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On the Question of Exhibition Part 3

ǝlɐuuǝıq sɐ ǝɯɐs ǝɥʇ ǝq ʇouuɐɔ lɐuıq: Might the Exhibition Be a Festival?

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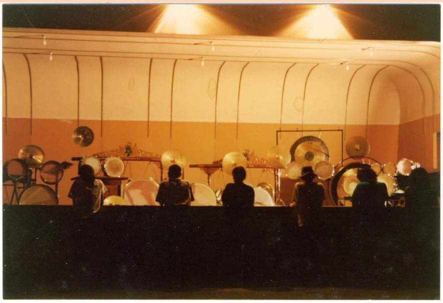
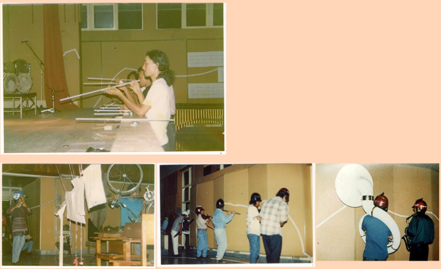


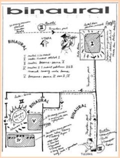
fig.1

Young men are blowing small, hardened balls of paper through their pipes, aiming to hit the gamelan set on stage to generate sound. They are guided by a composition: there are cues and time indications that they are supposed to follow when blowing their paper balls at the gamelan. The lengths of paper stuck onto the back wall, seen in the second image—the long, curved lines and the larger rectangles seen on the right of the photo—are also part of the composition. These are scores for the wind instruments that were installed along the walls. Imagine blowing a trumpet or a flute while walking around…



figs. 2–5

They are playing in a conventional music hall in the Akademi Musik Indonesia in Jogja—as the city of Yogyakarta is colloquially referred to—as part of an event called BINAL Experimental Arts '92. According to the composer, the helmets were to help protect the players' hearing from other sounds and to keep their focus on what was directly in front of them, the composition along the wall. The artists who organised BINAL claimed the festival was a kind of protest, yet the composer of this work, Haryo 'Yose' Suyoto, clearly states this was not his intention.[1] "I mean, they can call it whatever they want. For me, I was simply making music. Since they were proposing the [word] 'binal' as a concept or some sort of departing point, I responded to them with a 'binal' that was aural, *Binaural*."[2] Some instruments are easily recognisable, such as percussion, guitar, piano and the gamelan. At best, you might think these are images of a rehearsal, or a crowded jam session.



figs. 6–11

The guy with the cape, climbing up the stairs, is Djaelani (Jay/Jae), the vocalist for the composition. As you can see in the photograph, some people are looking at him, one is even grinning. It wouldn't be too far-fetched to think he has said something memorable. What was he singing? When Grace spoke to him, in 2009, he didn't remember; nor did the composer, but he recalled the overall intent of the piece. "Of course, I am aware that the word [binaural] is also a technical term in the field of sound recording. And that music composition indeed aspires to be as dynamic as the Sekaten. Not to record the sounds of Sekaten in a three-dimensional sense, but to recreate the ways in which sounds are being experienced."[3]

Deriving from the Arabic word *Syahadatain*, Sekaten is a week-long festivity in Jogja commemorating the prophet Muhammad's birthday. It was first held by the first Sultan of Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat—now known as Yogyakarta Special Region—celebrating the Sultanate's acceptance of Islam. The festival's name derives from the proclamation of *syahada*, which marks a person's conversion to the religion. Jogja is a university town, and the fascination with Sekaten is not exclusively ours. During this week, while the *Kraton* (palace) and the people of Jogja are busy preparing the *Muludan* ritual, student migrants (like Grace) would mostly be entertained by the night market, a main attraction of the festivities. Especially for students who come from bigger cities or more cosmopolitan places (such as Jakarta, Medan, Bandung, Surabaya, Makassar, etc.), the night market can be an exciting experience.[4]

Like many depictions of night markets in literature or film, Sekaten is full of life, with fireballs thrown into the air, huge balloons flying above the traffic, little peculiar shops, games for all ages, magic, so-called "freak shows", and all that. The place is constantly busy and full of sounds. We wouldn't call these noises, as they are all desired, expected, intended by different groups of visitors to the Sekaten. This aural festivity is the basis of Yose's *Binaural*. He attempted to compose such an experience. The colourful balloons in some of the images burst during the performance, which must have sounded, felt, random. But, after speaking to Yose, we're assured that even the bursting balloons must have been timed, calculated into his composition. He said: "I wanted the audience to not have to wait, look, and get ready for the sounds. The sounds are just there, around them, with them, and they are a part of it." All the entrance and exit doors of the convention hall were left open during the *Binaural* performance, and no one recalls an official speech or a call for the audience to enter the hall. Music simply started. We imagine it would have been rather confusing. There were no designated seats for the audience, and the musicians were in casual attire —except for Jay in his blue cape—and scattered around the hall. The entire hall was the stage, where the sounds of the audience trying to navigate the situation also contributed to the performance. It may not have been written or timed by the composer, but it surely was expected.

