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**Writing Jakarta in Seno Gumira Ajidarma's
*Kentut Kosmopolitan***

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Writing Jakarta in Seno Gumira Ajidarma's *Kentut Kosmopolitan*¹

These essays are an effort to be critical towards the world around me – that is, Jakarta – with the risk that this perspective will change (Ajidarma, 2008, p.vii).

The ordinary persons who use urban space from day to day imbue it with meaning and symbols, and have a strong sense of space (Colombijn, 2007, p.258).

Seno Gumira Ajidarma is one of Indonesia's most important and widely-read contemporary writers. He has published some 30 books that include novels, short stories, collections of essays, poetry and edited volumes. Seno has been active as a writer since the early-mid 1980s and he emerged as a prominent short story writer in a genre that has been described as *sastra koran* (newspaper literature). His short stories are often both documentations of everyday life as well as being critical of contemporary social, cultural and political conditions. Although there are some works that address Seno's short fiction and novels, there are yet to be any scholarly works that specifically study Seno's essays. This working paper is part of an effort to open up a discussion on the significance of Seno's essays as found in *Kentut Kosmopolitan* (Cosmopolitan Fart) (Ajidarma, 2008).

Seno's essays compiled in *Kentut Kosmopolitan* present a particular way of knowing Jakarta. In these essays, Jakarta is a site of contested urban meaning and interactions. Seno, through postmodernist observations, explores the manner in which power relations are formalised, strengthened and challenged. In this article, I show how Seno's essays in *Kentut Kosmopolitan* explore the dichotomies of 'formal' and 'informal' public space, global and local cultures and the borders of 'public' and 'private' space.

An important element of Seno's essays relates to notions of the *rakyat* (the people, common person) and the emerging middle classes. He shows how the 'powerless' – often identified as the *rakyat* create specific uses for space and their own meanings of the city. In these essays the *rakyat* are not presented as powerless and oppressed. Nor are the middle classes of Jakarta represented as being a homogenised class of people. Ideas regarding the middle classes and the *rakyat* are part of the process of establishing what is 'formal' and what is 'informal' space.

I explore the writings of *Kentut Kosmopolitan* as an individual collection it is the most recent collection of Seno's writings on Jakarta and as such provides readers with a direct insight into his perspective on contemporary Jakartan life. The essays included in the collection also address similar themes to those in some of his short stories and novels, but in these essays Seno explores those issues in a more overtly theoretical and self-reflexive manner.

The ideology of the city's landmarks has been explored in the works of Kusno (2000) and Permanasari (2007). Seno's essays in *Kentut Kosmopolitan*, on the other hand, look at the small and trivial aspects of daily life in the national capital. They relate to the scholarly interests of theorists such as Henri Lefebvre (1991) and Michel de Certeau (1988), who

¹ I thank Assoc.Pam Allen (University of Tasmania) for her comments on this Working Paper. I also thank Dr.Michelle Miller and an anonymous reviewer of Asian Research Institute at National University of Singapore.

explore how public space is reshaped and imagined through the ways it is used by the city's inhabitants. As Seno states in the quote above, the essays of *Kentut Kosmopolitan* are an attempt to understand 'the world around' him. This book – his second that deals explicitly with Jakarta, the other being *affair* (Ajidarma, 2004) - is a significant addition to the increasing number of contemporary texts that deal with Jakarta: a literary topic that is becoming increasingly diverse. Seno's essays are significant for they develop notions of the flâneur and flânerie as well as questioning, interrogating and negotiating the idea of public space. These elements of the essays lend themselves to an engagement with the writings of Walter Benjamin (1996), Richard Sennett (2002) and other critics of Indonesia's urban history such as Marco Kusumawijaya (2004), Peter Nas (2002) and Christopher Silver (2008).

The essays of *Kentut Kosmopolitan* provide a complementary perspective to other writings on Indonesian cities and Jakarta in particular. While part of the popular media, these essays offer a more nuanced perspective on Indonesian urban life than, for example, the official government promotional materials on Jakarta and the state ideology on Jakarta that posits the capital city as the hallmark of 'development' in Indonesia. Seno's essays also provide a philosophical study of urban life in contrast to the daily columns of 'crime' and 'metropolitan' found in newspapers such as *Kompas* or *Tempo* news magazine. Seno's essays are chronicles that indicate an author's response to the events and situations of which he is a part. Like Pramoedya's stories in *Tales from Djakarta*, these are also 'caricatures of circumstances and their human beings'. Yet, Seno views Jakarta in a somewhat more positive light than Pramoedya did.

The quote used at the beginning of this article is relevant for it refers to the elusiveness, flexibility and fluidity of Seno's identity as a writer. Seno, in this quote, acknowledges that his perspective on Jakarta is subject to change. His own flexibility and openness to a diversity of styles is also reflected in the multiple identities, spaces and meanings of the city of Jakarta – the city that he routinely occupies, but which he also habitually leaves. This flexibility and ambivalence is a typical characteristic of postmodernist cultural practices. Seno's postmodernist tendencies are reflected in the variety of forms and styles of his writing as well as in the variety of spaces, milieus and social, cultural and political spaces he occupies.

According to *The Lonely Planet*, Jakarta is 'filled with all the good and bad of Indonesian life'. The paragraph on Jakarta, however, merely emphasises what is 'bad' about the city. Readers are told that: 'Jakarta's infamous *macet* chokes its freeways, town planning is anathema and all attempts to forge a central focal point for the city have stuttered and ultimately failed. The first – or only – thought on most travellers' minds is how quickly the city and its polluted streets can be left behind.'² Such descriptions of Indonesian cities aimed at tourists, however, can be dismissed in the manner of Howard Dick who, in his book on Surabaya, stated that 'the perspective of the foreign tourist has no intrinsic merit' (2002, p.1). Yet, Seno's essays share some commonalities with the tourist's perspective, given that he remains, in various instances, an outsider within Jakarta. He is, after all, from the small Javanese city of Yogyakarta and is deeply influenced by its traditions. Seno is new to Jakarta and, like tourists and short-term visitors, experiences a newness and exoticness in the city.

² <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/indonesia/jakarta#>

On the other hand, Christopher Silver, an academic who has written a history of the planning of Jakarta, contrasts his first impressions with impressions he formed based on an understanding of Jakarta's history:

Jakarta, with its jumbling and chaotic urban activities seemed devoid of the basic elements of planning typically found in the West...[but it was] in many respects the outcome of carefully calculated planning interventions; a city where planning was an integral part of the apparatus of government management (Silver, 2008, p.2).

The essays *Puisi Jalan Tol* (Toll Road Poetry) (2008, pp.72-75), *Jakarta dan Ruang* (Jakarta and Space) (2008, pp.225-229) and *Jalan Tol* (Toll Road) (2008, pp.63-66), in *Kentut Kosmopolitan*, address the matter of planning and how some members of Jakartan society have their lives affected by government sponsored urban planning. Marco Kusumawijaya, an urban activist based in Jakarta, has also written of the problems of urban planning in Jakarta and, in particular, how it has favoured the creation of spaces for motor vehicles at the expense of pedestrians and bicycle users (2004). Kusumawijaya is the leading activist for creating a greener and more environmentally friendly Jakarta.³ The planning of Jakarta has increased the city's amenity and function, while at the same time displacing urban poor and isolating sections of the city's population. The essays of *Kentut Kosmopolitan* are part of the discourse that addresses the displacement of the urban poor as well as the ambivalent nature of development.

Ambivalent engagement with urban spaces and cities in Indonesia is also reflected in an observation of Pramoedya regarding both Surabaya and Medan, cities that produced a sensation of 'discomfort' in him. In a letter to one of his children, Pramoedya writes, 'I lived there [Surabaya] once, for quite some time...I can't say I like Surabaya very much. For me, it's a bit like Medan – I just don't feel comfortable there' (Toer, 2009, p.388). Through the essays of *Kentut Kosmopolitan*, it seems that Seno is making sense of his un-ease in the city. Through writing Seno formulates his 'sense' of what is going on around him. Writing is an act that allays a sense of un-ease.

