Memandang Bangsa dari Kota
Manneke Budiman

Penghayatan Lintas Budaya:
Pribumi Menyoroti Tionghoa dalam Sastra Indonesia
Pamela Allen

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Colonial Cities in Motion: Urban Symbolism and Popular Radicalism

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Abstract

This paper concerns with the change in the visual environment of colonial city, and the ways in which they helped to shape political imagination. What kinds of architectural and urban spectacles were constructed and what role did they play in contributing to the formation of alternative identities for the Indonesians under Dutch colonial rule? How could colonial cities be understood less as a "form of dominance", but rather a city that was appropriated by the colonized to produce unintended consequences that contributed to the undermining of colonial power? The focus of this paper is thus the political implications of the visual environment of the colonial city. I rely on literature and a range of discursive visual representations in documenting the ways in which the material city was experienced in its wider social political context. Yet what can we except from the visual environment?

Key words: colonial city, architectural, urban symbolism, popular radicalism.

... in fact, urban experience and in particular the struggle for the city (for its preservation and restoration, for the freedom of the city) provide the setting and objectives for a number of revolutionary actions.


In 1924, two years before the Indonesian Communist Party launched an abortive revolt against the colonial government, Mas Marco Kartodikromo, a young radical, who had moved around the urban centers of

1 For a life history of Mas Marco Kartodikromo, see Takashi Shiraishi, An Age in Motion, pp. 81-91; For Marco’s literary world, see also Paul Tickell, “Intro-
Java, observed the city of Surabaya with an eye on what it was like before.¹

"Now if a person came back to Surabaya after being away for seven or eight years, he or she would certainly be amazed at the changes in this great city... The gas and electric lights lining the street lit the place up like daylight... Even at midnight the main streets are still busy—not all that different to the daytime. Horse carriages, cars and all sorts of vehicles still sped along the roads, sounding their horns loudly. Cinemas like the Royal, the East-Java and dozens of other large cinemas in the main market had just finished showing films to audiences of thousands, who were now streaming out of the 'flicks,' waiting for taxis or other vehicles. Why were the people still waiting even when the film was over...?"²

Mas Marco was clearly fascinated by the new urban life and the change in the visual environment of the city. He was a product of the development of urban popular “mass” cultures of the early twentieth century. Mas Marco, however, was also one of the urban radicals charged by the Dutch colonial government as an agitator of the Indies social order who had to be completely removed from the city in the aftermath of the communist revolt in 1926. The impact of new urban life and the change in the visual environment of the city had indeed provided the inhabitants of the colonial city of Java with new ways of conceiving both time and space. The universe of Mas Marco could be said as being opened up by the change of the social and visual environment such that he then conceived himself to be interrelated with the larger world of the city. This consciousness could be said as relying on a sense of being both “urban” and “modern,” a new subjectivity which carried an ultimate political implication: a sense of anti-colonial nationalism, among others.

This paper concerns with the change in the visual environment of colonial city, and the ways in which they helped to shape political imagination. What kinds of architectural and urban spectacles were constructed and what role did they play in contributing to the formation of alternative

¹roduction: Mas Marco Kartodikromo and early Indonesian Literature,” in Three Early Indonesian Short Stories, pp. 1-5.
identities for the Indonesians under Dutch colonial rule? How could colonial cities be understood less as a “form of dominance,” but rather a city that was appropriated by the colonized to produce unintended consequences that contributed to the undermining of colonial power? The focus of this paper is thus the political implications of the visual environment of the colonial city. I rely on literature and a range of discursive visual representations in documenting the ways in which the material city was experienced in its wider social political context. Yet what can we expect from the visual environment?

The Visual Environment

The question of how the visual environment helps constitute the collective subjectivities of the urban population is a persistent challenge to scholars working on the material environment of the city. In the limited world of architecture and urban design, such question has been made popular by the works of Kevin Lynch on the cognitive image of the city.³ It has been taken up by various scholars including Marxist cultural critics such as Fredric Jameson who expands the concept to the realm of the political (which Lynch ignored).⁴ The notion of “cognitive mapping,” for instance, raises the question about the difficulty (as well as the possibility) of forming collective political consciousness in the city seized by the ever changing forms of capitalism. What sort of understanding did people bring to the

³ In the 1960s, Kevin Lynch (1960) sought to understand how people perceive their environments, a knowledge which he hoped could be used by professionals for designing the city. While I share with Lynch his argument that it is important to understand how people perceive cities, I find his assumptions problematic. Lynch believed that everyone “naturally” assumes a similar way of perceiving environmental form. He disregarded the questions of social relations in structuring the experience of physical space. In this paper I emphasize not only the importance of power relations in giving meaning to urban form but also the political effects of visually perceptible symbols. For other explorations on similar issues, see Kim Dovey, Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form, London and NY: Routledge, 1999; Peter Nas (ed), Urban Symbolism, Leiden: B.J. Brill, 1993.

nature of their involvement with the visually perceptible built environment? How can we account for the role of the aspects of the built environment in helping to form collective identities and a changing political consciousness when various and often conflicting meanings can be invested into a single image, form or object?

Visually perceptible forms (such as buildings and their symbolic elements) can be seen as not merely an expression of a social and political system, but also as helping to constitute the subjectivity of people who live in and through them. However, we cannot fix the meaning of an urban form nor can we assume full knowledge of a subject’s action embedded in physical space. An object, a building or an environmental form like a street may invite many different interpretations from many different people and some interpretations may be labeled misinterpretations. Yet, it is precisely the fragmentary, multiple, incomplete and imprecise nature of the experiences of the visual and spatial environment that has made the interpretative reading of the image of the city so important. It may be that some idiosyncratic misinterpretations (on the part of those who experience the city) are actually teasing out aspects of spatial experience which otherwise remain unarticulated or unstatable. It is thus possible to argue for the power of the visual environment in registering subjectivity in so far as that power is seen as merely contributing to rather than determining the experiences of people.

This essay suggests the importance of keeping alive the interpretation of the visual environment even as the experience of the city is subject to multiple interpretations. I seek to unpack the social meanings of the built environment and indicate the acts of interpretation that Indonesian people (might) have made of the visual and spatial environment.

