

Workshop on Indonesian Cinema 2015

Abstracts

New Indonesian horror

Adam Knee

Although there has been a profusion of Indonesian horror film productions ever since the massive success of *Jelangkung* in 2001, their narrative and other formal parameters have been surprisingly limited: these low-budget films typically concern a group of college-age, middle-class Jakartans who, owing to misbehaviour or simply bad luck, end up encountering a supernatural entity (such as a *pocong* or *kuntilanak* or “crawling nurse”), with which they must do battle to save themselves. Aside from articulating concerns about the mores of contemporary youth and about the rise of urban Indonesia at the expense of the rural, the films also evince anxiety about historical trauma, violent moments in Indonesia’s not too distant past. This paper will map out key distinctive generic properties and trends of twenty-first century Indonesian horror films, identify some of their industrial determinants, but also more importantly consider the cultural and historical resonances for their contemporary context. Representative examples to be discussed include *Bangsai 13* and *Suster Keramas*.

Mood, meaning, composition: utter visual darkness and stylistic innovation in post-New Order Indonesian cinematography

Ari Purnama

In this presentation, I discuss the significance of a particular tendency in the cinematographic practices of post-New Order filmmaking in which utter visual darkness is purposefully valorised to shape the films’ visual storytelling design. As part of my ongoing research on filmmaking creativity and stylistic innovation in post-1998 Indonesian cinema, this presentation will examine how Indonesian cinematographers have, in different ways, used sheer graphic darkness to their creative advantage. I argue that in this cinematographic mode, utter darkness is deliberately employed to set a particular mood for the story, facilitate thematic meaning making, suggest horrific and immoral action, elicit imagination and produce pictorial effects. Drawing on Patrick Keating I will show how extreme darkness becomes a multifunctional aesthetic element, making it as important as lighting. Taking concrete cinematographic examples from popular mainstream and independent films such as *The Raid: Redemption* (2011), *Perempuan Punya Cerita* (2007), *Darah Garuda- Merah Putih II* (2010), *Sang Pencerah* (2010), *Quickie Express* (2007) and *Siti* (2014), I will demonstrate how this utter darkness strategy works multifunctionally in a bounded mechanism, restrained by the demands of genre, production and reception context, and the artistic motivation of the filmmakers.

Exploiting sex in 1990s Indonesian cinema: beyond a strategy for survival

Ben Murtagh

Indonesian cinema of the 1990s has often been noted for its lowbrow and erotic content. Due to changes in local production and distribution conditions it has generally been argued that those who continued to make films for cinema had no choice but to reduce their budgets and to turn to lower class audiences. Local critics of the time generally despaired of the poor quality of the films made, a concern compounded by worries about the affect of these films on the lower class audiences they were imagined to attract. This period of Indonesian film production has been little studied to date. Given the increasing moralistic tone of discussions about culture in Indonesia, it seems that these are films that many commentators would prefer to simply forget. Drawing on well-known definitions of (s)exploitation cinema, this paper will discuss some of the principle features of the ‘hot’ films produced during this period. The film’s content and imagery will be contextualized in the light of popular concerns of the period, with particular attention to how sex and violence is represented in these films. Discussion of the films will also draw on media reports that document the apparent descent into depravity. Arguing that there is much about Indonesian cinema of the period that would seem to lend itself, at least partly, to the exploitation label, this paper will seek to discuss how exploitation theory might aid an understanding of this comparatively under researched period of Indonesian film production.

**Early film production in colonial Indonesia:
re-assembling a forgotten film archive (1896-1914)**
Dafna Ruppin

The writing of cinema history in Indonesia has often been constricted by the shortage of surviving materials, with only a handful of films shot for the Dutch Colonial Institute between 1910 and 1920 surviving at the EYE Film Institute in Amsterdam. Nevertheless, in the process of sifting through other sources - namely, Dutch and Malay-language newspapers, government documents, photographs and other non-filmic materials - this research has unearthed a lively local scene of moving image exhibition, production and distribution. Beginning in the late 1890s, moving pictures were regularly captured in colonial Indonesia by local entrepreneurs, targeting mainly local audiences. These scenes ranged in topic from actualities depicting modern urban settings, through ethnographic curiosities showing scenes of so-called “Native” life, to stories of local interest, such as a 1906 adaptation of *Nyai Dasima* made by an Indian travelling showman. This was at a time when indigenous cinema was virtually unheard of. Without having access to these lost films, this presentation will focus on the socio-cultural contexts in which such images were produced and exhibited. In the process, it questions traditional approaches to writing Indonesian cinema history, which usually leave out the first two decades of film exhibition and production, thus proposing a longer history of Indonesian film than generally acknowledged.