Kentut Kosmopolitan is an attempt at going beyond just feeling a particular way about a city or environment; his essays are investigations and exploratory. Seno doesn't consider Jakarta as a place from which to escape (even if Jakartans themselves are often looking for escapes and retreats from daily urban life), but instead explores the manner in which Jakartans address the often harsh daily realities of Jakartan life. He shows how Jakartans adapt to their situation and make the most of their circumstances. Seno doesn't accept his immediate and intuitive reaction to the city. Instead, the city – and Jakarta in particular – is a site for intellectual, theoretical and writerly investigation.

³ See in particular Kusumawijaya's two websites: <http://rujak.org> and <http://mkusumawijaya.wordpress.org>

The essays in this collection were first published in *djakarta!: the city life magazine*⁴ between 2004 and 2008. Seno's essays published in *djakarta* stand in contrast to his series of essays for *Intisari*.⁵ This monthly magazine provides Seno with a forum for his writings on urban life. The audience for the magazine comprises young cosmopolitan Jakartan elites who are interested in lifestyle and who have time and money to spare. The taste of the audience is a hybrid of global and local interests: this audience consumes products that are globally available as well as those that are specifically Indonesian. Foreign popular culture is consumed alongside local culture. The essays in *djakarta* are generally less than 1,000 words in length. They sit amongst articles on where to get a good massage, where to eat the best kind of Italian or Japanese food and where the best cafes are in Jakarta or Bandung. The magazine, a large format glossy with thick paper, is a guide for urban living in twenty first century Jakarta. Seno provides readers with light theoretical essays with which to consider their context.

The style of the essays in *Kentut Kosmopolitan* shows Seno's skills as a journalist, academic researcher, short story writer, essayist and popular culture critic. Seno frequently draws on theory and philosophy to expose issues in contemporary urban society. The essays are sprinkled with references to de Saussure, Barthes, Appadurai, Althusser and Stuart Hall. Readers are introduced to the aforementioned philosophers and theorists in terms that are directly relevant to their socio-cultural situation. For example, *Jakarta Sebagai Teks* (Jakarta As a Text) (2008, pp.5-8) draws on de Saussure; *Uang Dengar* (Hearing Money) (2008, pp.67-71), *Udel Bodong* (Protruding Navel) (2008, pp.76-80) and *The Fashion System* (original title in English) (2008, pp.85-89) draw on Barthes; *Puisi Jalan Tol* (Toll Road Poetry) draws on the cultural studies work of Stuart Hall (2008, pp.72-75) and *Media, + &* refers to the work of Arjun Appadurai (2008, pp.81-84).

References to such theorists and academics who are known across broad areas of studies are intermingled amongst texts that repeatedly refer to local Jakartan and Indonesian cultural figures. These references include the comic book author Ganes Th in *Si Jampang dan Maskulinitas* (Jampang and Masculinity) (Ajidarma, 2008, pp.22-26), the essay "Kentut Kosmopolitan", which refers to the Javanese clown, Semar (name of a mythical Javanese character) (Ajidarma, 2008, pp.35-38) and *Menjadi Tua di Jakarta* (Becoming Old in Jakarta) which refers to the prominent modern Indonesian short story writer and playwright, Putu Wijaya (Ajidarma, 2008, pp.39-42). A reading of these essays requires a degree of flexibility in being able to make connections between theorists from outside Indonesia with examples of socio-cultural patterns in Indonesia. The essays are both *of* Indonesia and *of* theories and ideas from outside of Indonesia. Seno's writing style is questioning and provisional rather than assertive and declamatory. The essays are introductory, rather than sustained arguments about a particular subject. Seno explains that, 'I'm not exploring the art of writing in this book. But rather I'm offering the heat of an argumentative discussion in around 700 words' (Ajidarma, 2008, p.ix). Seno's essays are an act of creating a dialogue: they start a conversation with his unseen audience: an audience that is made up of young, cosmopolitan and educated urbanites.

⁴ As 'Jakarta' was written prior to a language policy implemented in 1972. The name of this magazine is written in the lower-case.

⁵ For example, in *Intisari*, Seno was able to present lengthier essays on subjects of his own choice. One of his notable series of essays were those on the Wali Songo – the nine saints credited with spreading Islam throughout Java - and his visits to their graves. These essays and the photographs that Seno took were to form the basis of his book, *Sembilan Wali & Siti Jenar*.

The essays of *Kentut Kosmopolitan* (and also Seno's earlier book, *affair*) are part of an increasing number of texts relating to the documentation and analysis of contemporary Jakartan life and urban conditions in Indonesia in general. These include *Jakarta: Metropolis Tunggang-Langgang* (Jakarta: Helter Skelter Metropolis) by Indonesian architect and city-culture commentator and activist Marco Kusumawijaya, and the more sensationalist novelistic reportage of Moammad Emka in his series of books *Jakarta Undercover*, which apparently uncover the sex habits of Jakartan yuppies in the late 1990s and 2000s. The cartoons featuring the two characters Benny and Mice – published weekly in *Kompas* newspaper – are also available as books and present a humorous perspective on the lives of two men who are ill at ease with Jakarta's modernity and cosmopolitanism. Books such as *The Food Travelers Guide: Romantic Places, Tempat-Tempat Makan Romantis di Jakarta* (Romantic Places to Eat in Jakarta) by Dewi Fita and Mala Aprilia and the 'urban' section in *Kompas* offer specific guides on how to live in urban Jakarta and how to enjoy the luxuries it offers. The intended readers of these books and sections of newspapers are middle-class, knowledgeable of life outside Indonesia and upwardly mobile. Such texts present their own imagining of what it means to be cosmopolitan and Jakartan.

Seno's essays are complemented by the activist oriented urban studies writings of Marco Kusumawijaya. Like Seno, Kusumawijaya shares an interest in the street, mall culture, *becaks* (trishaw), and politics of the city and daily urban life in Jakarta. Kusumawijaya's essays, nonetheless, differ in that they focus more on the failed aspects of planning in Jakarta. Moreover, Kusumawijaya frequently negatively compares the daily practices of Jakartans with those of urbanites in other cities in the world. He also draws on European and Western urban theory to describe the problems of Jakartan planning and life. His vocabulary incorporates many literal translations of English language terms. Rather than finding a discourse from within Jakarta and Indonesia itself to describe contemporary urban conditions in Indonesia, Kusumawijaya imposes a foreign urban pattern upon Jakarta. His approach seems to lack something – something that I seek to find through the writings of Seno Gumira Ajidarma. That is, a hybridisation of knowledge of urban theory with that of the daily practice of urban citizens. Seno's essays, unlike Kusumawijaya's, draw meanings from how urban citizens make sense of and adapt themselves to their conditions.

Jessica Champagne writes that the reality of Jakarta is in contrast to how it is imagined in nationalist representations of the city. She writes that Jakarta is generally imagined as the incarnation of nationalism and of modernity, rather than a city where tens of thousands of people make their homes beneath toll roads (Champagne, 2006, p.11). Through Seno's essays in *Kentut Kosmopolitan*, a perspective on Jakarta is shown where the lives of those who live under toll roads are disrupted by development. Their lives are depicted to be of significance to the historical reality of Jakarta. Seno considers the lives of people living under toll roads as integrated and meaningful, rather than something dispensable, moveable and subject to being ordered by a municipal or national government. The fate of urban *kampung*⁶ that have their land turned into toll roads is discussed in the essay *Jalan Tol* (Ajidarma, 2008, p.63-66).