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5 Textual materials might help us to interpret the responses of people who experienced or altered buildings or spaces they used and created. They might capture the significance of particular buildings, but textual evidence cannot fully represent the meanings that people put into the building. Even if there is written documentation on someone’s experience of a particular space, we can never be clear how much of the account can be transposed to represent the power of a particular place. Besides, human experience cannot always be verbally or textually stated, and what we want to know about one’s experience, quite often, remains unstated.
created by or for them during what Takashi Shiraishi identified as the colonial “age in motion” (*zaman pergerakan*), 1900-1926. I interpret some discursive events, visual materials and accounts from recollections and works of fiction in order to explore the implications of the changing visual environment on the development of popular radicalism in the early 20th century urban Indies.

In order to account for such discursive relations between society and space, let me first tease out some cultural expressions of urban popular radicalism in the early twentieth century. In their studies of late colonial cultures of Indonesia, Rudolf Mrzack, James Siegel and Takashi Shiraishi have indicated to us a profound engagement of Indonesian social and political movements with the urban environment of the city. From their studies, we can now feel sure to say that changes in the urban environment of the early 20th century can be seen locally (if not globally) as a political catalyst. To give Shiraishi’s formulation of the “age in motion” a spatial context, we can say that it was in the city that “natives’ moved (‘bergerak’), in their search for forms to express their new political consciousness, put in motion (‘mengerakkan’) their thoughts and ideas, and confronted the realities of the Indies in the world and in an age they felt to be in motion.” In this paper, I draw insights from the studies of Shiraishi and Mrzack, but I pay more attention to the ways in which the visual environment of the city interacted with the urban population and explain how and why the emergence of political consciousness first took place in the Javanese royal centers, such as Surakarta.

I discuss some aspects of the changing urban symbolism of the royal town of Solo (the capital city of Surakarta in Central Java) and considers the ways in which new visual environment might have provided the

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7 And if the visual environment of the early 20th century somehow played a part in the formation of political consciousness, then could this earlier relation between space and identity formation be seen as having an impact on the urban conflict of the post Suharto era as shown in the chapter 4?

cognitive framework for social processes of consciousness change. Why and how did popular radicalism and modern political consciousness in Indonesia first emerge in areas around the heart of traditional authority (in the royal towns of Surakarta and Yogyakarta) and not in the centers of colonial cities such as Batavia or Bandung? I then explore the general development of the visual environment of the Indies town in Java and raise questions concerning the connection between changes in the visual environment and the emergence of popular radicalism in early 20th century colonial cities. But first let me tease out some cultural fragments of anti-colonial political consciousness which found expression in the urban spaces of the early twentieth century colonial town.

The Urban Generation and the Radical “Age in Motion”

On April 3, 1920, someone named Doelriadi called attention to the dilemma and leading question of his time. He wrote, perhaps to his own astonishment, a short statement entitled “Zaman Baharoe” (The New Time) at the front page of Persatoean Hindia, a newspaper based in the once relatively sleepy royal towns of Central Java.

“The notion of ‘moving’ (‘bergerak’) does not only mean ‘striking’ (‘pemogokan’). Instead it refers to what in Javanese is called ‘change’ (‘obah’). Ten years ago, the movement (‘pergerakan’) of our nation (bangsa Hindia) was marked by the desire (‘kemaoean’) among young people to obtain a job in the government. The reason was that the job presupposed honor (‘kehormatan’) even though the salary is small. The desire of people for honor could not be stopped. But who moved them? It was neither a goddess (‘peri’) nor a human. Instead it was the era (‘zaman’) itself that moves the desire... Then, the movement has gone to a different direction. The era is asking for a different thing. It does not go for the sake of honor anymore. Instead it is honoring money. Our young people will go to where there is money (mengejar wang). A lot of graduates are no longer interested in working for the government as civil servants or teachers. They do not listen to their elders who keep asking them to work in the offices of the government for they do not find satisfaction anymore in the respect of the elderly and students. Instead they prefer to work in the shops and companies who give them no honor, but only more money.... However recently, the movement has gone in
another direction. Besides the pursuit of money, people are looking for 'human rights' (‘hak kemanusiaan’) and freedom (‘kemerdikaan’). In this era, virtually everyone in our nation (‘bangsa Hindia’), young and old, men and women, are chasing freedom and human rights. These two words are their favorite (‘buah bibir’). These two words have been exploding the world of the master and the capitalist. Who is moving us so? It is the era that wants to see this happening. There will be casualties, but the 'movement' will not die out and it cannot be stopped. It will only accelerate because it is the will of the era (‘zaman’).”

Doelriadi could not help but notice that something in the life of his social environment had gone awry. He however embraced the change as inevitable and was convinced that the new time (zaman baharoe) had everything to do with the push and pull of money that came in tandem with the consciousness of freedom and human rights. He preferred to leave to the mystery of history the question of "who is moving us so". He was more interested in pursuing the political implications of the combined energies of money, human rights and freedom all of which were associated with the desire of having both individual and collective accesses to urban modernity. Ignoring the advice and wishes of their parents, Doelriadi and his friends (from both high and low) could be said as belonging to the urban generation who defined modernity as a condition (-a zaman) that provoked struggles for money, individual rights and social justices. Members of his generation seemed to prepare to consume what the city could offer (by ways of mengejar wang), to struggle for their rights to the city (according to hak kemanusiaan) and to liberate themselves from colonialism (to achieve kemerdekaan).

The connection between political consciousness and urban modernity seemed to be widespread. It moved to various urban centers in the Indies as was expressed through the notion of "movement" (pergerakan) which took a literal and metaphorical meaning. In Sumatra, Hamka (a Sumatran religious scholar and a leading figure in the struggle for national Independence) was also moved by the new times. In 1924 he prepared for his first trip to Yogyakarta to see for himself the Sarikat Islam

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(the first large scale modern Indonesian political organization) which was on the rise. But there was something more to his trip. Hamka was particularly interested to see one of the charismatic leaders of the SI, Tjokroaminoto, of whom he had heard so much. People in his kampong spoke very highly of Tjokroaminoto and referred to the leader as "tjermin auto" (the mirror of automobile) because "his brain is said to be as clear as the mirror of an automobile." It is not entirely clear how the name of Tjokroaminoto (the leader) could slip into the smooth surface of the automobile's mirror, but this transposition indicates a profound integration of the Indonesian political world into the popular culture of the modern city. This sense that the city was on the move, as if in the automobile, had affected people's self-identity and identification. The idea of seeing oneself "at the mirror" and "as a mirror" connoted one's particular consciousness of one's appearance in the public associated with urban modernity—how one thought about oneself as he or she was constituted as a new subject of the city.