If all this was conceived as an exhibition, what would it be like? This is not a question of what kind of format the work described above might be best presented in, contextualised or mediated—although this is a good question too, and a related one. The challenges that certain artists and art forms pose for exhibition-making are well known and discussed.[5] It is quite natural that a display format designed for painters and sculptors in Europe a century ago would create small headaches and puzzles for the many artists worldwide working in different ways—as they have done for a very long time now—and for anyone who tries to relate these activities to a public. Although few would still subscribe to its high-modernist principles of visuality, objecthood and autonomy, the "classic" white-walled exhibition enclosure for art still reigns supreme as the norm from which many alternatives depart. The question of alternatives remains important for this reason . But the question in this case is different. What if we were to imagine an exhibition format deriving from the internal logic of the work described above? If we imagine an exhibition based on its principles, what would that exhibition be like?

Trying to ask the right questions, we could look at the situation in which *Binaural* actually happened: BINAL Experimental Arts '92. When we talk about BINAL, people recall the rebellious spirit of youth, similar to how people felt about the first phase of Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia—Indonesia New Art Movement, 1975–1989 , also colloquially referred to as Seni Rupa Baru. Curator Jim Supangkat, who was one of the driving forces behind Seni Rupa Baru, even wrote at the time that BINAL was "a 'protest'" by the young artists in Jogja", a "counter exhibition" to the edition of the Biennale Jogja happening that year.[6] Supangkat furthered his analysis in an interview, in which he stated

> [t]here are several similarities between this BINAL of 1992, Seni Rupa Baru in 1975, and Esensialisme Pop Art that happened in 1976, in Jogja. The three were suffocated by what was acknowledged as the creativity of their own times. These three events wanted something more flexible than what was provided by their surrounding systems. The three strived in search of newness, hence it was done by young people.[7]

However, BINAL is rarely discussed or written about thoroughly; it is seen as yet another young rebel in the course of Indonesia's art histories.

BINAL did indeed differentiate itself from the "institutionalising aesthetics" of the official biennale, playing up its "wildness"—where the word *binal* is translatable as "wild", "rebellious", "naughty".[8] The proposal document for

BINAL notes how the biennale's "institutionalising" was enforced through its selection process and its limitations on age and media, and its tendency to distinguish "formal art" from "non-formal art"' and the differentiation between "art from the top" (fine art) and "from the bottom"' (applied arts/craft), underlining the prevalence of such tendencies across Indonesia in galleries, art centres, writing and educational institutions. "This atmosphere can easily slide into the normative, thus blocking some processes or blunting the creativity and critical power of art workers."[9] But the tone of the event is far from oppositional, and overall the BINAL–biennale binary is not that sharp: although BINAL considered itself a "counter-exhibition", it also hit more cooperative notes in trying to "help enliven" the official event.[10] This corresponds with a general move away from self-consciously oppositional stances in art during the previous decades of the Suharto regime, seen for instance in Seni Rupa Baru, and the move by the younger generation to instead initiate "alternative", as they were described, structures and practices.

The organisers differentiated BINAL from the biennale in the following ways:

BIENNALE	BINAL
Uses formal places/public places	Can be anywhere: in the street, the market, the neighbourhood, the family home or the great outdoors
Exhibition is centred in one location/building complex	Spread out across various locations
Exhibition is held in a closed space (indoors)	Can be in an enclosed space (indoors) and in an outdoor space
The works exhibited are individual works	Individual works and team collective works
Limited to two-dimensional works	No limitations to two -dimensions
Limited to a visual art discipline (painting)Tends to the established	Interdisciplinary/multi-media: visual art, music, theatere, movement, audio-visual, etc.
	Locates itself in the process and has an experimental spirit[11]

It is worth pausing at the name BINAL. The title plays on the local pronunciation of the word biennale ("bee-nul"), which sounds identical to "binal" when said aloud. *Binal* is a word in Bahasa Indonesia that has various connotations depending on context; in addition to those listed earlier, there are also disobedience, stubbornness, untamed, uncontrolled… It is these specific connotations that give meaning to the BINAL's upside-down opening statement/conclusion: This writing will begin with a conclusion. If *binal* is not *biennale*, then *binal* cannot be the same as *biennale*.