⁶ Alan M. Stevens and A. Ed. Schmidgall-Tellings (in *A Comprehensive Indonesian – English Dictionary*, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2010) define *kampung* as: 1 a) a cluster of houses, hamlet, village or part of a village. b) a poor, semi-rural, village-like area in a town or city; (sometimes) shantytown. c) quarter, area, ward, administrative or otherwise, of a city. My use of *kampung* relates to definition 'b' and 'c'. This dictionary is available online at: <http://www.sealang.net/indonesia/dictionary.htm>

Seno describes the setting of a toll road under construction. He observes that the local residents of the *kampung* make use of the empty roads for themselves. The roads – which are not yet being used by vehicles – are the site for games of badminton, mothers taking their children for walks and for teenagers who, unhappy with their lives smoke marijuana, dye their hair, ride bicycles and have rings on all of their fingers (Ajidarma, 2008, pp.63-64). A toll road, Seno writes, ‘changes everything’ (Ajidarma, 2008, p.63 & p.65). Seno asks rhetorically why housing estates for the wealthy have not been cleared for the construction or extension of toll roads (Ajidarma, 2008, p.63). The poor, who live in informal communities, have their houses destroyed for infrastructure that they cannot use. The toll road under construction becomes a site for play for members of urban poor communities; upon its construction it is used by those with access to cars. Seno concludes that ‘toll roads are born from the ideology of efficiency’ (Ajidarma, 2008, p.66). Where one lives, Seno writes, is part of ‘identity’, and through the construction of a toll road, this identity is destroyed. Identity, however, is not part of the ideology of efficiency.

The *rakyat*, according to James Siegel, are ‘followers of a leader’. They are the audiences of political rallies and those who associate themselves with the nationalist movement (Siegel, 1998, p.3). Doreen Lee, on the other hand, states that the *rakyat* are ‘the common people...with overtones of their being poor and uneducated, but nonetheless remaining the good and moral citizens of the nation’ (Lee, 2007, p.1). Siegel and Lee’s observations are useful, for they show points of convergence and divergence with the manner in which Seno employs the figure of the *rakyat*. For Seno, the *rakyat* are not merely ‘followers of a leader’ and those identified with the nationalist movement, but are in control of their own fate – that is, they are able to determine their own course in life – and, this sometimes puts them at odds with the nationalist ideals of Jakarta’s city planners. In contrast to Lee’s observations, Seno’s *rakyat* rarely feature as being ‘good and moral’, but as citizens acting in their own best interests and often in an innovative manner. As such, they are not separate from the nation, or a group that blindly follows national political leaders, but are rather individuals with their own ideologies and their own interests that they seek to protect. The innovation is seen in their willingness to disobey standard traffic laws (Ajidarma, 2008, p.62).

These essays consider the *rakyat* sympathetically and at the same time remove the *rakyat* from a romantic imagination: they show that the *rakyat* are not a general floating mass, but individuals with their own needs, agendas and abilities to negotiate their lives in their particular contexts. At the conclusion of *The Motorcycle People* (original title in English), Seno writes: ‘for them, it is an impossibility that they put off their visit to grandma until they have enough money to buy a car or wait until the rules of road usage change’ (Ajidarma, 2008, p.62).

The concept of *rakyat* and their presence in the essays of *Kentut Kosmopolitan* is significant as they form part of the crowd in which the flâneur differentiates himself. The narrator is the flâneur; he looks and observes the others who are acting out their lives before him as a kind of spectacle.

The flâneur also, observes and comments on the actions, identity and behaviour of the crowd and masses. A flâneur is dependent on a separate and other *rakyat* for the feeling of being different from them. A flâneur, in the case of Seno’s essays in *Kentut Kosmopolitan*, also documents the activities of the *rakyat* through his writings. The crowd is a group from which the flâneur differentiates himself. They are caught up in daily life without being able to take a critical stance towards their surroundings or habits. The flâneur is a critical and detached

participant in daily urban life, while the crowd, the *rakyat*, are often imagined as uncritical participants. Seno's essays, on the other hand, point to the creativity and ingenuity of the *rakyat*.

KENTUT KOSMOPOLITAN STREETS

The street and ways of seeing that are facilitated by being in a vehicle is one of the concerns that links the essays of *Kentut Kosmopolitan*. The street is the realm of a flâneur and the place where the flâneur conducts his investigations⁷. Some of the key essays in *Kentut Kosmopolitan* that address the street, street life and negotiation include *Subuh* (Dawn) (Ajidarma, 2008, pp.99-102), *Jalan Tol* (Ajidarma, 2008, pp.63-67), *Puisi Jalan Tol* (Ajidarma, 2008, pp.72-75), "*Ojek Thamrin-Sudirman*" (Thamrin-Sudirman Motorcycle Taxis) (Ajidarma, 2008, pp.230-234) and "*The Story of Mister Cepek atawa Jalan Gronjal*" (The Story of Mister 100 Rupiah or the Bumpy Road) (Ajidarma, 2008, pp.13-16). Doreen Lee, writes that 'the conditions of the street have come to represent the city' (Lee, 2007, p.1). The street is also given strong emphasis in the writings of Nas and Pratiwo (2003) and also by postcolonial urban theorist Abidin Kusno (2000, 2003, 2009).

"*Subuh*", according to Seno, is a 'reflection from behind a taxi window' (Ajidarma, 2008, p.99). Dawn is the time of the first obligatory prayer according to Islamic orthodoxy, yet in this essay Seno offers a reflection on secular daily life in Jakarta. The author sees that the streets are already busy with people who are working and selling food at open-air markets. The author himself is in a taxi travelling towards the Jakarta airport at Cengkareng. Another quality of dawn is that the air is relatively clean. Seno asks at what time is Jakarta quiet and clean. His answer is before 4am, because by this time buses are already running and their smoke is already contributing to the air quality of Jakarta. The Jakartan *metro-minis* – city buses – are already waiting at bus stops and stations with their engines running while waiting for passengers.⁸ Jakarta at this time of day is a 'difference'. Seno writes:

In the context of Jakarta, the early morning is a difference. The roads are quiet and those who can be seen on the streets are a kind of people who are truly amazing in the struggle of life. If during rush hour when people leave for and return from the office (not the market, not the fields, not the forest and not the sea) what we see are robots, at 4 in the morning, I guarantee that you will see the heroes (*para pejuang*)⁹ (Ajidarma, 2008, p.100).

Yet, there is another kind of difference that exists in this essay. It is not only the difference that exists between the usual, ordinary, typical Jakarta typified by heat, population density and pollution, but also the difference between the narrator and the subjects he describes. The narrator is able to reflect; those he sees are not able to reflect: they work for a small amount of money and at great physical cost. The narrator is free to travel to other cities in Indonesia, while the workers he sees at the market are bound by their work conditions to follow the

⁷ An example of flânerie as artistic practice is seen in the work of Sophie Calle in Venice – in her work *Suite Venitienne* (1979). Calle follows a man known as 'Henri B.' through the streets of Venice, taking photographs of him.

⁸ This practice is known in the vernacular as 'ngetem'.

⁹ It is difficult to convey the positive connotations of this word. It contains the meanings of 'fighter', 'struggler' and 'hero' all at once. It is someone who struggles against an oppressive force in a heroic manner.

same patterns, day in, day out. Reflection is an act reserved for those who are able to have a privileged distance from their own condition. Although Seno empathises with the urban poor, his very act of empathising suggests his own position of distance.

