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**Asian Urbanisms and Mallness in
*Recording the Future***

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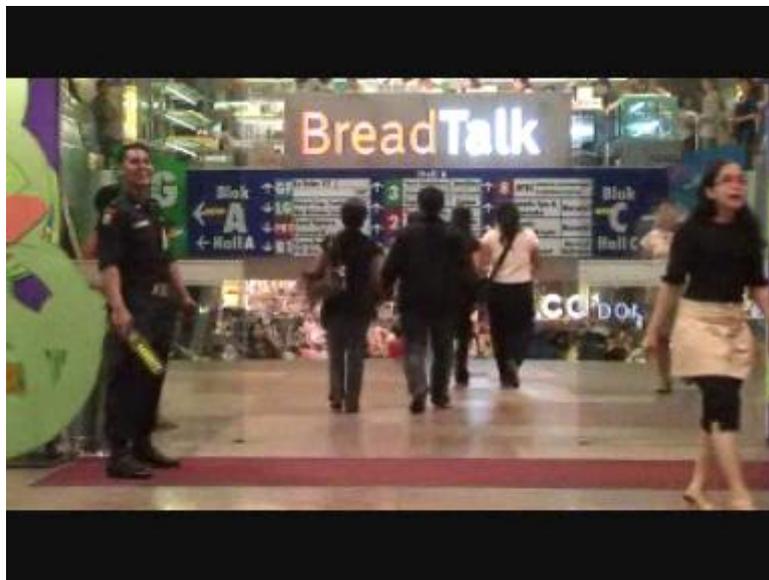
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Asian Urbanisms and Mallness in *Recording the Future*¹

The starting point for this article is a watching of KITLV², Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan (Indonesian Institute of Social Sciences) and Offstream³'s ongoing audio-visual archive, *Recording the Future*. I have divided it into three parts: a discussion of key issues in contemporary urban studies of Asian cities, a brief analysis of some of the textual - and authorial - practices of *RtF*, and finally, an application of the issues discussed in the first part to selected segments of *RtF* footage. A purpose of the article is to show how *RtF* footage – accessible through the website *Virtual Indonesia* – can be used as a starting point, reference point and stimulation for research. The footage documents changes, patterns, similarities and differences throughout the eight locations in Indonesia. I apply some of the reading practices (usually associated with literary texts and cinema studies) to this 500 hour audio-visual text.



Welcome to the Mall

RTF OVERVIEW

Recording the Future (RtF), a project started by KITLV in 2003, aims at documenting everyday life in Indonesia. The documentation is created through an audio-visual archive of everyday life in eight locations – ranging from Payakumbuh in West Sumatra to Ternate in Northern Moluccu.⁴ Up until 2011, around 500 hours of footage has been recorded. The footage consists of walks, river journeys,

¹ I would like to thank Dr.Fridus Steijlen, Prof.Henk Schulte Nordholt and Prof. Spyer for feedback on an earlier draft of this paper. I also thank the anonymous reviewer from Asia Research Institute.

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³ A film production firm, led by Lexy Rambadeta. See www.offstream.tv

⁴ Recordings have been made in the following locations: Delanggu and Jakarta (2003, 2007, 2011), Bintang and Payakumbuh (2004, 2008), Bittuang and Sintang (2005, 2009), Surabaya and Ternate (2006, 2010).

fixed points, interviews and drives. Some of this footage has been edited to make three films: *Don't Forget to Remember Me* (2008), *Being prominent in Indonesia: a day in the life of Ibu Mooryati* (2011) and *Performances of Authority* (2011).⁵ Shorter fragments of the footage have been edited to be published as clips on KITLV's You Tube channel.⁶ These clips, approximately five minutes in length, show small details cut from the footage and include clips on a gay community in Surabaya, soccer fans in Ternate, an ice-factory in Kawal, metal workers in Delanggu, a community in Kampung Melayu, and a *krupuk* (cracker) factory in Payakumbuh. Two articles have been published (2007 and 2008) and an exhibition has been held at the Tropenmuseum, in Amsterdam.⁷ Fridus Steijlen and others have participated in many workshops and presentations regarding the project in the Netherlands, Indonesia and elsewhere. Most recently, a workshop was organised at KITLV featuring scholars who related the project to varying trends in using audio-visual materials as research resources.