The statement has a playful instability reflected in the fact that it appears in the BINAL's "prologue to be discussed"—situating itself not as a final statement or manifesto, but as an opening.[12] The English translation appears a tautology, or nonsense, or insistence—all of which finds some resonance with the original intent, but the original language statement also flips the sequence of meaning: *binal* is not distinguished *from* the main event, but the other way around, it is *binal* that fixes the meaning of *biennale*, and said out loud they become indistinguishable iterations where *binal* takes primacy. "Biennale" might sound like wildness/waywardness/disobedience, but it is not any of these things, and *binal* is something else. The organisers explained this as follows: "Humans are animals that are trapped in webs of meaning that they have determined themselves; in other words, animals are humans that are not trapped in webs of meaning because they cannot spin them. That is why the *binal* is more chaotic than the *biennale*. That is culture."[13]

The destabilisation of the main event was more than just linguistic, since BINAL ultimately eclipsed the 1992 biennale—the small amount of press the biennale received was largely to compare it to the BINAL. After 1992, the Biennale Seni Lukis Yogyakarta was no more, and it changed its name along with its committees, formats and criteria. As part of this process, it adopted many of the elements the BINAL proposed, reflecting the connection between the initiatives. It might even be said that BINAL fulfilled the biennale's mission more successfully than the biennale itself and therefore perhaps had a reformist rather than rebellious influence.

As mentioned earlier, Suyoto's *Binaural* did not set itself up as a "protest" and, in contrast to Supangkat's rebellious Seni Rupa Baru generation, it reflects a different mode of practice and a different generation of artists—although Suyoto is of a similar age as Supangkat. Its title, playing on the sounds of both *binal* and *biennial,* opens up to the question posed at the beginning of this section—what kind of exhibition does this work sound like? *Binaural* is the organisation of an environment to produce a particular collective experience, a translation of the sonic character of the annual festivity on which it is based. It is open-ended, spatially dispersed, chaotic and amusing and, within its set of formal parameters, uncontrolled; it sets up a framework for a whirling polyphony of sound and movement that draws in all individuals and sounds in its vicinity. The composition's structured anarchism resonates with the *binal* sense of wildness, but its approach is different in not being self-consciously oppositional, invoking a different concept of gathering and aesthetics in the experience and dynamics of the Sekaten.

In addition to the music hall, BINAL also included more typical exhibitionary sites such as artists' studios and galleries. The most established of these was the Senisono Art Gallery. Despite its location in one of the busiest and most popular areas of Jogja city, Senisono was on the brink of disappearance. A year before BINAL began, the local authority's decision to close and demolish the gallery prompted a month-long occupation of its front yard and the street outside. Artists from various disciplines gathered and camped out there, coming from Jogja, Solo and across the archipelago. They were joined by folk and street artists, students from various social and political sciences, and many others. They held marches, did performances, read poetry, produced theatre, showed sculptural objects, and tried everything they could to reverse the province's decision to close the gallery. The occupation caught the attention of the media, which tagged it "Gerakan Senisono 1991" (1991 Senisono Movement).[14] This made it sound more like a protest, a demonstration, an attempt to undermine the government in some way, rather than the festive event that it was—which can be seen especially in the way it organised itself, through its "programme" and scheduling. Yet it is worth emphasising that there was no single organisation that was doing a singular or central kind of planning. In the various news reports, no one claimed to be the organiser, as we might expect today. There were just groups of artists, from various disciplines, gathering and making space and time for each other as they supported this cause. Those who were living and working in Jogja naturally became hosts for those who came from other cities to show their solidarity.

SENI ONO
BIARKAN SENISONO
TEGAK BERDIRI

figs. 12–13

In many contexts, festivals can be a way to collectively show hope for good luck or better weather, to ward off misfortunes, etc., and Gerakan Senisono's festivities were mobilised in defence of this established part of Jogja's art infrastructure. It is worth emphasising the location. Many "official" cultural events, such as the Biennale Jogja, happened in the town's art centre Purnabudaya, located within the complex of Universitas Gadjah Mada—a school with a reputation for its vernacularly socialist values. Meanwhile, Senisono Art Gallery was located within the busy commercial hub of Malioboro Street, near the famous *pendhapa* public architecture designed by Mangunwijaya, a popular space for many different Jogja residents. The gallery itself seemed to be a relatively liberal, hands-off space: anyone could exhibit there as long as they would take care of their own installation, promotion, etc. You only had to submit a proposal and await your turn. In contrast to the university complex, this was a location where all kinds of people could meet, be it sultanate family members, professors, celebrities, street vendors, musicians, students, intellectuals, artists, etc. Therefore it was not only the artists who lost the fight for Senisono Art Gallery, it was also the wider population. The building was torn down early 1993; not long after, the *pendhapa* was dismantled, and that corner of Malioboro Street was forever fenced off.

figs. 14–16

Some people remember the BINAL exhibitionary element that happened in Senisono as one of the outcomes of Gerakan Senisono's attempts to sustain the gallery.[15] And not uncannily, the work that most interviewees would remember from BINAL was Ong Harry Wahyu's installation at Senisono. At first glance, the work looks like a brick temple—commonly found in various old towns of Java— but on closer inspection it is a spiral maze. Paper ducks were installed on top of the brick walls, lining up as if pulled into the spiral; used retail boxes provided the temple's fence, and three ponds surrounded it—sources of water being a common feature for temples. The water in the ponds was coloured red, yellow and green, the colours of the three big national political parties at that time. There were also real ducks living in the installation: quacking, eating, pissing, shitting and walking around.