As Hamka was preparing to witness for himself the mirror-like brightness of the SI leader, Mas Marco had already described in Java the emergence of a new type of urban Indonesian who made his appearance in the city as if he was seeing himself at the mirror. In 1924, Marco described this mutually constitutive relation between the city and self-fashioning in his short story titled "Tjermin Boeah Keroyalan" (The mirror of living royally). Mas Marco described his protagonist in the following way:

"There was a young clerk from a trading company in the crowd who was walking about at the Boeloeplein intersection as if he was waiting for someone. Now and then he would look down at the tips of his newly polished shoes—perhaps because they were getting dusty again. He was wearing a newly laundered white shirt and trousers, which he thought made him look smart. The rain coat he held in his left hand and which he had recently borrowed at a small cost from an Arab in Kampung Melayu also added to his good looks. His newly cut hair was covered by a grayish white boursaline hat. A silver watch chain hung on his chest and was

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threaded from his top pocket to his button hole, even though he had no watch. This really gave him a stylish appearance.\textsuperscript{11}

This young man was not rich, Mas Marco told us, but “he did not want to be left out while others were out on the town having fun (...) Although he had just been paid that morning, he really didn’t have enough to pay for a meal. For him though that was nothing.”\textsuperscript{12} He was a new type of men in the Indies, ones that despite having not much money would not want to be left out from an engagement with the city. Rudolf Mrazek refers to this type of young men as the first Indonesian dandies, an “ex-natives,” a new subject that could not be adequately seen as “natives” for there was no recognized space yet known to the Indies to fit them in. One of them, such as Mas Marco himself, was described by the police as someone who often appeared “with a peculiar skullcap on his head, yellow shoes on his feet, colored eyeglasses on his eyes, and several pens and pencils in his vest pocket.”\textsuperscript{13} In the eyes of the colonial state, this “modern” man raised a troubling question. For the Dutch “those natives who borrowed Dutch clothes to place themselves in the modern colonial society ... clearly... were not genuine natives. (They were) the new breed that clearly did not fit into the Dutch category of the native...”\textsuperscript{14} Dutch authority however perceived them as a problem even as the state was largely responsible for their emergence.

Indonesian “dandies,” as Mrazek calls them, indeed were part of the result of the Dutch attempt to accommodate the expansion of private businesses and state activities. They were the educated and skilled labor needed for the “modernization” of the colony. Some of them liked to read, write, and exchange books. They belonged to the emerging strata of the \textit{orang partikuler} (those businessmen or salaried men who worked for private companies). They were never true Javanese aristocratic officials or civil servants of colonial Java. They were not “\textit{priyayi}” (of the 19\textsuperscript{th} C. pseudo feudal ideal) of the refined, cultivated, leisured, upper class Javanese. Instead they were independent “orang partikuler” who were

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Marco, Ibid: 13.
\item \textsuperscript{13} As cited in Mrazek, \textit{Engineers of Happy Land: Technology and nationalism in a Colony}, p. 143.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Mrazek, ibid., p. 143.
\end{itemize}
invariably contemptuous of much of the traditional sphere in which their parents had been brought up. They were members of the new times (zaman baharoe in Doelriadi’s definition), the urban generation who engaged in the unpredictability and freedom offered by the city which in turn allowed them to play the role of critical observer of modern life. Such men (and almost always men) often used clothing to register the new mood of the time, to match the interior of the modern office where they worked and to differentiate themselves from others. When they wrote novels (like Mas Marco), they took the city as the site for their stories.

Yet, the urban modernity of the early twentieth century created not only a different type of person, but it also produced political implications in the order of Indies. These new selves built up by the colonizer to cope with the economic demands of the modern age had returned (in the manner of Homi Bhaba’s colonial mimicry) with a threatening gaze. By the 1910s, many of them were haunting the orderly Indies by taking part in street demonstrations, strikes, political rallies and finally, revolting against the colonial state. Many of them were practitioners of Islam, but they were neither fundamentalist Mohammadians nor messianic proponents from the countryside. Instead they were urbanites who could be described as resolutely “modern.”

In his study of the rise and fall of popular radicalism in Java, Takashi Shiraishi describes how the meetings of “Sarikat Islam,” the first large scale modern Indonesian political organization, were conducted.

“Here the merry festive mood of the rally and the sense of power and solidarity felt by the SI members are recreated by the visual image of tens of andong with the SI flag, (and) the sound of music—probably ‘Het Wilhelmus’ (the Dutch national anthem)... This was the rally, the occasion of merry, pleasant festivity. And here every speech was greeted with great applause. But this was not an ordinary festivity to which the Javanese were accustomed. For one thing, the rally was distinctly modern. Music and not gamelan sounded. Photographs were taken. People came to the place dressed as they liked—Javanese, European, and ‘Turkish’ (Arabic).”\(^{15}\)

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\(^{15}\) Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912-1926*: p. 65 (emphasis added).
We can only appreciate the striking modernity of the scene, but we might also wonder about the process by which the rally came to rely upon urban cultures for its authoritative position and how the leaders of the SI came to use modern mediums to mediate their relations with their followers. The rally took the form of a festival, like a theatre performance which included things that were "modern." The scene was also resolutely "urban." The keywords that supported the festivity such as "politics" (‘politik’), "organization" (‘organisasi’) and "rallies" were all new to the world of Java. The modern spectacle of new visual images, the sound of music and the opportunity of dressing "as they liked" sustained the power of the rally and they represented the relative sense of moving in an unpredictable direction characteristic of the city life.

The urban change was indeed a fundamental aspect of the process of social transformation. Between 1900 and 1925, the population of almost all major cities in Java grew by more than 100 percent as did the growth of the members of political parties. The growth of the city was accompanied by the increasing participation of Indonesians in "modern" urban life associated with politics. The explicit outcry of the "urban social movements" (such as the rally, the strikes and later the revolt) represented "a phenomenon that most vividly struck the Dutch as the 'native' awakening in the Indies in the first quarter of the twentieth century." (p. xi)

Yet, for the city to be felt as awakening and moving, it would need a cognitive comparison to what would then be considered as "still" and "un-moveable."16 Just how the city might be considered as on the move, we would need to look at a comparative moment which was at work in the visual environment of the city in the early 20th C. This would also explain why popular radicalism first arose most profoundly in the centers of "old" Javanese power such as Surakarta and Yogyakarta, and not in the capital city of Batavia or the "European" cities of Bandung and only later in the port cities of Semarang and Surabaya.