Seno also identifies categories of urban citizens within his idea of difference. These are the differences of income, wealth and debt – or class. While moving through the city in a taxi at dawn he sees people setting up their stalls at a street market. ‘We will see people opening up sacks of coconut, lifting crates, throwing down bags. People who, even at this time of the day are already sweating’ (Ajidarma, 2008, p.100). He sees people who sleep amongst the fruit and vegetables they are selling. This private act becomes a spectacle for a flâneur author travelling in the relative luxury of a taxi on his way to an airport. (The narrator is aware of his position, as indicated in the following paragraph.) This leads to a reflection on the possibilities of making money from such work. He sees that these people may make only enough to buy food for their next meal. They do not earn enough to pay for insurance to protect them from any kind of accident. In contrast to these workers and the little money that they may have in their pockets, the narrator reminds readers of those who live luxuriously but are in great debt. The narrator, Seno, is at once sympathetic to those he sees around him – members of the crowd, the *rakyat* – while at the same time detached from them. He is able to give meaning to their situation and to contextualise the injustices regarding class and economic systems. He writes:

I often think of how absurd it is that a conglomerate who has trillions of rupiah in debt is able to live in a luxurious manner, while small traders who are just able to make enough to live on have to struggle for a living in the early hours of the morning (Ajidarma, 2008, p.101).

The narrator’s realisation of this discrepancy provides a moment of criticism of social injustices within daily Jakartan society. Dawn (*subuh*) offers a moment for an individual to become politically more aware – that is, aware of the suffering, plight and conditions of others. For the narrator, the moment is described as a ‘what if I were in that situation?’¹⁰ moment (Ajidarma, 2008, p.102). The narrator invites his readers to comprehend the social and political nature of the difference between the early morning and the daylight hours in Jakarta. He regards this moment as a potential spark for Jakartans to become politically aware. He writes: ‘in the quietude of the street, but within the spirit of the struggle of the urban poor, isn’t there the opportunity for Jakartans [‘homo Jakartensis’] to feel a degree of political engagement? Isn’t it possible for Jakartans to look out their window, to look at their fellow human beings and to discover a process of identification, as in what if I was in their place?’ (Ajidarma, 2008, p.102).

The narrator despairs at the disconnection between fellow human beings and the suffering that others experience. For the narrator, an example of this is not only the discrepancy between rich and poor within Jakarta itself, but is also evident in the disregard some have for the suffering of others, in the wake of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. The urban environment provides a context for the reflection on existentialist questions.

The narrator asks questions, but there are no answers – not at least in this format of the short essay. He points to the media for failing in its role to bring people closer together: ‘What is the process that has made human beings so numb to the suffering of others? Is it the media

¹⁰ Seandainya aku berada di tempat mereka?

that has served to enforce the gap between different people, rather than to create greater mutual understanding?’ (Ajidarma, 2008, p.102).

So, despite the author’s distance from the scene that he observes, dawn provides a moment for critical social observation and existential angst. In a similar manner, the narrator in *Puisi Jalan Tol* writes in search of poetry and a romantic sensibility derived from the experience of travelling along a toll road.¹¹ In this case, the narrator draws on an element of development and construction that is integral to the modernist ambitions of New Order Indonesia as part of the ideology of *pembangunan* (development – in terms of the imagined nation and the physical nation, evident in its infrastructure) (Heryanto, 1995). Development and its implications – dispersal of urban poor communities, suppression of political movements and opposition, murder of suspected criminals – has been a target of Seno’s politically motivated social criticism.

In *Puisi Jalan Tol*, however, Seno acknowledges the poetic potential of a toll road. This perspective is something that is offered in order to counter a common literary trope: in this case, Seno questions the dichotomy of the rural idyll with that of urban malaise by showing the poetic qualities of a toll road. Instead of using the calmness and tranquillity of an imagined rural space as the source for poetic inspiration, Seno alludes to engineering and infrastructure as possible sources for poetic reflection. Seno concludes *Puisi Jalan Tol* with the assertion that there is a degree of crossover between the aesthetics of poetry and urban infrastructure. He writes: “it is possible that within the conscience of builders of toll roads are the unrealised talents of a poet” (Ajidarma, 2008, p.75). Engineering and development provides some necessary infrastructure for poetic reflection.

The toll road – an elevated road that encircles Jakarta – allows for a privileged perspective on the city. The toll road is compared with another of Jakarta’s main roads – Jalan Sudirman. The narrator tells us: ‘if we are crawling along Sudirman (in a car), the sky is enclosed by multi-story buildings; but from the toll road, the buildings of the Golden Triangle take up only a small part of the sky’ (Ajidarma, 2008, p.73). The narrator asserts that poetry is everywhere. Seno, who is ever present as the narrator of the essays, asserts that: ‘the existence of a toll road is related to the political economy that is based on a particular ideology which is not necessarily related to poetry’ (Ajidarma, 2008, p.75). The toll road invites thoughts of function, engineering and development, while poetry reminds readers of reflection and solitude. The essay *Puisi Jalan Tol*, however, asserts that toll roads can be imagined poetically. The opportunity to write a ‘toll road poem’ is exclusive to those ‘only with the experience of using a car, one with air-conditioning and sound system – at least that is what I experienced’ (Ajidarma, 2008, p.73). By moving quickly along a toll road, in an isolated and private environment, Jakarta-which-is-so-annoying – but is now at a safe distance can become poetic: ‘in such a situation... Jakarta can be poetic’, the narrator asserts (Ajidarma, 2008, p.73).

Jakarta is not only made up of toll roads and protocol roads but also comprises minor roads and narrow lanes that pass through local communities and sometimes can only be traversed using a motorcycle or on foot, or, at the most, in a vehicle moving very slowly. Roads that are now being used for vehicular traffic were not designed for such purposes, but, given the

¹¹ The reliance on the theme of sunset (*senja*) is a familiar element for readers of short stories by Seno Gumira Ajidarma (see for example, *Sepotong Senja untuk Pacarku* (A Slice of Sunset for My Sweetheart), *Tujuan: Negeri Senja* (Destination: The Land of Sunset), *Negeri Senja* (The Land of Sunset))

development of many urban *kampungs* with lots being turned into apartments and *kosts*¹², some roads are becoming sources of new traffic jams. These roads, while becoming increasingly relied upon by new residents to get to and from work in relative comfort, maintain their local and specific qualities through the activities that take place on the narrow footpaths beside them. These footpaths are sometimes covered by overhanging shop rooves and also used as a site of trade by cigarette sellers and food hawkers. For an example of such a transition one may visit Setia Budi in Jakarta. The toll road is, arguably, a non-place through which vehicles pass (Augé, 1995; Bull, 2000). Car users engage with the city in a mediated and detached manner. Car users move through the toll road in an air-conditioned space – a space that has its own distinctive attributes - separate from those outside of the car. The toll road and not just the street becomes a place that can be appropriated into poetic imagination. The flâneur can be found in the non-place of a toll road, just as he can be found in a busy street.

In the essay *The Story of Mister Cepek atawa Jalan Gronjal* the narrator begins his reflection from the starting point of passing a connecting road. Seno writes, ‘more than ten years ago, I started passing through that road – a short cut which connects my housing complex with another housing complex. From that housing complex is a road which heads towards the city’ (Ajidarma, 2008, p.13). In Indonesian this is known as *jalan tembus*: a road breaks through and is used for taking shortcuts. The title of the essay appropriates informal language. The man who is given the name of ‘Mister Cepek’ has light skin, so, just as Caucasian men in Indonesia are often given the uniform title of ‘mister’, so, this man is given the name ‘mister’. As such, this word, borrowed from English, assumes a new meaning in its Jakartan context. The title of ‘mister’ assumes an irony in regards to notions of wealth and poverty. ‘Misters’ are assumed to be uniformly wealthy, while *cepek* – or Rp.100 – is the second lowest denomination of rupiah and is the denomination often handed out to beggars, street musicians or shoe shiners.

The *jalan tembus* provides a connection between the edge of Jakarta and the centre of the city. The kind of ‘penetration’ or ‘breaking through’ (*tembus*) also has a metaphorical resonance. The road breaks through the dichotomies of developed, undeveloped, informal and formal space. On the city’s outskirts, the narrator sees a Betawi¹³ community: a community that he says has been around since the days of Nyai Dasima¹⁴. Here, they still follow the traditions of Betawi culture: setting off fireworks in the morning to announce a wedding and the showing of Indian films on a public screen in the middle of a road or other kind of public space. It is through this community that some of Jakarta’s commuters pass on their way to work or the city centre in general. Here, at the city’s periphery, we can get a sense that Betawi culture too has been marginalised within the constructed image of Jakarta. It remains as something exotic, traditional and of-the-past, rather than an integrated element of Batavia/Djakarta/Jakarta’s

¹² Single bedroom apartments with shared kitchens often used by students.