It is hard not to see the work as a commentary on the social-political circumstances of its time. BINAL began in July, a month after the 1992 national election in which Suharto's biggest backing party, Golongan Karya (Golkar), had just won again. This was his sixth term as president. During the election, small waves of dissent had begun to appear. Soerjadi, the leader of the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI), gave a much-discussed speech, arguing for the need to limit the presidential position to two terms. Along with a growth of interest towards democracy, votes for the Islam-based United Development Party (PPP) also grew significantly. From a present-day perspective it is possible to see events of that year in terms of what was soon to come: Suharto was again appointed as president in the 1997 elections, and then the Asian financial crisis hit, part a sequence of events that triggered the toppling of the long-running authoritarian regime by 1998. For those who were living through those times, it would have been impossible not to feel hopeless in the face of never-ending repression, suppression and terror. But the 1990s were also the beginning of even daring to hope for change.

"Public" is something experienced differently by different people and in different times and places.[16] In its statements, BINAL differentiated itself from the publics and spaces of the biennale, while public space in Indonesia at that time was not a neutral space to begin with. The 1990s was the peak of the *dwifungsi* (dual function) policy that under Suharto's New Order regime increasingly embedded the army at every level of society, from high-ranking parliamentary and civil service roles to the handling of everyday public services. During this era, it was not uncommon to see bloodied bodies lying on the streets, left out like a warning.[17] Jogja, in particular, was where the notorious series of extrajudicial state killings known as "Petrus" (*Penembak Misterius*, or mysterious shooter) began in the early 1980s.[18] As if in collusion with the New Order regime, the mass media extended these violations through extensive, lurid coverage on television and in print. Dissenting figures within the more intellectual media outlets turned to satirical or literary means (fiction or poetry) instead of journalism, to avoid being banned, captured or even murdered. Violence and the army were part of the fabric of everyday life.

During BINAL, a group of young artists installed artworks in Yogyakarta Station, locally known as Stasiun Tugu.[19] The group called their project *Kerja Seni Waktu Luang*, which can be translated as *Art Work(ing) in Spare Time*. The most visible part of the installation was a group of mummified figures, situated among people waiting for their train to arrive. There were also metal structures installed with bandages, banners, syringes and other medical equipment. At times the installation expanded into performance, as bandaged figures, some marked with blood, lay groaning, lamenting or sleeping, and sometimes a doctor figure would appear to help or condemn them. The work was titled *Sakit di mana-mana*—translatable as *Disease everywhere*, or *Sickness everywhere*, or *Pain everywhere*.[20] The artist recalled that people's general reaction to his work was rather flat. They were not surprised, horrified, upset or amused. In fact, most people paid little attention to the mummified figures. Perhaps this is unsurprising; for at least a decade the New Order regime had taught the citizens of Indonesia to not put themselves in others' shoes, to remain silent, to mind their own business. But one story, as told by Tommy Faisal Alim, stands out:

> A friend of mine came rushing, panicking… "Tom! Tom! A lady is dismantling your work!" I rushed to it and found her removing a number of syringes from my installation. So I asked: "Why are you taking these?" She said that she was a nurse. I tried talking to her about illness, diseases, sickness in our society, etc., but she would simply reply "I am a nurse…"—as if this meant she was entitled to use them. The conversation didn't go on long. A security guard came to us, shooed her away, and told me to ignore her as she is [mentally] ill.[21]

figs. 17–20

This story reminded David of another story from the Week of Cooperative Suffering, a week-long festival whose events all took place at night-time in the Tha Pae Gate, in Chiang Mai, in northern Thailand. The Week of Cooperative Suffering was a satellite event to the series of festivals known as Chiang Mai Social Installation, which had been established in 1992 by a group of artists, lecturers and art students at the Fine Art Faculty of Chiang Mai University. The festivals set out to bring contemporary art into city's daily life and activities via a loose organisational structure that attracted an increasingly far-flung group of participants, before largely dissolving itself in the late 1990s. The events took place at the second Week of Cooperative Suffering, in early January 1996, in the course of the third edition of Chiang Mai Social Installation—subtitled "Third Art and Cultural Festival: Temples, Cemeteries, Private-Residences, Public Buildings, Streets, Bridges, Walls, Rivers and Canals, Open Spaces". Two of the core instigators of CMSI, Uthit Atimana and Mit Jai Inn, recall how a doctor and medical team turned up one night to the festivities, wanting to join in, having heard about the events on the news.