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Origins Revisited: Counter-Monuments and the New Coordinates in Solo

The popularity of western fashion, automobile, and movies among people in Java reflected not only new forces at work in society (a new zaman in Doelriadi’s report) but also a crisis in the representation of traditional power. Earlier, it made sense that the realm of Java, in its metaphysical sense, was seen by many as embodying the equilibrium between the outer and inner states of mind, for Java is considered as “jiwa”—the depth and soul of a human. But during the age in motion, the order of things had become very different.

Benedict Anderson has indicated that three of the four rulers in contemporary Java held the title that informs us of the centrality, if not the fixity, of their position as the sustainer of equilibrium—Paku Buwana (Nail of the Universe), Hamengku Buwana (Sustainer of the Universe), and Paku Alam (Nail of the World).\(^{17}\) Expressed architecturally, at the center and apex, stood the king who fixed himself as the axis of cosmos; around him and at his feet, the palace; around the palace was the capital composed of a reliable and submissive members who lived in the relatively self-contained royal compounds; around the capital was the realm of bondsmen’s dwellings of impermanent building materials “getting ready to show obedience” at the periphery; and finally, the outside world—all arranged in the North-South compass-point order, a configuration of circles that depicted not just the structure of society but of the universe as a whole.\(^{18}\) Properly represented, the Supreme Ruler, his capital, the administration, the artisans and the commoners must therefore be given a space which perfectly represented the working of this structure.

Politically, the ideal layout of the “Kraton” (palace) expressed the position of the king vis a vis its subjects. The king was at the center and


everyone else (including his family members) occupied a hierarchical position based on his/her relation to him. Based on the hierarchy, other social norms were issued, from dress code to manners. Those who were connected, even tangentially, to this structure would be seen as above the masses, even if the latter were far wealthier, financially, than any of those attached to the king. In traditional Java, money was a worldly thing; trade was a worldly occupation and traders were marginal, if not outside the hierarchical structure of the Kraton. We could thus understand the declaration of Doelriadi, as indicated above, and appreciate the profound transformation he felt in the social life of Java in the early twentieth century when the pursuit of “money,” “human rights” and “freedom” had displaced the old attachment and became the prime focus of the new generation.

By the early twentieth century, the architecture of traditional society had indeed been displaced. The royal town of Surakarta, which historian Kuntowijoyo called the “macro-cosmos of the big universe,” had been filled with contrasting images that destabilized its position. In regards to the visual environment, tensions had developed around the positions of new buildings that clustered around the Kraton complex. Earlier, the office of the kepantihan (Javanese court), the Sanggabuwono stage (the platform of the cosmos), the Grand Mosque, the Bondholumekso (the Javanese pawn house), the Taman Sriwedari and Taman Balekambang, were all understood as forming a synchronic part of the larger Kraton complex. However, by the early 20th C, this set of buildings was superimposed by another set of buildings associated with the power of the Dutch. The office of the Dutch Resident was counterposed to the office of the kepantihan (Javanese court); the Vastenburg castle to the Sanggabuwono stage; the Purbayan Catholic Church to the Grand Mosque; the Volkscreditbank and Javaschebank to the Bondholumekso. The entertainment places, such as Taman Sriwedari and Taman

Balekambang were also countered by the Schouwburg and the Societiet buildings.20

These “counter-monuments” formed a paradigmatic ensemble which constituted a system of opposition between the “new” and the “old” power. Along with this, the new syntagmatic linkages of the transportation system and the road network had all contributed to the undermining of the traditional orientation of the cosmos. This change in the spatial configuration and visual environment of the city altered not only the cosmological coherence of the royal town but also the cognitive mapping of the inhabitants of the city thus resulting in a new sense of time. From the perspective of Java, the diachronic relations between the two different styles of building were considered locally as disturbing the equilibrium of Java for their presence had pushed away the centrality of the court. Mulyadi and Soedarmono (et al) report that the Dutch buildings stirred up controversies and were considered locally as undermining the old symbolism and thus engendering a sense of disharmony in Java.21

The juxtaposition of the two different sets of monuments was to represent the declining authority of Java. The new visual regime recalls the famous photo of Pakubuwana X on the arm of a Dutch Resident of Surakarta. The glory of the diminutive king could only be maintained under the guidance of the taller Dutchman.22 (Figure 1) The sense of impotence prevailed even as the ruling class tried to conceal the reality. The juxtaposition of monumental buildings represented a state of dependence of the Javanese ruling class on the colonial government. It also offered to the viewer a comparison, cognitively, of what had come before and after the decline of Javanese power. The “unharmonious” juxtaposition of monuments created in the visual environment a new set of coordinates that might be said as helping to form modern political consciousness.

The visual contradiction embedded in Solo is of particular significance as the mood of restlessness had been growing rapidly at the turn of the century. By 1900, Surakarta (the Javanese center of the universe) had undergone an unprecedented change. The “quiet” Indies town had

23 Kuntowijoyo studies the case of Laweyan. Geographically, Laweyan and Kraton were only a few miles away from each other, however, they were two different worlds. The prime reason for the distance was more social than physical. Laweyan was at the beginning the center of Javanese “traders” and trade which, in the eyes of the Sultanate, was a realm of the world deemed marginal in, if not outside of, the hierarchical structure of Kraton. This detachment from the center however was a blessing in disguise. Laweyan prospered economically under its own Islamic trading network while socially, it enjoyed autonomy unattainable within the structure of patrimonial relations. This social distance is wide enough to undermine the grip of the cultural power of Kraton and encourage the formation of alternative cultures. In Laweyan, the Sarikat (Dagang) Islam, the first popularly based indigenous organization in the Indies, was first established. It derived its force from the combined forces of Islam, trade and opposition to cultures of Javanese aristocrats (“priyayi”). See: Kuntowijoyo, Raja, Priyayi dan Kawula, Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2004 p. 74-76.
been filled with sights, sounds and smells of a “modern” commercialized town. In Kuntowijoyo’s words “the skeleton of the city remained the same, the environment had become entirely different.” This change has a lot to do with the circulation of popular culture and the increasing importance of money. Such change intricately challenged the existing configuration of power, status and identity. Earlier, access to governmental positions (as civil servant of the Dutch-Javanese colonial regime) was considered paramount in Javanese culture, but now worked outside the governmental sphere and having money to access the new aspects of urban culture was considered a far more important enterprise. The pursuit of money (wang) and the engagement with human rights (hak kemanoesiaan) and freedom (kemerdikaan), as indicated by Doelriadi above, had created not only tension with the traditional authority, but they also entailed a rupture of the existing colonial order.