The recorded footage from the project is available through the website Virtual Indonesia.⁸ This website is a research tool, which is available to researchers who come to the KITLV with a research question. Until now, research through the Virtual Indonesia website can only be performed while being physically present at the KITLV library.⁹ For reasons of privacy – and protection of identities – material is not generally available. Material, however, can be viewed at research institutes such as LIPI and KITLV for research purposes.¹⁰ Virtual Indonesia classifies the footage through four main categorisations: place, year, theme (e.g. leisure, politics, religion) and type of recording.¹¹ Users of Virtual Indonesia can also search by in-putting keywords in combination with years, types, themes and locations. Upon performing a search, users are taken to a specific section of an hour long recording. At this section they will find the relevant clip, and also a written description of when and where the recording took place, who is in it, and a summary of what is discussed (if it is an interview or conversation) and what is evident in the recording. The written remarks in these tables frame the contents and suggest to users what is important in the footage. The footage is studied through a combination of intuition and keyword searches. The researcher's interests competes and differs with the interests of the camera-crew.

⁵ My review of *Don't Forget to Remember Me* can be found here:
<http://www.insideindonesia.org/stories/remembering-everyday-life-17121384>

My review of *Being prominent* and *Performances of Authority* can be found in the November 2011 edition of the IAS Newsletter.

⁶ <http://www.youtube.com/kitlvrtf>

⁷ A workshop will be held on 6-7th October, 2011 at KITLV.

⁸ <http://rtf.kitlv.nl>

⁹ Who are the researchers that have been using *RtF*?

¹⁰ The ethics and indeed the 'gaze' of the camera in *Recording the Future* is frequently questioned at conferences and workshops. Audience members often see it as a 'neo-colonialist' project. The camera crew's style (most of the footage I have watched was recorded by Lexy Rambadeta and Andre Triadiputra) is often confrontational and direct. This is a style that is not always appreciated by the people who are interviewed or filmed on the street. For more details on the ethics of the project and what has made it possible, see Nordholt and Steijlen (2007). The project is a joint venture between KITLV, LIPI and Offstream. It is a collaboration between Dutch and Indonesian researchers.

¹¹ Themes are: education, office, shopping street, healthcare, politics, sport, industry, religion, transportation, leisure time, school. Recording type: boat trip, extensive, interview, portrait, walk, drive, headlines, panorama, various, fix.

WRITING/IMAGERY

Part of the purpose my work with RtF was to see what I could do with the footage. This started from a homage to John Berger and Jean Mohr's exploration in their work, *Another Way of Telling* (1989). Berger and Mohr ask: 'what do photographs mean? How can they be used?', and, assert: 'a photograph is a meeting place where the interests of the photographer, the photographed, the viewer and those who are using the photograph are often contradictory' (Berger & Mohr, 1989, p.7). They state that such 'contradictions both hide and increase the natural ambiguity of the photographic image' (Berger & Mohr, 1989). Elsewhere, Sontag (Sontag, 1977) aligns the act of taking photographs with that of the flâneur, the urban stroller, who sets himself or herself apart from the crowd and records 'others'. The recording practice adopted by the RtF crew in the Mangga Dua Square is a case of flânerie par excellence. The crew walks casually and slowly through the mall, stopping here and there to consume the surrounding spectacles. The viewer and user of the RtF subsequently performs a similar kind of flânerie while watching the footage and indeed asking in the Bergerian manner: 'how can this footage be used?' How I have used the material is realised in this article and the related short film.

The technology of RtF provides possibilities for particular kinds of writing practices. As shown by Steijlen and Simandjuntak, the material can be used to make an argument concerning particular kinds of 'performances of authority' in contemporary Indonesia.¹² This is an argument that depends on the narrative techniques of visual signs and the editing of selected footage. Evidence is in the form of a moving image and quotations. This is not necessarily a 'new' practice, but, it is one that relates to the practices of collecting varying discursive fragments as exemplified in Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*. Mike Featherstone writes as follows:

Were Benjamin alive today, one can speculate that his project could be more fully realised through hypertext and multi-media. Hypertext could allow the cross-referenced jumps across the various sections (the street objects or the alphabetically listed chunks of the Arcades Project). Multimedia would allow a fuller range of materials: films, photographs, sounds, music, voice recordings to be placed alongside text. (Featherstone, 1998, p.910)

The audio-visual archive of RtF provides researchers with a range of possibilities in the writing and practice of research. Research can be presented through the complementary discourses of the visual with the written. Writers, as authors, can present their source material *within* the very document that presents their own analysis. Primary (audio-visual) material can be easily incorporated into an article or longer text that includes the researcher's analysis. Writers of an enhanced article can choose the length of their footage. Provided there is the necessary band-width, more time, doesn't necessarily take up more space. If it is possible for an article to host (incorporate) footage, there needn't be serious restrictions on the length of the clip. As such, the reader/user of the article can then decide for her/himself as to how much time they need to spend on watching the selected (edited or unedited) footage.