> Uthit: "And he said, 'Artists are a bunch of dangerous people!'"
>
> Mit: "... who needed injections."
>
> Uthit: "[Artists] could speak in the name of culture, to which he had no right. And they got to be on TV and newspapers. So he claimed that he needed to inject them with a dose of morality. And he injected them. I asked about the medicine, and he said not to worry, it's just glucose. Imagine the doctor. Was that art? Was he an artist? For me, he'd get an A+ for his key message, up there with Joseph Beuys. For me, this is a great example of art."

figs. 21–22

Another participant remembers the nurse offering doses of "anti-cultural immune deficiency vaccine". This stands out as an example of the participation of non-artists in "artistic" activities as part of the social installation, which was an ongoing concern of the organisers. The information leaflet stated: "Anybody, any profession, any nationality can participate in this activity. FREE!!!". This is connected to the notion of the "culturalist", that Uthit and CMSI proposed as an alternative to the idea of "artist". Activities listed for the Week of Cooperative Suffering under this concept included music by visually impaired people, experimental music, folk dance, poetry, pavement art, magic, fortune telling and comedy, while the events for that week also included a night market, academic discussions, performances, installation art and a party. CMSI organisers also linked culturalism with a notion of "inter expression" and the idea of the festivals as an international contemporary version of Thai temple fairs.

One thing that makes these two events memorable is the clash of different positions in society—the health professional and the artist—and the way these different types of authority come up against one another. BINAL and CMSI also benefited from the social status of the university for their activities to be allowed to happen; the university connection legitimized what they were doing. Both stories also stand out because they feature memorable encounters with members of a more "general" or "non-art" public; these encounters are not passive or dictated by the intentions of the artist—indeed, it is not clear whether they have completely engaged with or understood the situations in which they are intervening so memorably. But we wonder if these narratives stick in the mind because they show forms of engagement that are more active and unpredictable, perhaps more suitable for a festive occasion. These surprising reactions, by "ordinary" people, ignore the rules usually set up around art and provoke a new set of reactions. The terms of "engagement" or "participation" are actively rejected in both cases, and a new scenario is created.

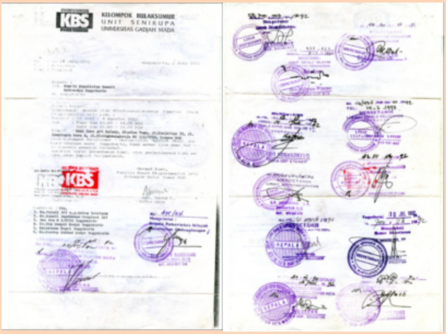
It may be interesting to think about exhibitions, biennales and festivals in terms of such "borderline" moments; their ability to produce unexpected, unintended consequences, their capacity for surprise, to facilitate or celebrate the breaking of their own rules. This may in turn lead to unexpected or strange questions for the exhibitionary paradigm—if its main value is to be located at the points where it does not perform its function "correctly". Such an understanding would attach little significance or intrinsic value to any particular exhibition "content", or the authorship or intentionality of its agents, with individual organisers, artists and art less important than the kind of relationships they produce. What makes the exhibition or festival significant from this perspective, is everything that it makes possible outside of itself, or what happens at its edges. Its priority may be something like a "gathering of oscillating social forms", where "the aesthetic-life-world (the inherent entanglement of aesthetics and politics) manifests otherworldly social compositions."[22] Its values may not be those of "art" so much as those of friendship or solidarity.[23]

There are various resonances between the social contexts of the two locations—Chiang Mai and Jogja—in which these festive initiatives emerged at the same time. The locations themselves bear interesting comparison, each being a city with memories of ancient significance and power—Chiang Mai was at the heart of the premodern Lanna kingdom, Jogja a royal capital of Java—contrasting sharply with the urban intensity of Bangkok and Jakarta, the megacities that displaced them as capitals during the crash landing of nation-state modernity. Both cities are home to many intellectuals and artists, and both have a more "incomplete" relationship to modernity than the capital cities; residents and visitors experience the complex overlapping of ancient and modern temporalities as a basic part of everyday life. There are also important differences: for instance, rather than the repressive atmosphere of late New Order Indonesia, the 1990s were a comparatively stable period in Thai political life, albeit in the wake of a military coup in 1991 and the violent crackdown on student protesters known as Black May in 1992—followed by a succession of military coups and political crises from the 2000s until today. These differences may, however, be understood in relation to certain overarching continuities; David Teh has noted that authoritarianism, censorship and state intervention are key structural factors for understanding exhibition and institutional histories in Southeast Asia.[24]

The events of BINAL in Jogja possibly remind you of other stories you have heard about artist-led initiatives and festivals elsewhere in Indonesia and other parts of Southeast Asia since the 1990s. As well as CMSI, we could consider initiatives such as Viva ExCon in the Philippine Visayas Islands, Womanifesto in Bangkok, The Artists Village in Singapore, and Baguio Arts Festival in the north Philippines—all of which emerged from the late-1980s into the mid-1990s.[25] All these initiatives emerged alongside, and in various relationships with, the more familiar biennial model that was experiencing a "boom" across Asia throughout the 1990s.[26] But the difference between the standard biennial model and the festivals described above is clear. The 1992 BINAL makes us wonder if it makes sense to argue that biennials are just the domesticated versions of their "wild" festive counterparts, or if it is more complicated than that. We could say that biennials make bad festivals because they are too much like exhibitions. There are questions of scale here, as well as the effects of contemporary conditions of production, as Gabriella de la Puente and Zarina Muhammad write:

