never be able to fully know this. As far as topic of subject formation is concerned, we are still poorly equipped to deal with the everyday built environment and how it contribute to the shaping of subjectivities.

19. *The changes brought by the colonial regimes in Indonesia to both "normalize" and improve life in order to control public unrest and urban movements such as "urban popular radicalism" were later utilized as tactics to fight against the colonial regime. Railroads and newspapers were the two prominent devices, which mobilized opposition and connected cities and towns, as well as their alternative imaginations across and beyond the nation (30). Perhaps, as you write, these were the "moments" of postcolonial condition, surfacing much before its appearance as a category today.*

Yes, if we define the postcolonial moment as the moment of decolonization of mind as this was mediated by the change in social and physical environment. Quite often this moment came in tandem with the circulation of visual technologies which

33. Kusno, *Appearances of Memory*, Chapter 6, "The Significance of Appearance in the Zaman Normal, 1927-1942," in *Kota lama, kota baru: Sejarah kota-kota di Indonesia sebelum dan setelah kemerdekaan / The history of the Indonesian City Before and After Independence*, Freek Colombijn, Martine Barwegen, Purnawan Basundoro, Johny Alfian Khusyairi, eds.(2005) Yogyakarta; Ombak; 493-520.

34. Abidin Kusno, "Whither Nationalist Urbanism? Public Life in Governor Sutedjo's Jakarta," *Urban Studies*, 41 / 12, 2377-2394.

in turn provides the condition for the emergence of anti-colonial "national awakenings." Benedict Anderson in his book the *Spectre of Comparisons* talked about such moments through the "logic of seriality" which, he argued produced various strands of national consciousness. Discussing about the change in the social environment of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century colonies, Anderson identifies two kinds of seriality that were at work simultaneously: the bound and the unbound. The bound seriality manifested itself in technologies of the state such as the census, map, and museum – these are official technologies programmed by the (colonial) state to classify identity and identification. In contrast to this making of official nationalism, another seriality, which he identifies as the unbound ran from and to different direction. These were newspapers, films, novels and other products and practices generated by population at large following more or less the forces of market.

We can see the logic of Anderson's argument which is based on the idea that the state and the market occupy different spheres but they both profoundly shaped social imaginations in more than one way. The bound seriality (being obsessed with classifying subjects in certain categories) produces fixed identities. On the

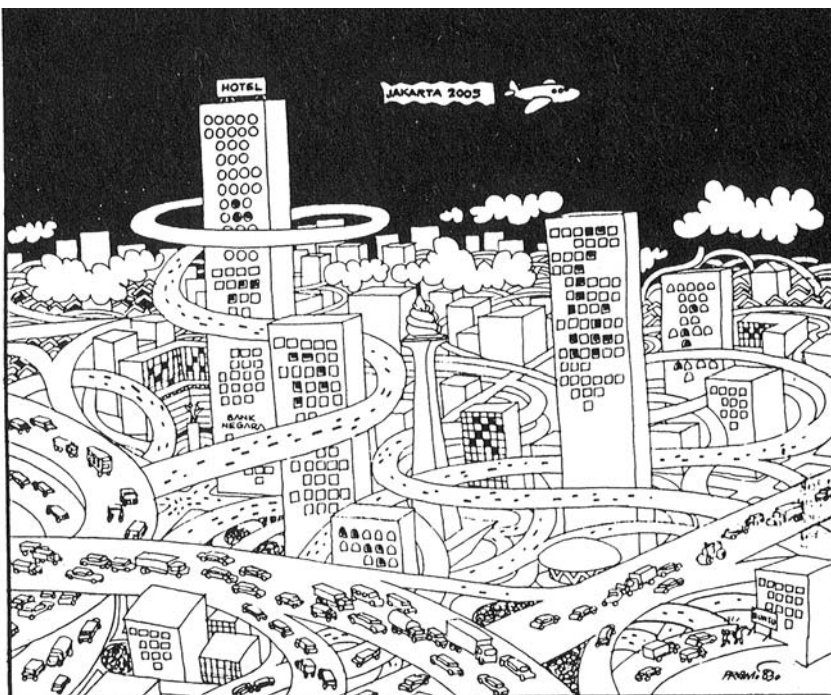
contrary, the unbound seriality, working through the improvisation of market, expands the possibility of new identity and identification. Anderson argues that both these two series provide different "grammars of representation" which in turn shape the imagining of the nation. I find the analytical division of Anderson quite useful, so in *Appearances of Memory*, I work out a place for visual environment as part of the bound and the unbound seriality. I argue that there were various "new grammars of representation" in the colonial city that help produce official and popular nationalism.

I should mention that in the historical context of Indonesia (on which case Anderson draws many of his insights), the idea of the "nation" (-popular nationalism) originally emerged out of a struggle against the "nation-state" of colonial power. Wouldn't it be interesting to compare this with the case of the formation of Turkey as a nation out of the remnants of the Ottoman Empire?

20. *If we want to locate the late Ottoman Empire within postcolonial theory, I suppose that we should be searching for such moments as well, particularly when everyday (spatial) practices were filled with new grammars of representation. During the 19th century, similar developments occurred in the Ottoman Empire, including the institutionalization of archaeology, the birth of museums and the dissemination of printing, documentation and transportation technologies (31). You had argued once that perhaps "when the Ottoman Empire felt the 'need' to take the west seriously, as a cultural 'sparring partner', the empire encountered its 'postcolonial' condition (32)."*

There are two aspects perhaps in this moment of encountering, but both are related to the shifting and reconfiguring of social relations and identities at the time of change. The first aspect would be the changing subjectivity of the ruling class as the previous domain of power underwent a serious crisis and rupture. The other aspect would be the change in the subjectivity of the ruled. As a new form of political and cultural communication between the ruler and the ruled was called for, technologies such as museums, archeology and so on

Jakarta 2005: Where Have All the Kampung Gone?, p. 148.