**The significance of *layar tancap*:
pre-Perfiki mobile cinema shows in the New Order Era (1974-1993)**
Ekky Imanjaya

Indonesia’s New Order Government (1966-1998) was notorious for its state-control of every aspect of life. In the film industry, the government applied sharp censorship and controlled film production by controlling scripts and film bodies as well as distribution and exhibition. This paper explores how the New Order and its policies valued and dealt with

the subcultures of *Layar Tancap* (open air cinema) and *bioskop keliling* (mobile cinema shows)? According to Katinka van Heeren, *Layar Tancap* shows were off of the New Order's radar until 1993, the year the government finally acknowledged and formalized Perfiki (Persatuan Perusahaan Pertunjukan Film Keliling Indonesia, or the Union of Indonesian Mobile Cinema Show). Both van Heeren and Krishna Sen, have argued that while its spectatorship is important to note, no specific official policies were applied and no data was collected by The Indonesian Statistical Bureau for this open air cinema. In short, *layar tancap* was overlooked by the New Order government because the spectators were from the lower and working classes. Drawing on the evidence of the New Order's film policies as well as general and trade magazines, my research questions van Heeren's assertion. I will argue that Suharto's government tried to frame this kind of distribution and exhibition cultures long before 1993, precisely because the villagers were one of their important assets; they formed the large majority of Indonesian citizens. I will also discuss how the practice and consumption of *layar tancap* and the policies of New Order government interact, negotiate, and influence each other.

The roles of international languages in films of the post-Suharto era

Ellen Rafferty

Language use in Indonesian films in the post-Suharto Era has shifted from primarily standard Indonesian to a diversity of varieties of Indonesian, local languages, and foreign languages, marking dramatic changes in language ideologies and shifting cultural hegemonies in Indonesia. This paper examines the functional and symbolic roles of international languages (Arabic, English, and Mandarin) in four Indonesian films: *Ayat-ayat cinta*, *Minggu pagi di Victoria Park*, *Tanda tanya*, and *A long road to Heaven*. Language ideologies are defined as shared notions regarding the nature of language and sets of beliefs regarding the roles of language in society. These ideologies are cultural concepts about how language relates to social and linguistic practices, including the moral and ethical values attached to those practices. This paper will explore the dialectical relationship between language use and ideology by observing language use in the cultural contexts found in the above-mentioned films. The discussion of the emergence of new language ideologies along with shifting roles and statuses of three international languages will be contextualized in the globalizing forces that have transformed the social, political, religious, and technological landscape of Indonesia in the period since 2000.

In a war against poverty porn, who wins?

Social issues and personal portraiture in three contemporary Indonesian documentary films

Eric Sasono

This paper will examine three contemporary documentary films from post-1998 Indonesia: *Lukas' Moment* (Danusiri, 2006), *The Land beneath the Fog* (Siregar, 2012) and *Denok dan Gareng* (Nugraheni, 2014). These films share common characteristics as observational documentary with no interviews, no voice-over narrator and the presentation of intimate encounters with the subjects. However, these films also somehow address the filmmaker's 'moral obligation' to portray poverty and other social issues. Drawing on Graham's notion of 'rejection of poverty porn' I argue that the filmmakers present poverty to defy the

exploitation or othering of their fellow Indonesians. The format and the filmmakers' respective statements suggest these documentaries might be categorised in accordance with Bill Nichols' definition of the personal portraiture category as opposed to the social issue documentary. However, Nichols' categorisation is imbued within a particular context and the historical development of documentary films. This paper will go further than Nichols' categorisation by examining the documentary from totally different contexts and practices - institutional and discursive - with the intention of opening up a critical position on the documentary in addressing collective problems within certain social and political settings.

Recent developments in documentary film-making.

Felicia Hughes-Freeland

The growth of documentary film-making in Indonesia is one of the striking features of the post-Suharto era. This talk builds on research from 2008-11 to discuss recent developments, particularly on films by the filmmaker Ucu Agustin. The talk will show how Ucu's reputation has grown since the author met her in 2008, and considers what her projects reveal about broader trends in Indonesian media and political discourse. The talk will be illustrated with film clips.

Islam and performative appearances in recorded everyday life in Indonesia

Fridus Steijlen

Reflecting on recordings of everyday life in Indonesia of the Recording the Future project (recording daily life at eight locations in Indonesia) I noticed that people often use the public domain to express some kind of identity. In my paper I will focus on two events that come to the fore from our raw footage on two different locations displaying Islam. The first is from Ternate, Eastern Indonesia where a delegation from the Sultan's mosque leaves for the Kedaton to invite the Sultan to the Friday morning prayers. The second is on the island of Java where inhabitants from the area occupy a crossroad in a small village on a Saturday night to attend the declamation of the Quran and a sermon while *santri* from a nearby boarding school perform dances. Both events have performative characteristics and use symbols and attributes with historical and global references. Yet the events, or performances if you like, are different in their impact. In this contribution I will describe both events and discuss the differences. I also will elaborate on the question of how film, in this case raw footage from an audiovisual project, can be used as a source for social scientific research.