¹² Steijlen developed the idea for their film on 'performances of authority' while being in the field and doing the recordings. The film progressed by subsequently looking for other traces and practices of 'authority' throughout earlier recordings. The film crew didn't intentionally look for 'performances of authority', but they were instead revealed through their recording of everyday life in Indonesia. Authority was shown to be performed through architecture, body language, gesture and of course verbal statements. The camera also performed authority against the subjects it recorded.

These possibilities are a part of an 'audio-visual turn' in contemporary research and archival practices. Just as a scholar of literary or historical texts is able to incorporate primary material into an article, so can the scholar of visual material incorporate primary material into her or his article. Readers of the article may play, stop, pause and re-play the footage in accordance with their needs and wishes. Technological developments that allow for the inclusion of audio-visual material facilitate a kind of enhanced writing: a writing that allows for numerous kinds of discourses (visual, spoken, written) in a single text (article). The easy accessibility and recourse to the primary visual data allows the researcher to re-present the material from which her or his observations derive. Importantly, the author of an enhanced article doesn't need to describe (i.e. represent) through words what happens in a different media – i.e. that of the audio-visual.

A researcher is able to experience and engage with a 'virtual Indonesia' on a level that is not available through being physically present in Indonesia. The technology of the camera and the representation of the recorded material on Virtual Indonesia allows the researcher to skip, fast-forward, rewind, photograph and edit material from the archives. Repeated acts of watching and listening to the same material or scenes is not possible in the carrying out of everyday research. The researcher, potentially, can use the material to create an audio-visual analysis or article – as is seen in Steijlen's *Performances of Authority*. In such a documentary, the analysis and argument is present through the act of editing, rather than the literal narrative of the researcher. The author's voice is still evident in the documentary – however, it is a voice that is mediated through the statements made by the characters who appear in the documentary. The narrator's voice as such is deferred by a degree of separation. The viewer as the reader of the text thus gains the possibility to interpret the primary source material as she or he wishes and based on their own experience and perspective. This kind of openness in reading a research article is not so easily apparent in standard written scholarly articles. The more easily available the *RtF* material is, the more useful it will become for researchers.

Through using *RtF* as a research tool, we have the possibility to explore notions regarding what makes up research, what kinds of discursive practices contribute to research and knowledge. We also have the opportunity to engage with debates on the merits of written versus visual articles. Just as texts are opened to readings at different levels, so, writing, researching and production is also able to engage with varying kinds of production techniques. Just as the footage used in *The Maelstrom* relies upon knowledge of later events for their meaning, so, may knowledge of future events give a changed meaning to the scenes recorded in the *RtF* archives.

Chunkiness is a feature of *RtF*/Virtual Indonesia.¹³ Such a feature may also be reproduced in the kinds of writing produced based on or related to *RtF*. Featherstone (1998) writes that chunkiness, as opposed to a narrative flow, is a feature of Walter Benjamin's book, *The Arcades Project*. Chunks of writing, stand-alone paragraphs, rather than whole-pieces of writing that are based on an introduction, body and conclusion, are seemingly more of the times: a time in which experience is acknowledged to be fragmentary, dislocating and discombobulating. The contrast between chunkiness and smooth narrative construction is also evident in the varying film-making processes in *Performances of Authority* and *Being prominent in Indonesia*. In the case of *The Arcades Project*, the text is a city, Featherstone writes (1998, p.910). The text reproduces city-ness through its vast assemblage of 'hand-bills, tickets, photographs, advertisements, diaries, newspaper cuttings' (Featherstone, 1998, p.909). *RtF* has emerged at a time when the narratives of the Indonesian nation

¹³ Chunkiness, as a quality and writing technique, is also evident in the writings of Seno Gumira Ajidarma – such as his novel *Jazz, Parfum dan Insiden* and essays of *Kentut Kosmopolitan* and *affair*. Websites such as kunci.org.id and karbonjurnal.org also provide portraits of urban and contemporary cultural trends through chunky essays, chunky photographs and chunky opinion pieces.

are highly contested. Virtual Indonesia provides users with an opportunity to realise the multiplicity of voices that are a part of the everyday Indonesian nation. This is a democratisation of the process of constructing historical narratives.