35. Tan Malaka was a "trans-national", left-wing Indonesian intellectual and "hero of national independence." See Chapter 7, "From City to City: Tan Malaka, Shanghai and the Politics of Geographical Imagining," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 24, 3, November 2003; 327-339.

became important for the provision of different narrative. Yet, we need to remember that these were state institutions which were mobilized to create particular form of identities for the state and its "people." Outside this official domain, there were other unbound technologies, such as prints for popular consumption, public transport, and should we say, urban cultural and visual environments. All these popular technologies operated relatively outside the control of the state, but they might profoundly shape if not create different (and often conflicting) social and political imaginations.

21. *I think as a technology of power, urban space too could be seen in terms of the logic of the bound and the unbound. As you have written in "Phantom of Urban Design" the colonial regimes utilized urban design for visual order and self-surveillance, not only on the basis of huge open spaces and grid system, but also their representations (i.e., model kampongs and the 1937 plan for Koningsplein) (33). Integrating "indigenous" forms into such framework, "good citizens" of colonial Indonesia found their bazaars, places and buildings relocated into a grid system, which functioned as controlling device. All these schemes created a mode of seeing that formed an era called the "zaman normal" (-the age of normalcy). This was basically an era of policing and surveillance articulated through urban space.*

It is always interesting to reflect on the question of power and its embodiment in urban project and visual environment. The essay on "zaman normal" deals with the urban discourses of normalization such that subjects are positioned to accept the "truthfulness" of urban governance embodied in the physical space. It shows that following the violent death of urban popular radicalism in 1926-27, the colonial government offered an assurance of the a new "normal" life.

This attempt was communicated through the organization of visual environment. I argue that this process of subjectivation in the major cities came in tandem with the spectacle of "rehabilitation" of the radicals in the penal colony in the outer island. In these two radically different places, people

nevertheless lived under a similar condition of normality. The juxtaposition between the "normal life" of a penal colony and that of the city in the age of post-radicalism prompts us to reflect on how thin the line that separates coercion from consent and on the means through which material space come to seize subjects independently of subjects' own self-representation. On the other hand, resistance to subjectivation occurred inside the "zaman normal" even as this disruptive action had not been made explicit.

22. *The Appearances of Memory gives us instances of how colonial past is repeatedly revisited to "provide a spectral order for the built environment of the post-colonial" (34). One example of that was the attempt in Jakarta to restore the colonial town as a tourism center. This was not only a policy for attracting foreign exchange, but "part of the nostalgic remembering of the orderliness of the old regimes and the forgetting of the chaotic present." The governor was trying to cope with the "looseness" at the center, which gave way to the creation of many smaller spaces as locales of power. Do you see this recent development in one Indonesian city, where the relationship between the nation and the state lost its strength, as an indication of a "postcolonial moment"?*

The essay on post-1998 Jakarta can be considered as an attempt to figure out the formation of a different mode of urban governance after the collapse of the centralizing regime of Suharto in 1998. In a way, if "zaman normal" constitutes a "unity of discourse," the chapter on the "crisis of the center" exemplifies the disruption of that order. We know that processes of subjectivation in and through urban spaces are never homogenous, but the urban space of post-Suharto's Jakarta (with its 'looseness' at the center) expressed more clearly a disparate range of discourses and unpredicted strategies ones that are simultaneously coercive, hegemonic and resistive.

Under this circumstance, different social classes mobilized some recognizable but disjointed discourses of urban space from the recent and distant past in order to come to grip with the present. Beneath the disorderly "looseness at the center" lies various orders that

contradictorily co-exist with each other. The power-effect of the Suharto's regime could still be felt (under the urban discourse of "nationalist urbanism"), but its register shows more the sign that its grand narrative is in trouble. This power trouble has opened up various possibilities for different ways of imagining urban life and urban discourses and practices. But it has not yet been clear to me what kind of urban survival do people have in mind and how the new and the old bearings permit us to navigate the present. In a sense, the essay lacks precise term for the new energies released after the end of an authoritarian era, and yet we are aware that a relationship to this new time remains to be made.

The appearance of politics is changing and yet a term is still needed. It may turn out that the term "postcolonial" (in its skeptically hopeful sense; in its discontinued continuity with the recent past) represents the changing situation we have been living through. At least the term "post" offers a double-ness that recalls a hope for a different moment while recognizes its own powerlessness in articulating that moment which could be easily reabsorbed into another form of colonialism. It is all about the

difficulty of distinguishing the new from the old.

23. *As my final question, I am wondering if one could think about Tan Malaka's journey and his "politics of geographical imagination" as providing an inspiration for today's Indonesian cities (35). In other words, could "the city" and possibly the rest of the postcolonial world be "on the railway" again?*

Can the city of our time be "on the move" again? It partly depends on how we reflect on power and space of our own time. The discursive chapters in the "New Times" are pressed to come up with different concepts while reworking the old ones in the light of the present. Tan Malaka, the railway journey and the visual experiences in the colonial city represent urban excesses that disrupted processes of subjectivation. In a way, Tan Malaka's transnational colonial landscape might provide a ground for a reflection on the possibility as well as the impossibility for a radical imagining of our own urban world which is currently under the grip of neoliberal urban spaces.

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