> The big festivals parachute in trendy artists and don't support the local art scene, fail when it comes to public engagement, spend more time and money on professionally networking with other institutions / collectors / critics who will write nice things / monied people, and seem to care only about maintaining their brand rather than putting out any meaningful or relevant content. they're businesses more than anything.[27]

There is no sharp distinction between "festival" and "exhibition"—just like there is no binary between *binal* and *biennale*—and it is probably better to think of them as part of a continuum. Where they coexist in tension may be where the most interesting things happen. These moments of the early 1990s reflect in different ways a relationship between exhibitionary practices, forms of festivity and their convivial consequences. Sometimes this is a tense relationship, sometimes they appear at odds, and sometimes they align—like with the Senisono movement agitating to save the traditional exhibition venue. In every case there is a combination of different energies and contradictions, pulling in different directions at once.



KBS
KELOMPOK BULAKSUMUR
UNIT SENIRUPA
UNIVERSITAS GADJAH MADA

figs. 23–24

To round off these meanderings, for now, we will return to Jogja and the BINAL to consider the all-important questions of organisation and administration. The event's "wildness" would not have been possible without an elaborate set of legal and bureaucratic procedures—in a repressive situation, there really was no other way to make such things happen. Some participants, especially those not coming from art school, were well aware of this requirement and took up "official" organisational roles via a state-approved student organisation called Kelompok Bulaksumur (KBS) connected to the university. KBS was identified as "organiser" of BINAL, but this does not imply control over the whole event or even selection of participants or venues; its role can be better understood in terms of performance, of performing the formalities required by the regime in power. Yustina Neni was one of those involved in this side of BINAL, and her presence is felt all around the edges of its histories.[28] Neni is a crucial figure in Jogja's art ecosystem: as one of the key thinkers behind the initiative Yayasan Seni Cemeti (Cemeti Art Foundation, 1995–2007) that developed into the Indonesian Visual Art Archive (IVAA, 2007); as the executive director for Yogyakarta Biennale Foundation (2010–18) and one of the ideologues behind its equatorial agenda; and most notably as co-founder of Kedai Kebun Forum (1997–present). Within the rapidly developing discourses surrounding care-taking, nurturing, and invisible labour in the art world, she is a role model for many younger practitioners.

While working on the Yogyakarta Biennale Foundation's Equator Symposium (2012–19) Grace vividly remembers Neni's common response when asked about her role as director.[29] She would smile, inhale the smoke of her cigarette, blow it out—one could interpret the blowing out of her smoke as a mild sigh—and say, "You know what, I think *ketua panitia* is a more suitable term. Also, a term that we can easily relate to." *Ketua panitia* can be translated as chief organiser, or even executive director, but colloquially it is a term that many Indonesians would connect to the festivities organised by a community, school, neighbourhood, village or town, most commonly surrounding the celebration of Indonesia's independence day. *Ketua panitia* is not a role that assigns positions and responsibilities, sets up workflows, or makes decisions—these are already established. Instead, *ketua panitia* is the figure who maintains the overall dynamic—hosting and greeting people, accompanying when needed, speaking to or negotiating with external parties on behalf of the community. Can you imagine applying such an attitude to the running of an international biennale? Anyway, a permission letter from the time shows the bureaucratic hell that KBS, and its *ketua panitia*, had to deal with to make BINAL happen. It is interesting to note that many BINAL participants were unaware that anyone had played this role—some even remember being surprised to read in the newspapers about KBS's organisational involvement.[30] But recognising the true significance of the *ketua panitia* would be enough to turn all these histories upside down. This may need a longer conversation.

This essay is dedicated to Haryo 'Yose' Suyoto (1952–2021).

Image credits

1-11 Documentation of performance of *Binaural*, by Haryo Yose Suyoto, at Binal Eksperimental, Yogyakarta, 1992. Courtesy Indonesian Visual Art Archive, http://archive.ivaa-online.org/

12-13 Documentation of 'Gerakan Senisono 1991' ('1991 Senisono Movement'), Yogyakarta, 1991. Courtesy Indonesian Visual Art Archive, http://archive.ivaa-online.org/

14-16 Work by Ong Harry Wahyu at Senisono gallery, Binal Eksperimental, Yogyakarta, 1992. Courtesy Indonesian Visual Art Archive, http://archive.ivaa-online.org/

17-20 Work by Tommy Faisal Alim at Yogyakarta Station, Binal Eksperimental, Yogyakarta, 1992. Courtesy Indonesian Visual Art Archive, http://archive.ivaa-online.org/

21-22 'Anti-cultural immune deficiency vaccine' at the Week of Cooperative Suffering, organised as part of the third Chiang Mai Social Installation, Chiang Mai, 1996. Courtesy Uthit Atimana and Gridthiya Gaweewong

23-24 Kelompok Bulaksumur (KBS) documents, Binal Eksperimental, Yogyakarta, 1992. Courtesy Indonesian Visual Art Archive, http://archive.ivaa-online.org/