¹³ The Betawi, or ‘*orang Betawi*’ are considered to be the ‘native population’ of Jakarta. Betawi culture is a hybrid culture. They are known to have strong faith in Islam. In terms of ethnicity, Betawi are a mixture of Indonesians, Arabs, Portuguese and Chinese. They speak a distinct language of their own which contains elements of Hokkien and Arabic. Writers such as S.M.Ardan and Firman Muntaco are Indonesian authors who have used Betawi language in their writings.

¹⁴ The main character from a novel of the same name, authored by Gijsbert Francis in 1896. The story is set in Batavia.

changing image.¹⁵ The seemingly stagnant nature of the Betawi community's traditions is contrasted with the rapid transition of Jakarta. The by-line of the essay emphasises this contrast with the seemingly bland statement, 'in Jakarta there are also some things which do not change' (Ajidarma, 2008, p.13). The narrator acknowledges the exoticism of his gaze:

Now, full of exotic feelings, I enjoy the view of seeing the Betawi population laying out lines of bananas on the table for the wedding celebrations. I start to doubt whether such traditions will and need to disappear (Ajidarma, 2008, p.14).

Jakarta, as a so-called 'megacity' (Silver, 2008) is shown to allow for inter-personal relations that are both familiar and casual. A case of informal interaction in this essay is that between the narrator and his interlocutor, Budi. The narrator met Budi when the latter was still young, when he was working on the street, directing traffic on the *jalan tembus*, which the narrator doesn't name – it is only known for being on the 'edge' (*pinggir*) of Jakarta. The narrator gives Budi a small amount of money for the role he plays in the maintenance and conducting of organised traffic flow along the particular *jalan tembus*. The role played by Budi and his cohorts is to guide vehicles through narrow roads that are often riddled with holes. The narrator discovers over time that, due to the worsening condition of the road, it is quicker to drive to another *jalan tembus* even if it is further. After a time, the narrator returns to the first *jalan tembus*, because his alternative route is now just as hole-ridden as the first one, with the added burden of being further away. The narrator identifies a consistency and stagnation between himself, the road and the people who collect money on the side of the road ostensibly to fund the road's improvement. The narrator writes:

The road that is being "repaired" is, after ten years, still full of holes, the young guys on the road are now grown up and now have new sidekicks. The Mister Cepeks haven't changed, and the holey road hasn't changed – it's just getting worse and worse. I haven't changed either: I'm still taking the same road. (Ajidarma, 2008, p.16).

The street is a key element in the writings of Seno Gumira Ajidarma. The street plays a role in the knowing of an urban environment in Indonesia and Jakarta in particular. Through the exploration of street life, street power relations and the manner in which the street is used, the author depicts an urban situation that is complex, dynamic and changing. It is not stagnant and merely subject to the designs of town planners and local government, but is a space that is re-created through daily use by urban Jakartans who negotiate the space of the street for their own purposes to suit their own needs. From the example above, it is seen that a street in disrepair can serve as a means for making money for its local residents, who take commissions from passing vehicles. The street is shown not to be an 'empty space' functioning only for the smooth flow of vehicles, people and goods, but is a space that has meaning for its users.

¹⁵ The name Batavia was used from the 17th century to 1942 with the Japanese occupation, when it was re-named as Djakarta. The 'perfected spelling system' of 1972 changed 'dj' to 'j' – and thus, Jakarta.

KENTUT KOSMOPOLITAN FLÂNERIE

From the street itself we now move to the figure of the flâneur and the act of flânerie. Urban streets are the realms of flâneurs who view the surroundings – buildings, commodities, the crowd - for their entertainment. They participate in urban life without becoming attached, without becoming affected and without becoming involved. Flâneurs, as such, embody an ironic urban sensibility. They do one thing, while disavowing the act at the same time. Interpreting the city, giving it meaning is arguably Seno's dominant literary theme. The act of interpreting the city and cosmopolitan urban life reflects his biography: someone who has come from (relatively) traditional Yogyakarta to cosmopolitan and metropolitan Jakarta. Flâneurs are a part of the urban landscape, through their sheer presence, yet they reject an active engagement with their surroundings. A typical example of a flâneur's engagement with urban life comes in the form of a *feuilleton*: short essays that appear periodically in a newspaper. These two words (*feuilleton* and flâneur) of French origin locate the history of the subject in Paris – a city *par excellence* for practising flânerie; the city in which Walter Benjamin compiled his unfinished book, *The Arcades Project* (Benjamin, 1999).

Seno uses and draws upon the city in varying ways. As well as being a flâneur, he also uses the flâneur in varying ways. Sometimes the flâneur is engaged, sometimes detached and at other times both. In essays such as *Puisi Jalan Tol* the degree of socio-cultural and political intervention is rather limited. As such, Seno's essays and writings in general maintain a degree of ambivalence: an attitude that is flexible and open to numerous perspectives.

The essays of *Kentut Kosmopolitan* continue the established tradition of the flâneur and also the manner of flânerie that is typically identified with nineteenth century Paris. Synonyms for flâneur include dandy, saunterer, wanderer, stroller, and idle man-about-town. Yet, because these synonyms do not capture the essence of this figure, the term flâneur has been adopted in English. The figure of the flâneur is often identified with the writings of Walter Benjamin (Benjamin, 1996, 1999, 2006), Charles Baudelaire, Edgar Allan Poe (for example, his short story *The Man of the Crowd*), Georg Simmel and Franz Hessel. In the words of Hessel, as quoted by Anke Gleber, to be a flâneur is to practice 'the art of taking a walk' (1999, p.vii). One of the questions posed in this article, though, is the degree to which the concept of flâneur is relevant to an understanding of contemporary urban practices and conditions in Indonesia. I argue that it is significant both in terms of understanding urban-ness and city-ness as well as Indonesian literature.

Gleber argues the case for the contemporary relevance of flânerie and the critical importance of the concept of the flâneur, by stating: 'it [flânerie] is connected to such contemporary issues as the interpretation of images, visual literacy, power and public space, the female gaze, and the cultural definition of identity' (1999, p.vii). In Indonesia, as elsewhere, the city is the site of intense contestation of identities. For it is in the city that we see negotiation of tradition and modernity, religion and secularity, tolerance and intolerance, freedom and oppression. Within this realm, it is the flâneur and, increasingly, the flâneuse, who negotiate these contested values and practices. The flâneur and flâneuse are of the time in which they live, yet they maintain a critical distance – operating on the border of observation and participation. The flâneur participates in daily life as an observer, participant and documenter. Literature – like other elements of popular culture – is one of the key sources for tracing definitions of the flâneur as well as the diverse ways in the urban environment is negotiated. The flâneur compiles his writings on urban life through short essays, literary works and cultural artifacts that address matters of urban life.