Screens, however, are not a medium that are limited to the television or computer. Screens are a part of everyday urban life: where one sees advertisements, facades and signs. These screens are visual interventions – making statements of ideologies and values, they draw on memories and ambitions. The screens of the street (advertisements, political slogans) indeed could be subject to analysis. The street – and the mall - is also a site of chunkiness and fragmentation in which different signs are read. These are varying invitations, admonishments, warnings and invocations. While ‘street screens’ (advertisements and statements) are varied, the space of the mall is a space in which users are not only invited to consume, but also to perform different roles. Mall users as such are active, rather than be limited to being passive subjects of advertisements.

ASIAN URBANISMS

The street and street life has long been considered central to urban life. Street life is emblematic of urban conditions. It is a meeting point, a place of interchange and interaction in which many competing social and cultural interests converge. The street, as Barker argues, is the site par excellence for understanding the city. He writes:

The street is a social space with its own particular cast of characters, its own forms of social organization, and its own vernaculars. It is also the site of particular kinds of politics and forms of knowledge [...] Since the street often stands as a synecdoche for the city, a focus on the street serves much the same function as does the broader focus on city life: it provides a conceptual or empirical anchor for interdisciplinary conversations about the dynamics of modern public life (Barker, 2009, p.155).

In this article, however, I take the mall as being an emblematic urban space: it is a space that can be analysed in order to uncover some of the contemporary trajectories in Indonesian urban life. The mall is a useful tool for analysis, as it appears in the Jakartan cityscape as a distinct and discreet social space. Nonetheless, malls are spaces which are subject to penetrations and re-usings and re-shapings of their interiors to suit the desires, demands and practices of whoever enters the space. Malls, I argue through the example of footage from Mangga Dua Square – are not homogenising and hegemonic spaces that limit the development of interactions with others and assertions of identity. Malls are spaces in which users can claim, what Schulte Nordholt refers to as ‘cultural citizenship’ (Nordholt, 2011). Mall users perform and adopt varying lifestyle practices, engaging with others and having multi-sensory experiences which reflect trajectories in contemporary urban societies.

The camera records the activities of users of Mangga Dua Square; and, at the same time, the users record the presence of the camera through their various questions about the origins and purposes of the recording.¹⁴ The subjects or ‘characters’ who appear in the *RtF* footage at Mangga Dua Square as such, are not naive individuals who don’t consider how their image will be used: they speak to a particular imagined audience beyond the camera. As such, the camera records different kinds of

¹⁴ See for example, *A Day in the Life of a Mall*: a security guard asks, ‘which TV station are you from?’ At another moment, a high-school student asks, ‘what program is this for?’ There are other moments when a manager of a shop doesn’t permit the camera to record, unless they have permission from their central management.

speech acts: we see a woman talking with her friend who is the cameraman and we see others who speak of the mall in terms of an advertisement for the mall itself while also showing off their own expertise as mall users.¹⁵ The shopping mall is a site in which public life can be analysed. But it is a space that presents an intersection of competing public and private interests. Mangga Dua Square is an in-between space: somewhat closed and removed from the street, yet, similar to the street, it is a space which is used for movement, display, socialisation and routine, everyday tasks. It is a space of leisure (full of enjoyment and pleasure) and also a space of habit, utility and work. Marco Kusumawijaya, an architect and urban activist, has often lamented the lack of public space in Indonesian cities – primarily Jakarta (2004). Kusumawijaya argues that public space (referred to as *ruang khalayak*) was ‘emptied’ throughout the three decades of the New Order regime (2006, p.95). Kusumawijaya is also correct to argue that public space is not necessarily something that is universal and unproblematic, which he locates in Sennett’s arguments in *The Fall of Public Man* (Kusumawijaya, 2006, p.94). Kusumawijaya defines public space as being the place where ‘one can meet with others in a civilised manner ... where people do not force certain subjectivities onto others’ (Kusumawijaya, 2006, p.94).