Footnotes

[1] See “Proposal Binal”, no date. A scan of this document is available online at Indonesian Visual Art Archive (IVAA) along with many other materials relating to Binal, including archival documents, news articles, photographs and interviews with participants. See http://archive.ivaa-online.org/events/detail/362 (accessed 2021-05-03). In this essay we broadly follow the translations on the IVAA site, with some modifications. All other translations from Bahasa Indonesia by Grace Samboh. When abbreviating names in this text, we are following local naming conventions rather than a universal rule, which, in Thailand or Indonesia, often means using first names or nicknames. Any additional sense of informality this brings is welcomed. ↑

[2] Suyoto, Haryo Yose. In interview with Grace Samboh in the presence of Djaelani, 2009. ↑

[3] *Ibid.* ↑

[4] A 2018 video of Sekaten festivities at a glance, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NdB09QsSsPw&list=PLEa53MLpMHu1bt_JBcgglkw7F6c1Dv9yc (accessed 2021-05-03). ↑

[5] We could think of discussions around “exhibiting” performance, for example, at least since the 1970s, or exhibiting the “new art” of the 1960s, or sound, or film, or publishing, or various forms of process-based and “social” practices. Possibly, or ideally, most forms of artistic practice can present challenges for exhibition-making, in the sense that each case is different and there is no end to how things may become public. ↑

[6] Supangkat, Jim. “Gebu Yogya 1992”. *Tempo* magazine. 8 August 1992. p. 68. ↑

[7] Supangkat, quoted in Santora, Arief. “Jim Supangkat: Kasus BINAL, peluang emas bagi Yogya!”. *Kedaulatan Rakyat* newspaper. 18 August 1992. p. 8. ↑

[8] The Biennale Jogja is perhaps the most consistent regular exhibition event of its kind in Indonesia. The Jakarta Biennale started earlier but has been more irregular since its first edition in 1974 as the Grand Exhibition of Indonesian Painting (Pameran Besar Seni Lukis Indonesia). Beginning in 1983 as the Yogyakarta Painting Art Exhibition (Taman Budaya Yogyakarta), with three further annual editions in 1985–87, the regular exhibition in Jogja was reorganised under the leadership of Rob M. Mujiono and became the Yogyakarta Painting Biennale (Biennale Seni Lukis Yogyakarta) for its first edition in 1988. This iteration of the Biennale lasted two further editions, until the BINAL of 1992 threw it off-course. For more on the history of the Jogja biennale, see Samboh, Grace. “Biennale Jogja Dari Masa Ke Masa”. 15 February 2011. Available at https://www.biennalejogja.org/2011/tentang-kami/biennale-jogja-dari-masa-ke-masa/ (accessed 2021-05-03). ↑

[9] See “Proposal Binal”. ↑

[10] *Ibid.* ↑

[11] *Ibid.* ↑

[12] “Binal: Sebuah prolog untuk didiskusikan”. In *Tabloid Binal Eksperimental Arts 1992*, 27 July 1992, the “tabloid” newsprint publication produced to accompany Binal. Available at http://archive.ivaa-online.org/khazanahs/detail/98 (accessed 2021-05-03). ↑

[13] *Ibid.* ↑

[14] Various newspaper articles about the protest encampment are available at IVAA, see http://archive.ivaa-online.org/events/detail/542 (accessed 2021-05-03). ↑

[15] For instance, in interviews Grace Samboh with Athonk (Sapto Raharjo) and Brotoseno in 2009. ↑

[16] Khairani Barokka also notes the false universality, ableism and coloniality embedded in notions of “public”: “There are, within configurations in arts institutions of ‘public’ and ‘access’, genealogies of theft and genealogies of community that exist simultaneously and are framed in various ways. Due to the aforementioned complicity we all have in colonial capitalism, ongoing colonial violence is always part of the ‘public’, including an obscuring of genealogies of theft and of community by virtue of the ablenormativities of ‘public’ as well as that word’s relationship to ‘access’.” Barokka, Khairani. “‘Public’ and ‘Access’: Genealogies of Theft, Community, Violence and Pedagogies”. In *Art and its Worlds: Exhibitions, Institutions and Art Becoming Public*. Edited by Bo Choy, Charles Esche, David Morris and Lucy Steeds. London: Afterall Books. 2021. ↑

[17] See, among others, McGregor, Katherine E. *History in Uniform: Military Ideology and the Construction of Indonesia’s Past*. Singapore: NUS Press. 2007; Data, Pusat and Tempo, Analisa. *Dorr: Penembak Misterius (Petrus)*. Jakarta: TEMPO Publishing. 2019; Prasetyo, Stanley Yosep Adi. *Seputar Kedung Ombo*. Jakarta: Lembaga Studi dan Advokasi Masyarakat (ELSAM). 1994; Abd Rusly, H. and Yasin, R. (eds.). *MENUJU KEDAMAIAN NAN INDAH: Menelusuri Sejarah Berdarah Tanjung Priok Peristiwa 12 September 1984*. Jakarta: Yayasan Al-A’raaf. 2005. ↑