Articles by Lauster (2007) have questioned the validity of the Benjaminian concept of flâneur as aiding an understanding of the city, while elsewhere Featherstone has sought to broaden the definition of flâneur to include a range of practices beyond that of walking and engaging with the city (1998). In relation to Indonesia, contributions to the study and presence of flânerie and related practices have been made by Mrázek in his chapter on the ‘Indonesian Dandy’ (2002) as well as Paul Tickell’s translation and introduction to the short stories of Mas Marco Kartodikromo (1981). Mrázek writes of Mas Marco’s characters – in *Student Hijo*, for example – being able to enjoy a new kind of mobility and individuality. The characters of *Student Hijo* experience ‘*plesir*’ or ‘pleasure’: a result of a certain individual freedom and cosmopolitanism. Modernity, Mrázek writes, ‘[streams] into manners, looks, and fashion’ (2002, p.145). That is, ‘modernity’ is not limited to various technologies, but is also integrated into ways of interacting with others and of considering others and oneself. If the initial conceptions of the flâneur are identified with mid-nineteenth century European life and turn of the century colonial Indonesia, a new formulation of who and what a flâneur is and does can be conceived from Seno’s texts, making it relevant to contemporary Indonesia. Seno’s essays and writing practice present the case of a flâneur of postmodern times and postmodern cities, that is, of a postmodern flâneur and of postmodern flânerie. Flânerie, as such, serves as a flexible concept – although it speaks particularly of nineteenth century Paris, it maintains a relevance to urban conditions beyond its original application. A typical moment of mid-nineteenth century European flânerie is found in Allan Poe’s short story, *The Man of the Crowd*. The preposition ‘of’ is significant, for it differentiates the flâneur from ‘the men in the crowd’: i.e. those who are not aware of their own subjectivity within a mass of people. This is particularly differentiated in Seno’s short story, *Jakarta, Suatu Ketika*: where the flâneurist photographer takes photographs of rioters looting the unguarded shops of a lawless and dystopic Jakarta. Poe’s narrator in *The Man of the Crowd* describes his encounter with others as follows:

At first my observations took an abstract and generalizing turn. I looked at the passengers in masses, and thought of them in their aggregate relations. Soon, however, I descended to details, and regarded with minute interest the innumerable varieties of detail, dress, air, gait, visage, and expression of countenance (Poe, 1912, p.102).

The flâneur gazes upon the city for its attributes of spectacle, as shown clearly in Poe’s description above. The city and public spectacle and theatre have a close and direct relationship. This is typical of both Europe and Indonesia. Rudofsky writes of how early theatres were developed to mimic the environment of the street, while in contemporary Indonesia it is not difficult to come across public screenings of films, performances of *wayang* (shadow puppet) and of course wedding celebrations in temporarily closed-off streets. As Rudofsky writes, ‘the street is where the action is’ literally and figuratively. Rudofsky also points to the prominence of street scenes in Shakespeare’s plays (1969, p.132). To practice flânerie is to view the city for its sights, sounds and wonders.

The readers of Seno’s stories are those with time to spare and money to spend. The newspaper provides information on restaurants, nightclubs, spas, and fashion. Some who read it may well be flâneurs in waiting or indeed practising flâneurs. A key quality, however, of the flâneur or the flâneuse is that they are detached from their surroundings. The flâneur is detached, because engagement with urban life results in his consumption by that object. The flâneur must remain equally unstimulated or stimulated by all that surrounds him; passing

through the urban context in one seamless movement, observing all while never being wholly consumed by what he or she sees.

Howard Dick writes of the decline in opportunities for practising *flânerie* in Surabaya.¹⁶ He writes of the development of roads made for vehicles that create discomfort for an afternoon stroller. The transformation of a city in which walking gives way to driving is nostalgically captured by Dick:

Road widening and conversion to several lanes of one-way traffic has turned it [Tunjungan] into a speedway that is terrifying to cross, choked by exhaust fumes and with only a narrow alleyway for pedestrians. There is no longer any pleasure in strolling. Nor are the furniture shops, electronics shops, and automobile showrooms the kind of stores conducive to such a pastime. The situation became so bad that the Municipality examined ways to restore the character of the street, culminating in December 1994 in a trial closure to evening traffic, perhaps the first (momentary) setback that the motor car has suffered in Surabaya (Dick, 2002, p.13).

Contemporary Jakarta is also generally represented as being a city unfriendly to pedestrians. A 2009 essay in *IndoNews*¹⁷ presents Jakarta as a difficult city to negotiate for the foreigner. The view presents the uselessness of a map. The article demonstrates the difference between sensing space while moving through a city and the representation of space in a city map. This approach is curious because Walker sees his movement not in terms of where he has been or what he has seen, smelt and heard, but instead as to how far he has moved along a representation of the city in which he is moving. Walker writes:

After about an hour of tripping over uneven sidewalks and feeling like I was walking through soup, I happened upon a shopping mall, Senayan City. I went inside, grabbed a lemonade, sat down on a bench and opened my map. It turns out, after an hour-plus of walking, I had moved about one inch on this giant map (Walker, 2009, p.7).

What this passage does tell though, is that maps don't necessarily aid a pedestrian in Jakarta: and thus we need other modes of knowing Jakarta. And secondly, despite the environmental problems caused by malls, they can provide a respite to oppressive weather conditions allowing moments of escape from a reality of Jakarta. The question of 'what is the real Jakarta?' (Ajidarma, 2008, pp.239-243) is applicable in this instance: the Jakarta of shopping malls and plazas or the streets with uneven pavements? Seno, typically, does not attempt to answer the question 'what is the real Jakarta?' Instead, he argues against the imagining that there is a 'real' Jakarta. He argues this by showing the variety of 'real Jakartas'. To make a definite statement of what the 'real' Jakarta is, in the end, an act of exclusion.

¹⁶ On the other hand, Graham Robb writes that *flânerie* can also be performed in a traffic jam: 'they shared a certain Parisian *art de vivre*: sitting in traffic jams as a form of *flânerie*, parking illegally as a defence of personal liberty' (2010, p.5).

¹⁷ An on-line publication from the Asia Institute at The University of Melbourne, published between 2006 and 2009.

Flânerie, however, is something that need not be limited to the figure of a pedestrian. If we think more about what it means to practise flânerie, rather than delineating who a flâneur is, the definitions of flânerie may become broader. It is, I argue, a way of reading, a way of interpreting and a way of engaging with a broad range of phenomena. Flânerie can equally be performed at computer screen - browsing from blog to blog, chatting, watching, making, or in a taxi - going nowhere looking out and hearing the sounds of the taxi drivers communicating with one another or as an intellectual - moving from specialist to popular forums. To practice flânerie means to escape a definition, to refuse to be pinned down.

KENTUT KOSMOPOLITAN: URBAN MOVEMENTS

He was happy to be in his car. Sitting in the back, on one side, he smoked a cigar. The car moved smoothly, the day had become dark and the lights on the side of the road had been turned on. The air had started to cool. To calm his thoughts, his eyes looked left and right out the window (Pane, 2004, p.19).

So, I have tried to construct the ‘acrobat ideology’ based on the report from my own eyes. They do not perform their acrobatics in a self-aware manner, but they have to be acrobatic in order to exist (Ajidarma, 2008, p.60).

The two quotes above indicate different modes of engaging with the street. They suggest two kinds of urban citizen. The first, as appears in Pane’s 1938 novel *Belenggu* (Shackles), is someone who is in a privileged position. His mode of being keeps a distance or detachment between how he encounters the street and what he must experience. Karno enjoys a distance between ‘private’ and ‘public’ by virtue of the vehicle which he occupies. It moves along the streets and it is easy for him to see others, while he himself cannot necessarily clearly be seen by those he sees. The car affords Karno a degree of separation. Being removed from the action of the street, with its street traders, stalls, miscellaneous passersby, Karno becomes a kind of spectator who enjoys the performances of others.

The case of Karno is juxtaposed against Seno’s observation (taken from his essay, *The Motorcycle People*) to show how Seno’s own act of viewing sees ‘non-performers’ in terms of performance (Ajidarma, 2008, pp.59-62). Actions performed for their function are judged in terms of aesthetics. In this case, Seno’s questioning poses a problem as it harks back to Richard Sennett’s idea of ‘expression’ and the kinds of ‘expression...the human being [is] capable of in social relations’. Sennett asks: ‘when a man pays a stranger a compliment...does he act expressively in the way a stage actor acts?’ (Sennett, 2002, p.6). The different ways in which urban environments are negotiated are seen in Karno’s movement through the city, Seno’s example of ‘the motorcycle people’ and Sennett’s questioning of expression.