Public space, as argued by Houssay-Holzschuch and Teppo, is defined by three conditions: it is a political space where public debate can take place; a legal space in which spaces are owned by public authorities; and thirdly, it is a social space in which people from different backgrounds meet and interact with each other (Houssay-Holzschuch & Teppo, 2009, p.353). In the case of Jakarta, van Leeuwen has observed that despite the proliferation of malls, most of them remain exclusive to ‘certain groups of society’ (Leeuwen, 2011, p.169). Exclusion could be justified by arguing that certain groups of people needed to be protected from feeling a sense of shame or embarrassment (Leeuwen, 2011, p.170). A privatisation of public space doesn’t necessarily always mean a concomitant decline in practices of place construction and identification (Hogan, Bunnell, Pow, Permanasari, & Morshidi, 2011; Voyce, 2006). Hogan et al, argue, in the case of Manila, that, ‘the middle class of Manila flock to Eastwood City every night of the week, exemplifying public life flourishing in privately owned spaces’ (Hogan, et al., 2011, p.3). In the case of a shopping mall in Sydney, Voyce - relying on Cybriwsky and others - has argued that ‘malls displace public space’ (Voyce, 2006, p.271).

RtF/Virtual Indonesia allows users to enter into debates regarding contemporary trends in Asian urbanisms. *RtF* footage not only relates to the discourses within the footage, but, also to discourses beyond the footage. In a recent article for *Cities* journal, Hogan and Bunnell et al critique some trends in scholarship on cities. Firstly, they argue against particular methodologies of case studies in which the example of one city is used to establish a paradigm that predicts developments for other cities. Case study analysis can have the faults of ‘synecdoche’ and ‘fetishized origins’ (Hogan, et al., 2011, p.1). Secondly, the authors counter the tendency to refer back to Los Angeles and Anglophone urban studies as being paradigmatic; instead they argue for ‘Asian urbanisms’ which incorporates, ‘intra-regional diversity within the context of global flows, regional policies, technology transfers, and inter-urban cultural traffic’ (Hogan, et al., 2011, p.2). Thirdly, the authors argue against the idea that a privatization of public space is something entirely new, originating from the west, and of a thoroughly de-politicising force that restricts the emergence of civil society. Hogan et al write that, ‘such origins [in this case Forbes Park in Manila] have often been ignored by urbanists who consider North American experiences as the leading edge of the urban change in the modern world rather than looking at cities in regional, historical and cultural comparisons’ (Hogan, et al., 2011, p.2). Finally, the authors argue against the dystopic Anglophone readings of the privatization of public

¹⁵ These examples are also found in my film, *A Day in the Life of a Mall*.

space.¹⁶ In regards to the public/private cross-over, they argue that, 'Asia is [...] a site of emergent urbanisms, involving novel combinations of public and private, which have progressive potential' (Hogan, et al., 2011, p.4).

Mangga Dua Square serves as a case study of some of the issues outlined in Hogan et al's article. Mangga Dua Square is a site of both 'privatization' and 'public' space. Through watching the *RtF* footage we seem to be seeing how mall-users negotiate space, claim and perform identities and engage in intimate, multi-sensory acts. The users of Mangga Dua Square don't seem to be disenfranchised, marginalised or oppressed by the presence of the mall. Instead, the mall seems to be offering a space in which particular social-cultural practices can be performed. Many users engage with its facilities in atmosphere reminiscent of Bakhtinian notions of the carnivalesque. While other users, visit the mall with an attitude that evokes the Benjaminian flâneur: these users parade themselves, while visually consuming the technologies, practices and habits of others. Mangga Dua Square serves as street, public garden, shopping centre, dance-hall, karaoke venue and restaurant. Users indeed are subject to varying forms of surveillance; the mall no doubt was built with the marginalisation of an urban community. These, however, are issues that are easily forgotten by Mangga Dua Squares users who visit the mall for both its necessary services as well as its places of entertainment. Mangga Dua Square, in contrast to the critiques of malls, is a site in which place is constructed and where communities and strangers both ignore and interact with each other.



Fancy Footwork

Malls, plazas and five-star hotels have become some of the urban landmarks of Indonesian cities – and most overwhelmingly, Jakarta. Cybriwsky writes, 'the major streets are a parade of new tall buildings one after the other [and...] large international hotels, major malls [...] and a full assortment of Western-import restaurants and nightclubs' (Cybriwsky & Ford, 2001, p.205). The construction of glamorous, exclusive shopping spaces was one of the trends of the Suharto-led New Order era and was continued under Sutiyoso's governorship of Jakarta (1997-2007). There seemed to be little

¹⁶ The authors write, 'even to speak of the privatization of cities in a neoliberal era is to presume their prior public nature (Hogan et al, p.3).'

regulation or consideration of where malls (plazas) were to be constructed. Shopping malls are built almost next to each other, forming complexes and new urban spaces. Visitors, almost as a rule, arrive at malls by taxi or personal vehicle, regardless of how close they live to the mall itself.¹⁷ Malls were favoured under the New Order regime for their contribution to Indonesia's economic development (which stalled violently in 1997). The malls, however, also created new classes of consumers and new social and behavioural practices. Van Leeuwen writes of how mall designers sought to educate lower-middle class visitors on how to use and behave appropriately in the shopping mall (Leeuwen, 2011). As such, shopping malls are not uniform 'upper middle-class' or 'middle-class' spaces, but, instead are spaces of diversity in which people identify themselves as belonging to a particular group and class others as belong to different groups. Postures, clothing, and subjects discussed are essential elements of behaving appropriately in a shopping mall (Leeuwen, 2011).