**Consuming Urban Modernity**

A year before Doelriadi proclaimed the arrival of the new times (“zaman bahraroe”) to his fellows in Central Java, Indonesian radical Mas Marco published *Student Hidjo* after it was serialized in his journal. Student Hidjo is a young Indonesian who embodies the new times. He likes to wear a jacket and tie, and with pens in his vest pocket. He belongs to the new urban milieu. Marco described him as crossing the border to Holland and, later with his girlfriend, consuming modernity in the urban centers of the Indies. They survey the urban landscape of the Indies town, identified as “PAN-ORAMA” (a word written in capital letters). They engage in picnicking (*plesir*), riding the tramway, exchanging jokes in English and Dutch, and moving in and out theatres, movie houses, hotels, restaurants, and the milieu of the Regent and Dutch officer as if the divided world of the colony

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25 Mas Marco Kartodikromo, *Student Hidjo*, Yogyakarta: Bentang, 200? (first published as a serial in Sinar Hindia, 1918; published by Semarang: NV Boekhandel en Drukkerij Masman & Stroink, 1919.) After several press offenses and jail terms for political writings, Marco decided in 1918 to write novels.
is nothing but a single space in flux. The different worlds are flexibly intertwined. Human relations too, unlike in the past, are far more unpredictable, including Hidjo's own relationship with his lover(s). Nevertheless, with them he consumes lemonade, exchanges fashionable words in Dutch and English, and wears highly priced clothes from the store. Behind their consumption however, there are attempts to turn the hierarchical order of the Indies upside down. At one of the novel's climaxes, Hidjo and his friends celebrate their being together by driving around in a car and honking the horn in the royal town of Java as if to wake up the colonial-sponsored ancient regime.

The urban modernity of the early 20th century provided not only an escape from traditional bonds, but also offered a space for the criticism of that order and the larger colonial-feudal cultures embedded in it.26 For Marco, the fascinating thing about the city was its invulnerability to the order of antiquity. The possibility of wandering around the city with the flexibility of using a delman, dokar, tram, taxi, or just simply on foot to engage with the city was a condition that was in stark contrast to the inaccessibility of the palace and the ritualized performance of the court. Unlike the fixed order of the buildings of the Kraton and of Dutch government offices, the commercial buildings (of shops, restaurants, hotels, theaters and movie houses) allowed experiences to slip along lightly. The visual configuration of the cityscape filled with hotels, restaurants, movie houses and offices along the main roads was of no particular order except that they all tried to interpellate the passerby through various building styles and billboards. The frequent appearance of scenes in cafes, hotels, restaurants and theatres was not only because these spaces were new and accessible to the public who could pay but rather because they

26 We can reflect on the urban theories of Simmel and Wirth. With their primary concern on the urban experiences of the West, Simmel and Wirth overlook the ways in which urban modernity (in the colony) was formed out of the struggle against the colonial/monarchical order. The spatial coordinates of Wirth (rural and urban split) and the temporal contradictions of Simmel (the old and new social relations based on money) does not take into account the disjunction between the authority of the royal center and urban modernity especially in the context of a colony.
represented a sense of detachment from the order of “home” and the old way of life.

As a way of distancing the old, Marco’s stories brought together the traditional order and the new, blending them in ways that the earlier world lost its authority. In this sense, the order of “Dutch-Javanese town” described above, was seen by Marco as a problem to which his urban novel came as an imaginary solution. The hierarchical realm of the court and its declining power (as represented by the presence of Dutch authority) had encouraged an invention of a different and more independent subject position. Through Student Hidjo and his friends, Marco showed how urban modernity had productively undermined the hierarchical rigidities of colonial Java and helped loosen the urbanite from the grips of both antiquity and colonial order.

Student Hidjo is not only about urban modernity in the colonial context, but it is also about the colonial world turned-up-side-down and the imagining of the new world of equality and solidarity. It could be seen as a prose version of Marco’s 1917 poem “sama rasa sama rata” (“solidarity and equality”) which called for a new world and an end to the old hierarchy sustained by both the Dutch government and Javanese aristocrats. Marco’s new found consciousness against traditional authority (sanctioned by the colonial state) can be seen in his poem that sought to lead his readers in a different direction (against the traditional North-South axis).

(…)
Trust me my brothers
Orient yourselves only to the East
Where lies the light (tjahja)
Which will illuminate the world

We call it the sun
That gives light to the earth
It lights the day, and hides at night
Bright and dark are now clear

If you walk on the road
To the North and South
You will certainly feel cold
And mindlessly fall to sleep

You will end up in a place called “Pool”
The endless sea
If you try to pass through it
You will be destroyed

Your body will be frozen
Like the rigid iron
Tools of the factory of the sugar plantation
Steamroller that exploits your people-nation (*bangsamoe*)

Walking to the East will allow you to move around
Reaching the West you will find
So you will make another around
Because the world is round²⁷
(…)

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**East and West Bound: The Railway Journey**

The poem of Mas Marco Kartodikromo represented a movement to a different direction. Being East-West bound (which will allow people to “make another round”) was constructed to contradict the traditional North-South axis that for centuries had governed the orientation of Javanese traditional authority. Marco perhaps had the map of Java in his mind. Given the shape of the island, there were indeed more things to see if one travels East or West. Marco’s consciousness however could be seen as being informed by the change in the visual environment of the city. By the early twentieth century, the royal town of Surakarta was already known for or symbolized by its “restaurant Doehe, Hotel Slier, Hotel Russche, Restaurant Djiran, Office of Javasche Bank, city tram, *ruituig*, bicycle, horse racing, cars from Cadillace and Oldsmobile, … while electricity was already lightening European quarters and main roads.”²⁸ Developed along the main streets leading to other towns in the direction of East and West, Solo was already seen by

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²⁸ Kuntowijoyo, Raja, Priyayi dan Kawula, p.80-81.
its residents as merely part of a larger administrative and commercial network. The expansion of communication and transportation networks had made the “earlier” center only a center among other centers. Solo and Yogyakarta, the two royal towns of Java, were only a stop center in the chain of railway stations leading to other centers such as Semarang to the North, Surabaya to the East, and Batavia and Bandung to the West. While the Javanese palace had fortified itself with walls as thick as four meters and fixed its orientation to the North and South, the railway and the main street of Java (opened up by the Great Post Way—Groote Postweg) had pulled the orientation of the town in the opposite direction of the East and West, thus drifting the soul of Java farther and farther away from its center.