[18] The translated name for the Christian prophet Peter somewhat indicates its foreignness, or otherness. For more on this, see Ajidarma, Seno Gumira. *Penembak Misterius*. Jakarta: PT. Pustaka Utama Grafiti. 1993. ↑

[19] The station is located near the redundantly named monument Tugu; Tugu is a Sanskrit word, meaning monument, that has been absorbed by both Malay and Bahasa Indonesia. ↑

[20] Tommy Faisal Alim’s statement about the work reads: “When rumours spread that our art world is sickening, that it is experiencing back pain and heartache, as it has to befriend the evilness of Politics of the Elites… Departing from a deep sense of belonging, continued with endless conversations accompanied with never-ending pinches in one’s forehead, followed by an ethos of working together, finally these expressions are the result. These expressions are attempts in finding light where there is love. Where God must be at. Hopefully, we can offer you our sweetest smile that comes from our work in our ‘spare time’.” Published in the supplementary brochure of the works that were exhibited in Stasiun Tugu, “Kerja Seni Waktu Luang”. Available at http://archive.ivaa-online.org/khazanahs/detail/1783 (accessed 2021-05-04). ↑

[21] Interview Tommy Faisal Alim by Grace Samboh, 20 October 2009. Accessible in Indonesian Visual Art Archive (IVAA). ↑

[22] See Ruiz, Sandra and Vourloumis, Hypatia. *Formless Formation: Vignettes for the End of this World*. Colchester/New York, NY/Port Watson: Minor Compositions. 2021. p. 8 and p. 13. ↑

[23] While disavowing curatorial and authorial roles and functions, for instance, CMSI’s core organisers often described themselves in terms of friendship, see their 1995 statement of intent “7 Collective Principles from Friends”. For more on how “friendship” can operate in context-specific ways “beyond what was officially understood, taught, or predominantly exhibited”, see the exhibition project “Spirit of Friendship” (curated by Zoe Butt, Bill Nguyễn, Lê Thiên Bảo in 2017) and online resource, available at http://www.spiritoffriendship.org/ (accessed 2021-05-03). It is also interesting to consider the explicit positioning with and towards Southeast Asia by artists’ group Artists for Democracy, formed in the 1970s to give “material and cultural support to liberation movements worldwide”, and for whom solidarity festival-exhibitions were a central strategy. For some initial reflections on this, see Morris, David. “Artists for Democracy and the Vietnam festival (1975)”. Recording available at https://www.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/whats-on/forthcoming/potential-histories (accessed 2021-05-03). ↑

[24] Teh writes: “State institutions are subject to direct oversight and intervention. Censorship is common; self-censorship is endemic. Ministries are at least quite transparent in their allergies. The institutions themselves are perhaps more detrimental; they often intervene of their own accord and cannot be relied upon to defend artistic integrity.” See Teh, David. “Obstacles to Exhibition History: Institutions, Curatorship and the Undead Nation State”. In *The Curatorial Conundrum: What to Study? What to Research? What to Practice?* Edited by Paul O’Neill, Mick Wilson and Lucy Steeds. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016. pp. 26–38. ↑

[25] For more on the connections between Chiang Mai Social Installation, The Artists’ Village and Baguio Arts Festival, see Teh, David. “Chiang Mai Social Installation in Historical Perspective”. In *Artist-to-Artist: Independent Art Festivals in Chiang Mai 1992–98*. Edited by David Teh and David Morris. London: Afterall Books. 2018; Womanifesto has seen renewed attention and activity in recent years, with its archive now available at Asia Art Archive (https://aaa.org.hk/en/collections/search/archive/womanifesto-archive) and recent symposia and activities documented at https://blog.womanifesto.com/ and http://www.powerpublications.com.au/gender-in-se-asia/ (accessed 2021-05-03); histories of VIVA ExCon are documented in *VIVA ExCon, 1990–2016: The Community Archives Project*, a forthcoming publication project initiated by event co-founder Norberto “Peewee” Roldan. See also Choy, Bo. “Womanifesto” and Chương-Đài, Võ Hồng. “VIVA ExCon: Itinerant Indeterminacy”. Both in *Art and its Worlds: Exhibitions, Institutions and Art Becoming Public*. ↑

[26] See Green, Charles and Gardner, Anthony. “1989: Asian Biennalization”. In *Biennials, Triennials and Documenta: The Exhibitions that Created Contemporary* Art. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016. ↑

[27] De la Puente, Gabriella and Muhammad, Zarina. “What should an art festival look like?”. *The White Pube*, 3 March 2019, available at https://www.thewhitepube.co.uk/what-should-an-art-festival (accessed 2021-05-03). ↑

[28] More than twenty interviews with BINAL participants and enthusiasts were conducted in 2008-09 by IVAA’s researcher Pius Sigit Kuncoro and Grace Samboh as his assistant, but Yustina Neni was not in that