Malls, however, have come under criticism for their negative environmental impact. The traffic jams that lead slowly to their entrances and from their exits also further exacerbate Jakarta's traffic congestion (Cybriwsky & Ford, 2001, p.205). The malls, to some, are further signs of the extremes of Jakarta's (and perhaps Indonesia's more generally) social gaps: some visitors spend hundreds of dollars on a Gucci handbag¹⁸, while, others, who live in kampungs on the other side of a shopping mall's walls, may earn as little as 20 cents per day. That many shopping malls were looted and burnt down during the riots on 13-14th May 1998 supposedly showed further evidence that they are a site of jealousy and antagonism for Jakarta's poor.¹⁹ These supposedly spontaneous riots, however, have shown to be orchestrated events in which the military and security personnel encouraged looting to take place: exits were closed and malls were set on fire, trapping those inside in a macabre death (Leeuwen, 2011, pp.120-124). Significantly, van Leeuwen has also written of the looters' apparent indifferent attitude towards their stolen goods (Leeuwen, 2011).

Lea Jellinek's chapter, 'Jakarta, Indonesia: kampung culture or consumer culture?' (2000) presents a dichotomous condition that supposedly faced Indonesia at the end of the 1990s. That is, a choice between 'kampung culture' and 'consumer culture'. Jellinek argues that: 'Indonesia [...] has a chance to remember the social wealth of its value systems of sharing and caring and the wealth of its soil, assets that were being destroyed by an unrestrained economic development' (Jellinek, 2000, p.278). And earlier Jellinek condemns 'consumer culture' in the following manner:

The culture of conspicuous consumption bred a culture of want, of individualism, greed and dissatisfaction. One has to question its appropriateness for Indonesia, a country of 202 million people, most of whom are poor. The culture of conspicuous consumption meant that most of Indonesia's resources were being used by an unproductive, selfish minority instead of being shared with the more productive majority. Instead of focusing upon the difficult business of production and saving,

¹⁷ See Lizzy van Leeuwen, *Lost in Mall: An ethnography of middle-class Jakarta in the 1990s*, Leiden: KITLV Press. Van Leeuwen describes such a visit of a family spending an hour or so in a traffic jam, when the mall was a 10minute walk away from their home. The mall itself, however, is a place for strolling, sauntering and practicing some kind of flânerie: visitors show off their own style, consider the styles and habits of others and gaze into the many luxurious shops without necessarily venturing in or purchasing something.

¹⁸ Strolling and drinking coffee at the cafes, rather than buying, however, seems to be the main the main act performed within the 'elite' malls. Malls also offer access to varying degrees of authenticity of international brands. Some malls are home to a plentiful trade of pirated and 'fake' products.

¹⁹ A similar argument is being applied to the riots in London and other parts of England.

the elite were focusing on consumption and it was having a negative impact on Jakarta's environment (Jellinek, 2000, p.272).

The mall, by extension, is a part of Jellinek's critique – even though it is only referred to in passing. Malls, after all, are largely a product of Indonesia's New Order era; the era whose culture is criticised by Jellinek. The critical analysis offered by Jellinek offers an essentialised view of Indonesian culture – one that is rooted in traditionality and communal practices. I disagree, not only with this essentialism, but, also to what this essential 'Indonesia' might be. The imagined space of Indonesia has room for entrepreneurialism and consumer culture – with all the benefits and problems that they may engender. Indonesians don't need to 're-establish their own indigenous modes of living' (p.279) as many, no doubt, wouldn't recognise themselves in Jellinek's imagined Indonesian 'mode of living'. Perhaps even more would also prefer not to practice what Jellinek advocates.