The “solidarity and equality” poem of Mas Marco might be seen as belonging to the age of the train which by then had fully realized the fast track East-West connection.29 Nothing indeed could more explicitly represent time in motion than the train, especially when the locomotive moved across the countryside. Tan Malaka, a veteran Indonesian communist and a top wanted man of the colonial police, once wrote as he confronted with, in those days, the new locomotive that pierced into his Minangkabau world (“Alam”):

“Just look at this machine! How hard it works! The smoke of its breath is puffing out! I feel the heat of its sweat. Listen to its whistle warning: Step aside! Step aside! I am running! Don’t get in my way! How many thousands of kilos of goods I am carrying as I speed on my course! How many hundreds of souls ride behind me! Men, women, girls, boys, children and babies! Step aside, step aside, I cry again. Your danger is my shame! I am responsible for your safety; I must keep to my promise. One minute late destroys my reputation. My brother the mechanic is directly responsible. James Watt was my grandfather’s name. Fast, sure

29 In 1894 the government-run staatspoor-wegen opened the East West bound route of the Buitenzorg-Yogyakarta-Surakarta-Surabaya line. Shirashi reported that a year later “in 1895, the East - West line (...) carried 5,759,000 passangers and earned 3,054,000 guilders from passenger fares and 6,588,000 from merchandise transportation.” Takashi Shiraisi, An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912-1926: p.8.

30 This remark can be found in Tan Malaka, Madilog, (Djakarta: Widjaja, 1951). This citation is from Rudolf Mrazek, “Tan Malaka: A Political Personality’s Structure of Experience,” Indonesia, No. 13-14, 1972: 34.
and safe is my slogan. Perfection is my future."

The movement of the locomotive, going in and out of his Minangkabau "world" had made it virtually impossible to make an easy definition of what is inside and outside. His ancestor had been changed, and his Alam turned inside out. The locomotive, a prime symbol of the modern age, was taken over by Tan Malaka who was also simultaneously possessed by it. The strong moving object left him with political knowledge and masculinity, a sense of liberation and hope, as well as burdens of discipline, promise and responsibility. Yet, his body owed as much to the mechanic and electrician as to the surrounding with which he interacted. They created in him a sense of self. His mobile travelling body, like the locomotive, did not occupy a privileged center of perception. Instead, Tan Malaka and his locomotive embodied each other. The locomotive mediated his social and political consciousness. This "technology," while insinuating a kind of cultural imperialism, had heightened the consciousness of, and transformed, the way Tan Malaka thought about his social and political identity.

Like Marco, Tan Malaka too belonged to the age in motion. For these radicals of the early twentieth century, the idea of house or home, or the axis of a cosmos which symbolized permanence posed no attraction. In fact, in most of the novels of the early 20th century, the train had never been portrayed as a vehicle for one to return to the "hometown." In Indonesian fiction, the train had often been featured as the arena for the comparative world, the imagined future, the revelation of truth and the making of important decisions and ultimately, the crystallization of political consciousness. It offered a direction to the future no matter how unclear that would be, or how one might go astray as one follows the railway.

Moving with the train (in the East-West direction) signified liberation not only for men like Tan Malaka, but also women such as Retno Poernama. Marco told such a story in his *Mata Gelap* (The Blind Eyes) (1917). The protagonist, Retna Poernama, a somewhat liberated young

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Sundanese woman, had finally decided to leave her family after an unsuccessful affair with her sister’s husband. “Yeah, so be it! Let (my sister) be angry, but I am not afraid of her. If I were to be expelled from my parents’ house because of what I did, I can immediately go to Batavia, Semarang or Soerabaja—in short, to places where I will have no trouble to survive.”\(^{32}\) She wasn’t sure of her future, but she felt certain that the train was going to bring her to a city where no one would recognize her and where she could find her new self. From the beginning, the railway journey already offered her such promises. “Although Retno Poernama takes the lower class compartment, she feels content. What she is seeing in the train makes her happy and she forgets all about her parents, her relatives and her hometown.”\(^{33}\)

Retno Poernama didn’t know the cities she had in mind, but felt sure that she would be able to survive in the urban setting such of Batavia, Semarang and Soerabaja—all major cities in Java. She took a midnight train from Tjirebon (West Java) to Soerabaja (East Java). Not only was Soerabaya the last stop on the train, but it was the farthest point where no one could recognize who she was.\(^ {34}\) Through the train and the city, Retno Poernama expressed her subjectivity. She was determined to live in a city for the city was a new place that offered her no possibility of “being known by relatives.” The city in fact did not offer her any stability or security for, like the train, it was also on the move. There were, however, various possibilities for her to become someone in the city. At the worst, she thought she still could choose to be a “slave” or a “nyai.”

\(^{32}\) Kartodikromo, Mas Marco, *Mata Gelap*, p. 103.

\(^{33}\) Kartodikromo, Mas Marco, *Mata Gelap*, p. 108.