Analysing the enforcement and negotiation of boundaries between what is private and public is a means for understanding a society or culture. A culture or society can be measured, judged, critiqued or understood by the way it negotiates the concepts of public and private. However, these two words are not best understood as concepts with either fixed or vague definitions, but instead should be seen as becoming evident through practices or performance. Privacy is performed in one way in one particular place, and in another way somewhere else. Sennett claims that the downfall of the Roman Empire developed during a time when the

post-Augustan Romans became increasingly sceptical towards their public life. Romans questioned the values of ‘the formal obligations’ expected in public life (Sennett, 2002, p.3).

The notion of public is aligned with outwardness, action and others. Privacy on the other hand, can be related to inwardness, reflection and isolation. Being in public requires a negotiation of values with others: something is expressed in manners of speaking, dressing, eating etc. Privacy, it is presumed, is the space for oneself: where one needs to do less negotiating. The connected notions of privacy are intimately linked to conceptions of the human animal as being ‘individuals’: self-contained, unique, autonomous and someone who has certain inalienable rights. Zygmunt Bauman quotes de Tocqueville, who argued that ‘the individual is the citizen’s worst enemy’ (Bauman, 2008, p.107). This dichotomy can be applied to the concepts of public and private: a citizen privileges his or her subjectivity as being a part of a public; the individual on the other hand, asserts his or her right to his or her private domain at the expense of the public.

Cities are characterised, in part, by a competition for street space. It is a contestation between a public living on the one hand and a negotiation of the boundaries of private and privacy. The city is a place of rhythms: work, eating, recreation and transport usage. The city has daily, weekly, monthly and yearly rhythms. And in recent times in Jakarta, one of the beats in this rhythm is that of the flood. This pattern has been invoked in an advertisement for *Sampoerna A Mild* cigarettes, in their question: *banjir kok jadi tradisi?* (why have floods become a tradition?) The target audience of these advertisements are young and educated urban citizens who are able to pass a critical eye over the predicaments faced by their city (Jakarta).

The cigarette advertisements of Sampoerna, Djarum Super, Gudang Garam, LA Lights etc, are a part of the daily life of Jakartans, and Indonesians more generally throughout the archipelago. The advertisements play a role in constructing notions of escape, masculinity, exclusivity and adventure. Seno’s essays on urban life – those published in *djakarta!* – can be read as competing with other ways and methods of imagining the city and urban life. Cigarette advertisements that appear in the physical space of Jakarta (as well as throughout magazines read by Jakartans) present a counter discourse to that of Seno’s essays. Seno’s essays, rather than portraying the city as a site of turmoil and difficulty and as a place from which to escape, explore the manner in which the city is lived and given meaning to. Yet, both Seno’s essays and the vast array of cigarette advertisements throughout Jakarta form a part of daily urban life and are consumed as products of contemporary popular culture.

It is also possible to make a comparison between the ways in which Jakarta is re-created through such medias as the aforementioned *djakarta*, *Kompas*, *Republika* and *The Jakarta Post*. For perhaps a more antagonistic view of urban life, one could also consider conservative Islamic magazines such as *Sabili*, which assert that Jakarta (as well as other Indonesian cities) is a place of moral decay, lawlessness and irreverence.

The ways in which methods of public transport are used throughout Jakarta and other densely populated urban environments are an important aspect of the negotiation of urban space. Each method of moving through the city has its own attendant ways of looking, socialising and interacting with public space. At the same time, each kind of transport has its own economy: both in terms of time as well as cost. The most expensive modes of transport are not always the quickest. Many of Seno’s writings address issues related to public transport. This is seen in his short stories such as *Seorang Wanita di Halte Bis* (Woman at a Bus Stop) (1993, pp.91-

99), *Taxi Blues* (original title in English) (1999, pp.39-51) or *Becak Terakhir di Dunia (atawa Rambo)* (The Last Becak in the World (or Rambo)) (1993, pp.51-61). Throughout *Kentut Kosmopolitan*, Seno frequently notes the behaviour of Jakarta's urban citizens as they make use of or disregard certain kinds of public transport.

Marco Kusumawijaya has stated that the private car is the least ethical mode of transport within Jakarta. This is due to the space that it takes up – for the movement of only one person – and the discomfort it causes for others by virtue of the pollution it creates. From any time spent in Jakarta it is immediately apparent that the city is overwhelmed with an abundance of private vehicles. In policies similar to those that seek to limit the population growth of Jakarta, the city government of Jakarta and its police frequently assert (yet fail to implement) policies to restrict the Jakartan roads to cars only with Jakarta-registered number plates. The requirement to have three or more passengers in one vehicle at certain times of the day along certain streets is also overcome – with varying degrees of success – by the emergence of *ojek orang*. These are people who, for a small tip, make themselves available as passengers in vehicles that pass through the 'three in one' streets of Jakarta¹⁸. From my fieldwork in Jakarta in November 2008, it seems as if more and more *ojek orang* are women who are wearing a *jilbab* (head scarf) and carrying a baby with them. It is possible that the *jilbab* is used as a symbol of respect and trustworthiness, while the appropriation of a baby may be used to evoke a sense of sympathy from prospective clients.

Richard Sennett also views the private automobile in a negative manner. He sees it as being removed from city life, while at the same time seeking to conquer city life. In *The Fall of Public Man*, Sennett argues that:

One does not use one's car to see the city; the automobile is not a vehicle for touring... The car instead gives freedom of movement; one can travel uninhibited by formal stops, as in the subway, or elevated to pedestrian movement, in making a journey from place A to place B. the city street acquires, then, a peculiar function – to permit motion; if it regulates motion too much, by lights, one-ways, and the like, motorists become nervous or angry (2002, p.14).

Sennett's awareness of the 'fall of public man' foresees many recent ideas that seek to reclaim the streets as places for pedestrians and less orderly modes of interaction (such as *bemos*, (small vans used for public transport) *becaks*, *ojeks*). On the other hand, the urban policies of city governments in Jakarta continue to develop measures that aim to broaden streets and to facilitate the ease of vehicular traffic.

Public space is that where individuals can engage with 'the other' on an equal footing. In January 2009 *Kompas* newspaper reported a recent practice in Jakarta of changing office hours in order to make workers use their cars at earlier hours so that the traffic jams are not so severe (*Kompas*). The car mediates the space of the city. The air-conditioned space of the car becomes yet another 'non-place' (Bull, 2000). Sennett argues as follows: 'we take unrestricted motion of the individual to be an absolute right, and the effect on public space, especially the space of the urban street, is that the space becomes meaningless or even maddening unless it can be subordinated to free movement' (Sennett, 2002, p.14). Cars are a means of overcoming the constraints of geography. Geography, as such is something that is to be overcome rather than to be aware of and to be engaged with.

¹⁸ During peak hour, some roads are limited to vehicles carrying three people.

A kind of disorder is present when city users act, move and exist beyond the imaginations, controls and reaches of urban planners and law enforcers. ‘Disorder’ is that which is imagined as an ideal state – or rather, process – in Richard Sennett’s book, *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life* (1971). In this text, Sennett argues against the overwhelming totalising tendencies of urban planning. He argues that much urban planning leaves no space for agency from urban subjects. Sennett writes that man is subordinated to becoming a part of a machine whose purpose is to create a coherence. Thus, this machine must eliminate the parts that create conflict and pain. The problem with this is that the experience and lives of the agents involved in this city – imagined-as-machine – are ‘taken to be less important than the creation of community that is conflict free’ (Sennett, 1971, p.97). Furthermore, Sennett indicts planning of cities for in the plans ‘there is no provision for the fact of history, for the unintended, for the contradictory, for the unknown’ (1971, p.99). Christopher Silver’s history on the planning of Jakarta (*Planning the Megacity* – written 30 years later than Sennett’s) is an example of the text that Sennett criticised. Silver writes his history of planning Jakarta with a focused criticism of how Jakarta was planned, but without applying the lessons that have been garnered from the ‘unintended...the contradictory...the unknown’.