MALL, MALLNESS

RtF's documentation of these practicings of everyday life complements to much of the recordings that draw attention to the everyday lives of the poor. As Nordholt and Steijlen have pointed out, it is seemingly much easier to gain access to the lives of the poor as much of their lives are lived openly and in public (Nordholt & Steijlen, 2007). The recordings in the shopping mall can also be compared against those made in markets and other 'shopping streets' such as in Pasar Baru (also in Jakarta). The mall recordings show that the malls are a *space of intimacy*: this contrasts with a pejorative and generalising view that malls are spaces of homogeneity, hegemonic commercialisation and sterility (Voyce, 2006). The shopping mall recordings also contain many encounters in which those who are recorded directly respond to the presence of the camera. In contrast to some of the reactions on the 'public spaces' of the street²⁰, mall users show themselves to be able to engage playfully and happily²¹ with the camera and to either carry on what they are doing or to provide detailed accounts and narratives of what they are doing in the mall. Rather than being places of indifference, emptiness and passiveness the mall is a space in which its users are actively and critically engaged.

The shopping mall is often derided for its supposed hegemonic assertion of the typical signifiers of global capitalism. It seems that for some, a shopping mall in Jakarta is the same as a shopping mall in the US or in Malaysia or in the Middle East. Shopping malls, some argue, displace, marginalise and deny the presence of local identities in place of national and international elites. The cultural practices created by shopping malls, however, cannot be reduced to this formula in which users are supposedly subjected to the overwhelming authority and determinacy of the mall. Mall users (visitors) create and practice their own cultures within the mall, making it a space and home for a diverse range of subcultures. They play, dance, adopt virtual identities, and go on dates with their partners. People of diverse ages, genders, ethnic and religious backgrounds participate in these subcultures – and at once deny claims to the singularity, homogeneity and sterility of shopping malls. The footage in the *RtF* archives of 'everyday life in a mall' is a series of distinct texts that provide a portrait of mall-life at a particular time and location: they are texts that can be compared with other footage of kinds of spaces in other locations and at other times.

²⁰ (see for example the confrontation in front of Megawati's in Jl.Teuku Umar, KITLV03_JKT003.wmv 38.56)

²¹ See for example the women who smile and pose at the camera while dancing together on one of the top-floors, and also the man who initially playfully rejects the camera while lying down using a massage-chair. His smiling and laughter overrides his initial hand gesture that seeks to reject the presence of the camera.

Malls are places for the shaping, re-shaping and negotiation of identities. A relatively quick viewing of footage from the shopping mall, shows how a mall is a space in which the body and bodily intimacies are important elements in the shaping and usage of space. Moreover, the mall provides an alternative space in which its users can create new identities for themselves. By participating in mall life, users can adopt new personages and thus the mall becomes a space that facilitates alterity as it allows for difference and a slippage of identities in which someone can become 'someone' else; or, at least, imagine themselves to be someone else. Footage taken from a karaoke and ballroom dancing section of the shopping mall is one such example. Here, mall users are able to participate in leisure practices in which they themselves are the star, the focus of attention. The singing of Mandarin language songs to an audience of (largely) Chinese-Indonesians also suggests not only an assertion of Chinese culture in public (something that was marginalised throughout the 32 year New Order era), but, also a desire to be amongst a group who share commonalities of language, background and social group. The mall, it seems, is one place where Chinese culture can be assertive. This footage from Mangga Dua Square, however, could also be compared with recordings from other malls which may or may not be more subdued in their representation and appropriation of symbolic Chineseness.²²



Mall Expert

Members of the audience take it in turns of being 'the performer' and 'the audience. Nonetheless, the very act of *being there*, is an active assertion of taste in cultural consumption and leisure activity. The dance floor in between the stage and the tables and chairs is a space in which mall users can engage in an activity that is intimate, of the body, and with various histories relating to the transmission of music and dance cultures. The ballroom dancing/karaoke section of the mall is a space in which mall users assert their own tastes and adopt fleeting identities. The mall users hold each other, embrace, move together, sing, sway rhythmically; they wear new clothes – adopting particular fashions, they make gestures, smile, get up when they like a song and sit down when they are tired from dancing or don't like a particular song. Dancing and singing karaoke are significant

²² In other malls in Jakarta, different cities are evoked through incorporating replicas of major urban landscapes from the US or the UK.

elements of cultural production and their performance (acting out) in a mall suggests that the mall is indeed a space in which local and individual identities can be lived out.