Aesthetics, Politics, and the Films of Edwin

Gerald Sim

This presentation considers the work of Edwin, specifically the relationships between its formal sensibility and the questions it poses regarding identity and alienation, which inevitably traverse the filmmaker's own Chinese-Indonesian biography. His avant-garde aesthetics and thematic foregrounding of ethnic marginalization have combined to propel Edwin to international prominence within art cinema circles. My close aesthetic readings of films such as *Trip to the Wound* and *Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* (both 2008) triangulates three approaches: Hamid Naficy's semi-humanist taxonomy of "accented" styles and exilic cinemas, the collective wisdom (including Timothy Corrigan's) on the

essay film, and Laura Marks's treatise on haptic visuality and intercultural filmmaking. The analysis is also comparative, and seeks insight through contrast with other local films addressing Chinese-Indonesian identity (*Sugiharti Halim*, 2008), and those by Chinese-Malaysian filmmaker James Lee (*My Beautiful Washing Machine*, 2004). These films' cultural and positional similarity reveals a distinctively Indonesian tendency to evoke the corporeal as a mode of expression. To wit, Edwin depicts an experience where emotional suffering manifests itself in physical pain. The issues set the stage for a series of questions regarding Indonesia's political history, national imagination, and film culture.

Representation and symbolism of power and sexuality in Ayu Utami's *Jamu* *Gerardus M Adhyanggono*

In the first decade following reformasi, three main factors fostered the revival and re-signification of documentary film in Indonesia. First, there was resistance to the New Order's repressive paradigm of censorship which was still imposed, particularly on issues such as sexuality, religion, and ethnicity. Second, there arose wider freedom for individuals to express their creativity due to the zeitgeist. Third, there was a coherence between the spirit of 'make-your-own-film' and the increasing popularity of the digital camera to produce independent films. Ayu Utami's *Jamu* (2002) provides a subtle and yet excellent example of a documentary film from this period. It is a documentary that might have never had the opportunity to be made in the New Order regime. The film, set in Jakarta, represents the power of *jamu* - traditional herbal medicine - which pertains to sexuality and its myth. Using an unconventional expository mode, this film explores *jamu* as a socio-cultural artifact that forces issues relating to power and sexuality to be brought out into the open. I contend that the representation and symbolism of power and sexuality in the film is predicated on challenging the prevailing view that Indonesia is a moralised society. Therefore the effect of *Jamu* can be perceived as twofold: a celebration of freedom of expression and the creative resistance to a hegemonic view of sexuality. My argument is framed with reference to Roland Barthes' semiotics, Michel Foucault's power/knowledge, Jeffrey Weeks's sexuality, and Laurie Honko's conception of myth.

The visual narrative of transgender in Indonesian comedy cinema: a social semiotic analysis of *Chips* *Lala Santyaputri*

The social norms of patriarchal culture often lead to the construction of stereotypes based on gender difference. This paper is particularly interested to investigate the ways in which transgender characters are stereotyped in New Order comedies made by the Warkop DKI collective, specifically in the Iksan Lahardi 's 1982 film *Chips*. My analysis will involve a close reading of individual scenes, paying attention to the gestures, physiognomy and body language of transgender characters, with the purpose of exposing how this marginalised identity is constructed within this comedy genre. The discussion of these visual narratives, will draw on technique and theory from interdisciplinary fields from cultural studies, film studies and queer theory.

**The subversive potential of drag:
performing disidentification in *Anak-anak Srikandi* and *Madame X***
Laura Coppens

Since Indonesia's democratic opening, cinema has become one of the major outlets in the struggle for representation and an important site for claiming activist citizenship. Eager to exercise their newly earned political rights, young middle-class (mainly secular) cultural producers have become involved in politics and actively engaged in the formation of new discourses on the nation in general and gender and sexuality in particular. In this paper, I argue that through the queering of dominant modes of cinematic representation, the films under discussion create affirmative visibility and account for the specificity and plurality of lived experiences of people with non-normative gender and sexualities in the archipelago. In doing so, the paper synthesizes two projects that at first sight have not much in common: the collective film *Anak-Anak Srikandi* (2012) and Lucky Kuswandi's first feature film *Madame X* (2010). Drawing on the work of queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz, I examine how in both films heteronormativity is subverted through the use of the disidentificatory practice of drag. In parallel, I explore their transformative possibilities and utopian potential for creating alternative spaces of being-in-the-world.