\(^{34}\) During the stop over in Semarang (Central Java), to Soetjina (a Prijaji who is attracted to her while they were on the train, again on the train!), Retno Purnama said: “But Raden! Tomorrow ‘hamba’ (a subordinated I) wants to continue (the train trip) to Soerabaja. ‘Hamba’ has purposefully left hometown (toempah darah) to go to Soerabaja. It would be embarrassing for hamba to stay in Semarang for there might be people who recognize hamba. However, in Soerabaja, no one would know hamba. Even if hamba has to be a slave there or become a ‘nyai,’ it is still better than being known by relatives.” Why Retno Poernama used “hamba” to refer to herself as she met Soetjina has a lot to do with the attempt of Retno to persuade Soetjina to help her deal with the hurly burly of the big city—which is, after all, still a city dominated by men.
The city indeed promised possibilities and many ors as well as many ands. Upon her arrival in Semarang (where the train halted), Retno Poernama was already visited by choices she had to make immediately. “It is so crowded here. I have never seen such a fine (bagoes) place. But where should I stay? Her sister’s servant used to say that there are many hotels around here: Hotel Hindia, Hotel Soerabaja, Hotel Slamet Datang etc.”  

There were choices where one could stay while on the move, just like there were possibilities to become one thing or the other. Behind the encounter with the city and the advertisement of hotels, we can discern the contours of a modern urban community radically different from the one known to Retno Poernama.

Advertising and Urban Cognition

When Retno Poernama was informed that there were many hotels in Semarang: “Hotel Hindia, Hotel Soerabaja, Hotel Slamet Datang etc,” she was, in fact, being visited by advertisements. By 1917, the population of the Indies town had grown “so crowded” and there were many more people like Retno Poernama who were new to the town and needed to be told where they could stay and be moved around. Hotels were not for locals. They needed to be specified in order for them to become visible to potential visitors before they arrived. In fact, in the newspapers’ advertisement section, hotels in one city were often featured along with those in other cities: “Hotel Tengger in Bromo, East Java at the height of 6000 meters above the sea; Hotel Toegoe in Jogyakarta; Hotel Jansen in Malang’s Alon-alon; Hotel Lans in Rembang, Semarang, and Grand Hotel Noiless & Metripoly with five floors in Soerabaja.”

The imagery of the “Alon-alon” (the traditional “piazza” in front of the palace compound) and the grand “five floor” hotel (presumably one of the highest buildings) were made parallel and equal, both were the selling points of the hotels and they contributed to the creation of an

image for the city where the hotels exist. If advertising commodities brought in the landscape of the world, it also brought to the public the streets where the shops and the hotels were located, thus creating an imagined and cognitive map of the city. Like the train schedule which projected stops at several towns before reaching the final destination, advertisements connected cities and roads and arranged them in a readable format. Lined up in the advertisement section of the newspaper was thus a whole realm of representation that was not only marketing commodities and services but also making the city imaginable. Urbanites were supposed to read into the advertisements a process creating an image of the city as “the city.”

Historian, Bedjo Riyanto points out that between 1897 and 1914, De Nieuwe Vortstenlanden listed shops in Surakarta and Yogyakarta in a manner that featured the same shops in other cities. “Toko Pianelli Frebes, Soerakarta and Semarang; Toko Midden-Java, Djogja, Bandoeng, Solo dan Tegal.” The inter-cities connection represented by the advertisement conveys the impression that Indies towns are all more or less the same. Such representation constituted a sense that one’s city was merely a city among many other cities. (Figure 2) There was no axis of cosmos in such network of cities. There were only series of nodes that offered passersby another round of moving to yet another city—“so you will make another round,” as suggested in Mas Marco’s poem. In this sense of unbound seriality, Retno Poernomo did not concern much about the difference between Semarang and Surabaya. What was important for her was that they were cities which contain different livelihood that, even at the worst condition, she still could choose one or the other, an activity similar to picking up a hotel from an advertisement.

In the early twentieth century, images capable of being detached and circulated from their immediate settings were particularly powerful. They catalyzed the concept of “movement and moving” and extended the field

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38 For a discussion on the unbound and concept of seriality, see Benedict Anderson, Spectre of Comparison, London: Verso, 1998.
of urban experience by allowing people to see a world they could not immediately apprehend. In Pramoedya’s *This Earth of Mankind*, the young Minke was stunned by what printed photographs could offer: “pictures of landscapes, august and important people, new machines, American skyscrapers, everything from all over the world—I can now witness for myself on these sheets of printed paper.”39 The images brought together the otherwise unconnected worlds. Seeing the world condensed in printed pages demanded a capacity to make a connection between the objects represented. Yet advertisements were more unsettling than photographs. Readers knew that the worlds presented by advertisements were subject to change, and enlargement. There were more to come though always on a provisional basis. While moveable and constantly moving, advertise

ments arrived as a readable text to be observed with some expected reception. This however also invited a sense of agency. The capacity to consume visual images, such as advertisements, constituted an experience of mastery, even though one had to learn to read the code in order to participate in such a visual world.

In Pramoedya’s story, Minke, the pioneer of the Indonesian nationalism, could be seen as a product of advertising. It might not be too far to suppose that advertising contributed to, rather than distracted him from, the formation of his political consciousness, feared by the colonial state. Before becoming a journalist and anti-colonial nationalist, Minke in fact created advertisements and short articles for the auction papers. We could expect that Minke wrote and read advertisements and found himself participating in the world-in-motion. In the early twentieth century, when writing and reading was still a new form of practice, it seemed that advertising had an unexpected power to draw people to act and imagine themselves anew. For Minke, participation in the world of advertising might had contributed to his habit of arranging his experiences into a readable representation.

Similarly, when Mas Marco composed his urban novels, we could imagine him wielding the visual environment of the city in the manner of Minke organizing his reading of printed images. Both were finding ways to explore authority and community built into the urban life of the early twentieth century. The relation between representation and the city is vividly expressed in Mas Marco’s 1924 short stories. In Semarang Hitam (The Dark Semarang), Marco wrote about the experience of an “orang partikuler” reading the city in and out of the newspaper: “A young man turned the pages of the newspaper … all of a sudden he came upon an article entitled: PROSPERITY: ‘a destitute vagrant became ill and died from exposure on the side of the road.’”40 In dismay, the young man went off to stroll around the city. What he saw there (in another short story about Surabaya) revealed only more about the unevenness of the colonial city. Marco’s protagonist turned himself from a subject read by the

newspaper into a subject who evaluated the city and revealed the hidden truth of injustices of colonial life. What is also striking is the way in which Marco organized the intersection between realities and representation in a format readable by countless and nameless other dear readers.