The video-game parlour is a contrasting - but related - example. Where dancing/karaoke is popular with an older group of participants (a result of music choices available?), the video-game parlour in the shopping mall is popular with teenagers who come by themselves and children who come to the parlour under the supervision of a parent or maid. The playing of video games offer mall users an opportunity to imagine themselves as the avatar of the video game they are playing and to control the actions of this imagined representation of the self. Mall users shoot with plastic guns at flashing, brightly lit-up screens; others use soft hammers to test their reflexes. *This is fun*: a practicing of leisure, a seeking of pleasure that is both contained within the shopping mall; contained within the games parlour and contained within the agreement of 'reality' established between the video game user and the video game itself. This is a space that is highly specialised, specific and although open to anyone, its pleasures are only accessible to those who invest it with particular meanings of reality and possibilities for pleasure. The video game parlour users shoot, hit, drive; pulling triggers, smashing with hammers and driving cars. The parlour even has its own economy where 'players' use their 'income' (earned through successful performance in a 'game') to buy toys and other objects. The better the performance, the greater the reward and thus a hierarchy is embodied through obtaining new and desirable material objects.



'We've got it under control.'

CONCLUSION

Mallness is a state that is created and facilitated by the particular social, cultural and political conditions of the urban shopping mall. It engenders particular ways looking, moving, engaging and disengaging. Mallness accommodates the pursuit of pleasure, the adopting and disavowal of identities. The mall is an in-between space within the long-established dichotomy of public/private: but, in this case, the private ownership of the mall does not preclude the expansion and expression of civil society or the attainment of cultural citizenship. The mall - a privately owned element of urban infrastructure - as argued by scholars such as Hogan et al (2011) and in another case by Kusno (2010), is a space in which mall users can perform a range of progressive subjectivities that are, at times, restricted or limited in other public (or semi-public) spaces of Jakarta. An imagining of

mallness, however, should not be limited to privileging the role and presence of consumers. Mall workers themselves actively create a sense of mallness: this is seen in the etiquette and humour of security guards who joke and make small-talk with passersby. These engagements show a sense of informality and acknowledgement of each-others roles.

I have used *RtF/Virtual Indonesia* as a research tool based on my own background in Indonesian literary and urban studies. KITLV's footage of shopping malls and urban life in general in Jakarta stimulated questions for my inquiries into everyday life in Indonesia. Throughout my research, I couldn't ignore the histories of the camera, and the traces of the projects' authors. I found myself struggling against the desires and framing of the camera crew and interviewer. At times, I found myself compromised by a lack of contextual knowledge about some of the recorded situations. Yet, at the same time, my perspective may also have been enriched or facilitated by my separation from the earlier moments of the project. An objective reading of the footage is not possible, but an 'enhanced subjectivity' may still be achieved.

RtF facilitates the production of research output in the form of audio-visual products. This is exemplified in Steijlen's *Performances of Authority*.²³ The possibility of making research articles through films is innovative and suggests a break from the pre-eminence of writing as the primary medium for research output. The difficult and time-consuming practices of film-making are becoming easier to learn and develop. Most researchers are presumably already au fait with the skills of editing, copying, cutting and pasting and narrative construction. These are skills that are easily transferrable from producing written articles to visual and moving-image articles. The production of 'films-as-articles', as suggested by Matthew Gandy (2009) also invokes the practice of collaboration. Clearly, there exists much opportunity for collaboration between film-makers, audio-visual researchers from inside and outside of KITLV to collaborate with each other. If granted permission, audio-visual artists may also use the footage to produce commentary that may also critique ways of seeing, reading and interpreting contemporary social, political and cultural shifts in Indonesia.

It is difficult to separate the project from questions of technology and practices of representation.²⁴ Just as with other texts, researchers using *RtF* cannot escape questions of interpretation. In the case of *RtF*, however, questions of interpretation and representation are manifold: we have to deal with the representation of the camera, of the interviewer and of the annotations that accompany the fragments of footage. Interpretive acts can be mediated by a comparison of footage with other written material. Researchers would also benefit from consulting the project's leaders as to what was occurring at the time of the material was being recorded.²⁵ *RtF* is a textual product that cannot be separated from the time and place of its various moments of creation. The most significant moment of creation, however, is when a user turns its footage into an audio-visual argument.

²³ Although some aspects of the film have been criticised by scholars such as Melani Budianta and Tan Sooi Beng, I argue that the film offers an example of how *RtF* footage can be re-mixed and re-used to suit research and argumentative purposes.

²⁴ I am somewhat sceptical about how long the project can continue in its current form. The strength and relevance of the project will lie in its ability to adapt, change and transform as new technological practices become available.

²⁵ Steijlen's notes regarding the *RtF* fieldtrips as such may prove most helpful to researchers.

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