**Where is the middlebrow?:
Mapping out contemporary film critics and criticism in Indonesia**
Mikael Johani

This paper will categorise and analyse - both ideologically and stylistically - contemporary film criticism and film critics in Indonesia. It will also consider their influence, if any, on Indonesian films and filmmakers, and more importantly, on the viewing culture of Indonesian film audiences. The paper will draw on criticism of Indonesian and non-Indonesian movies, in order to shed light on how the critics see themselves and the world, and how their points of view influence each other (eg, how would a local reading of *Kill Bill*'s mash-up of influences influence a local reading of *Azrax*'s mash-up of influences, or vice versa?). The period covered will be from the fall of Suharto/the rise of *Kaskus Movies* thread to the present day, when a dichotomy between the highbrow style of *Cinema Poetica* and its ilk (as well as academic criticism) and the lowbrow style of "movie bloggers" seems to be developing. This distinction in status is acknowledged openly, for example, at idfilmcritics.com where 'critics' and 'bloggers' share a stage but the hierarchy of their status is reaffirmed. The contention will be that the development of a middlebrow style (think Anthony Lane, Roger Ebert, Peter Travers) has been stunted by either the desire for intellectual respect or appeals to the lowest common denominator for commercial purposes. It will also be necessary to go beyond the text and investigate the cliques where these critics (and bloggers) operate in order to map out accurately their spheres of influence.

**Survival of the fittest:
women and queer film festivals in Indonesia**
Novi Kurnia

The tremendous growth of film festivals is one of the most important features of post-New Order Indonesian cinema. Two festivals in particular have provided a site of new

freedoms and forms of cultural expression. They are V Film Festival (VFF, International Women's Film Festival) and Q! Film Festival: (QFF, Queer International Film Festivals). This paper is concerned with the challenges faced by VFF and QFF as identity-based film festivals and the strategies they have adopted to survive in the dynamic circuit of film festivals in post-New Order Indonesia. I will explore why these festivals have fared very differently - one only survived for two years while the other has gone from strength to strength. Their different fates may be related to the festivals' organization, programming, challenges and strategies. Some important strategies that have influenced the life of these film festivals are: an established community-based network and good media relations. With the intention of contributing to the growing scholarship on film festivals in the last decade, this paper provides an account of how these film festivals shaped their politics of identity and their relationship with the broader forces of political and cultural change in the post-New Order Indonesian context.

Traditional community and intuitive filmmaking: film collaboration with a *wayang wong* group in Central Java *Tito Imanda*

The film workshop with Tjipta Boedaja performance group began five years ago. It was initially projected to provide skills to document its arts, and since then the group members themselves have started to get involved with the medium of film. Over the years, a range of scholars have looked at the use of modern media among indigenous people in various ways, and my research follows the idea that local people use film to reconstruct their cultural practice and concerns. Thus, the significance of this paper is to explore the possibilities for modern technology to support the existence of a traditional culture. My research explores issues around the process of a traditional performance group adapting to film production, with the general research question: how do traditional artists adapt to cinema and create their films? Using classic film theories that focus on the visual aura or 'the magic' of film, I am exploring the symbolic power of filmmaking technology in replacing the stage, the field, and other public space in the village in mediating the group's ritual, aesthetic and politics. One of the basic issues is the role of intuition in decision-making processes: what factors beyond film knowledge affect their artistic choices, and how can they help the film to reach a mass audience?

The willful archive of Indonesian women's films *Viola Lasmana*

This paper draws on a chapter in my thesis focusing on films made collaboratively by women in Indonesia, and that form a willful archive of stories and images. This chapter currently examines The Children of Srikandi Collective's *Children of Srikandi* (2012) and Workshop Project Change's *At Stake* (2009). I think through the ways in which the films, by focusing on content considered too taboo for public discourse and by utilizing alternative methods of production, move towards a mode of relation that is transformative and plurivocal; the films ultimately mobilize a feminist praxis that is collaborative in nature and that sets the groundwork for action. Through these films and others like them that employ a praxis focused on gender equality, ethics, and the collective (in this chapter, for instance, I also draw parallels with Trinh Minh-ha's *Surname Viet Given Name Nam*, which activates the mode of storytelling as an agentic practice),

one can see communities that challenge the meanings of democracy and gesture towards the future as a responsibility. Considering the New Order regime's repressive structures of gender and sexuality set in place after 1965 and censorship scrutiny on media considered too transgressive, these films present an affirmative model of relation, one that promises an ongoing willful archive able to speak back to masculinist structures of power that tend to silence women's stories.