“Yes... dear reader! Things are like that. In the big cities of our Indonesia, it is quite common for streets to be called the Heerenstraat—a name which has its roots in the capitalist spirit which divides social classes. If all things were fair, for every Heerenstraat, there should be a Kinderstraat (Children street), shouldn’t there? ... Usually Hereenstraats are busy, wide and have shops and large tiles along them. It is of course apt that such streets are called Heerenstraat, for along this street in Surabaya are many grand restaurants, like the Simpang Restaurant – establishments whose expensive prices stop any ordinary worker having a drink there. You have to be one of the rich tuans (Europeans) to go in there... If we compare the Heerenrestaurant on the Heerenstraat with the Tjap Krusek Warung on a narrow, smelly kampong alley, the capitalist ‘caste system’ becomes most obvious.” ... In one place people are happy, in another they are sleeping in the rubbish of those drinkers... If you don’t have the ability to study high-flown theories from foreign books, it is surely enough to understand the practical realities of everyday life. Comparisons show up injustices, don’t they?”

Though the unevenness of colonial city was hardly a surprising item of news, and though Marco’s dramatic rendering of his discovery emphasizes the significance of everyday built environment, his experience alerts us to the role of representation in forming the experience of the city. Before the era of print, news about the ills, the poor and the dead were made available only in oral forms, but in the era of the urban generation of Mas Marco, the oral transmission of such news came only after the signs were printed in the newspaper.

Yet, there is another feature in Marco’s reading of the news from the newspaper which brings us back to the visual environment of the city. The physical setting of the city was made a legible landscape to address political concerns. The streets marked by restaurants and shop fronts

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each displaying signboards of various kinds became a sight to be read as a phenomenon of a larger force of colonialism working on the city. If the advertisements, like the rail track, annihilated the spatial distance that connected the whole of Java (and the world) then the main road too brought the world closer to viewers, allowing them to locate themselves within a larger setting. Yet unlike advertisements, the actuality of urban space quite often stood in contradiction to the imagined fullness of representation. Advertisements and the main street offered a chance of mastery to consumers, but it was also one combined with despair. While they triggered the sense of “collective consumption” they also heightened feeling of inequality and inaccessibility to urban life.

While Retno Poernama in Mata Gelap could not help admire the prosperity and fine places of Semarang as she left behind her own town, in Semarang Hitam, Marco’s protagonist revealed the contradictions of the colonial city: the prosperity and the destitute. The unequal order of the urban space was read comparatively to organize a new field of vision so that one could better position oneself within the urban space. Marco made the visual environment of the city readable in a format similar to that of the advertisement that connected images that were otherwise unconnected. However, unlike advertisement, the city was read cognitively, alongside the signs of inequality for in practice the urban form also revealed much of the colonial structure of injustices. In such format of juxtaposition between different street scenes, Marco put himself in the position of an observer who looked at himself being in the urban world. For Marco, the visual environment of the city not only offered promises for a better future where everyone could consume what was advertised, but also the injustices of the colonial city.

Conclusion

By the 1920s, the colonized had appropriated aspects of the spectacle of the city, the urban cultures, and the movement of trams and trains and incorporated them into the more popular and radical ideas of “human rights” (“hak kemanoesiaan”) and “freedom” (“kemerdikaan”). They became the catchwords for political parties which organized strikes and protests with in-
creasing intensity. In 1926 the Communist Party launched a revolt against the colonial government. The movement was soon crushed and the era of urban popular radicalism met a violent death, along with its dandies and including Marco.42 A new type of urban and social environment was eventually constructed, one that promoted a sense of normalcy. The physical environment of the Indies town for the first time was subject to improvement with the purposes of, among others, resolving tensions and conflicts in the city and overcoming memories of the age in motion. The new Indies town coincided with the colonial regime of surveillance and political suppression which was mobilized to ensure the permanent death of the urban popular radicalism. We do not know exactly how urban space of the Indies town had contributed to the rise and fall of social and political movements, but since the death of urban popular radicalism, Indonesians lived in the social environment of relative peace and order until the Revolution of 1945-1950.

This essay is intended less to explain the socio-economic bases of popular urban radicalism in the early twentieth century Indies town. Instead, it seeks to show the visual and spatial mediation of political consciousness. The change in socio-economic interests and state policies were of fundamental importance. International political ideologies and global modernity that had circulated in the region by then clearly had a powerful impact in promoting restlessness—just as anti-colonial movements were developing at much the same time elsewhere. What I am proposing is that the change in the visual environment of the city played a role in the change of consciousness. Most clearly, it provided a contrast and comparison necessary for a criticism of Indonesia’s own ancient regime. In this regard, the princely towns in Central Java (where urban radicalism first began) played a historic role. Given their conservatism, most vividly expressed in their architectural and urban symbolism, the traditional royal town nevertheless provided the grounds for comparison which, in turn, put in motion the radical age in Indonesian history. I have also argued that the dynamic relations between the railway

42 Isolated by the colonial police, Minke (referred to historically as Raden Mas Tirto Adhi Soerjo (1880-1918)). Minke died in 1918 in a hotel where he had found himself staying upon his return from exile.
journey, the “print culture” and visual environment of the city had shaped the experience of the urban generation of Mas Marco. In a way, Mas Marco’s writings on the city called upon some aspects of the traditional town as a rhetorical device to underline some striking qualities of the modern urban life. His protagonists, dandies and liberated women in the colonial world, showed traces of the importance of space, place and settings in conditioning, as well as mediating and shaping their social and political consciousness. They also called attention to the centrality of spatial and visual mediation of urban space in forming political consciousness even though they were also often highly uneasy about their positions in the physical landscape of the city.

Acuan


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Budaya Massa: Identitas Masyarakat Kontemporer
Budaya Kota: Kosmologis Masyarakat Urban

Bahwa kota seringkali dilukiskan sebagai feminin bukanlah suatu hal baru. Dalam *The Sphinx and the City*, Elizabeth Wilson mendeskripsikan bagaimana massa penduduk kota yang mendiami kota-kota Eropa abad ke-19 “kian berciri perempuan” ketika mereka dipandang sebagai sebuah ancaman bagi disiplin dan ketertiban. Lebih jauh, Wilson menulis bahwa, meskipun kota dipandang sebagai “maskulin” dari segi bangunan-bangunan dan industrianya, kota juga digambarkan sebagai “feminin” sebagai akibat dari “ketidakpastian dan ketakterpusatannya yang penuh dengan liku-liku”.

(Manneke Budiman)

Yayasan Obor Indonesia