One of the manifestations of disorder is the phenomenon of the *ojek* and the profession of being a *tukang ojek*. The word *tukang* refers to a ‘skilled labourer or craftsman’ as well as ‘one who has the bad habit of doing something (Echols & Shadily, 1990, p.590). Examples of the crafts performed by *tukang* include a *tukang besi* (blacksmith) and the ignoble *tukang jambret* (purse snatcher). Those with bad habits can be identified as being *tukang bohong* (liars), *tukang bonceng* (spongers) or a *tukang ngacau* (trouble maker) among other examples.

In my sense of *tukang ojek*, *tukang* carries elements of both definitions as provided by Echols and Shadily. A *tukang ojek* is a craftsman in the sense that he has skilled and specialist knowledge of his profession. He has skills that can only be refined through practice (and indeed, performance). These are the skills of memorising the streets of his locality (generally unmapped and often irregularly numbered), being able to ride a motorcycle through streets with all sorts of motorised and non-motorised traffic, and being able to determine which roads should be used at which times. Unlike the typical ‘craftsman’ though, the *tukang ojek* operates outside: a locality becomes his workshop, his motorbike, memory and intuition his only tools¹⁹. On the other hand, the more negative qualities possibly associated with the *tukang ojek* is that such a person performs such a job either because he cannot find a job in the formal sector or indeed because there are too few available. (The number of *tukang ojek* that line Jakarta’s streets could be the closest and most immediate indicator of the rate of unemployment in Indonesia.) It is also necessary to remember that the user of the services provided by *tukang ojek*s also requires a certain amount of skill. He or she needs to know when is the best time to use one (speed over comfort), where to use one (is the *tukang ojek* trustworthy?) and what other options of transport are available.

¹⁹ See Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), p.19: ‘the craftsman summons an immediate image. Peering through a window into a carpenter’s shop, you see inside an elderly man surrounded by his apprentices and his tools. Order reigns within, parts of chairs are clamped neatly together, the fresh smell of wood shavings fills the room, the carpenter bends over his bench to make a fine incision for marquetry. The shop is menaced by a furniture factory down the road.’

Seno reflects on the position of the *tukang ojek* in his essay *Ojek Sudirman-Thamrin* (2008, pp.230-234), which he wrote while in Paris. The essay starts with another bland observation: ‘There are no *ojeks* in Paris’ (Ajidarma, 2008, p.230). Paris is also used as a point of comparison in an earlier essay, “*Kota Tanpa Tukang Parkir*” (City without Parking Attendants) (Ajidarma, 2008, pp.175-178). What is significant for the narrator in this case is that those who are marginalised through lack of work and thus seek informal work as parking attendants re-enforce the identification of middle class car owners who identify their self-respect with the lack-of-scratches along the bumper-bars of their vehicles. Both the *tukang ojek* and the *tukang parkir* play important roles in the traffic infrastructure of Jakarta. The narrator with his postcolonial gaze sees Paris not only for what it has, but what it lacks. As such the narrator privileges his supposedly marginal and peripheral perspective over that of an established metropolitan centre. The narrator sees Parisians as urban citizens who are under the hegemony of the ideology that it is good to walk. Thus people eat, kiss and read while walking. But, in Jakarta, *ojeks* exist because ‘people need them’. They exist without propaganda and promotion. The priority of the *tukang ojek* is to make enough food to be able to eat, while the priority of the user is to reach his or her destination as quickly as possible. For the narrator, ‘this is the ideology of *ojek* discourse’ (Ajidarma, 2008, p.233).

Seno’s voice as narrator of this story comes through clearly. He mentions his weekly writing of a serial for the Semarang-based newspaper, *Suara Merdeka* (Independent Voice). The narrator is reminded of the *tukang ojek* of two of Jakarta’s main roads, Thamrin and Sudirman, through the representation of a map. This map of a small part of Jakarta is on the author’s wall and is designed as a guide to show where the *ojeks* of Thamrin and Sudirman are located. The narrator describes *ojeks* as being part of ‘what is seen in Jakarta but is not noted down’ (Ajidarma, 2008, p.230). Such a map is a significant intervention into the standard street-mapping of Jakarta as described in Cairns (2006). It would also provide a complement to the experience of being in Jakarta and thus more negotiable to newcomers and outsiders. The ambivalence of the *ojek* is outlined by Seno as follows:

In reality the presence of *ojeks* is something special. Taking an *ojek* can be expensive, so, in some cases one is better off taking a taxi. So, *ojeks* are not always only a kind of transport for the lower classes, but also a means of transport that is efficient, quick, precise and sharp –exactly what is needed by the metropolitan citizens who need everything to be done quickly (Ajidarma, 2008, p.232).

Ojeks, and the service provided by *ojeks*, are a kind of informal public transport: users negotiate the price in accordance with the distance travelled and the destination. *Ojek* drivers are largely from rural areas and are unemployed: having the facility of a motorbike allows an *ojek* driver the possibility of a daily source of income. *Ojek* drivers have their own knowledge of the city: a knowledge that doesn’t depend on maps but extends to the alleys and *kampung*s – areas that have been targeted by Jakarta’s governors, such as Sutiyoso.

The availability and presence of the service of an *ojek*, is significant as it allows for an intimate knowing of urban space. *Ojek* drivers are able to move through the city in a quick, flexible and nimble manner. *Ojek* drivers are able to avoid the ‘rules’ that are established in the ordering of public space. *Ojek* drivers and their passengers maintain a degree of sensorial engagement with the city: they maintain contact with the air, sounds and textures of Jakartan urban life. Moreover, *ojek* drivers – largely members of the displaced urban-poor - provide a

service that is essential to the lives of members of the middle classes and upwardly mobile Jakartans.

SPACE AND PLACE, CITYSCAPE AND CITYSPACE

Kentut Kosmopolitan addresses problems of space. Seno, in this case as essayist, interprets the way in which different members of urban communities use and appropriate public space. Space, in the words of Lefebvre, is subject to the processes of 'production'. 'Space' is created through processes of practice, representation, and signification (Schmid, 2008, pp.36-37). The first of these aspects refers to the 'material dimensions of social activity and interaction'. The second refers to representations of space 'which give an image and thus also define a space'. The third, that of 'spaces of representation', 'concerns the symbolic dimension of space...[which may be a] divine power, the logos, the state, masculine or feminine principle, and so on' (Schmid, 2008, pp.36-37). In a Jakarta shaped largely by New Order and post-New Order urban policies that favoured elites and those that benefited from 'development', Seno interrogates the methods by which ordinary citizens re-negotiate their public space, whether it be 'civic' or otherwise. Inhabitants of the city, who have their houses destroyed for the building of a toll-road, for example, re-claim the space of the incomplete toll-road by using it as a space for play, socialisation and relaxation.

The New Order (*Orde Baru*) government of Suharto (1966-1998) developed and practised an ideology of formalising, limiting and controlling public space. 'Order' in the government-speak of the Suharto governments could cover meanings such as *keteraturan* (order), *pengaturan* (regulation of), *pembersihan* (cleaning up) and *pembasmian* (eradication). That is, elements of urban society had to be 'neatened up', 'made to fall into line', 'cleaned up' and 'wiped out'. For example, footpaths and traffic needed to become orderly, the roads need to be cleared of 'two-wheeled vehicles' and prostitutes who operated in undesignated areas needed to be wiped out (that is, moved on to the 'designated areas'). Merlyna Lim describes the efforts of Ali Sadikin during the 1970s to change the image of Jakarta by building new roads, bridges, schools and hospitals. But, he, "also took cruel and much criticized measures to eliminate the "eyesore" of street peddlers and *becak* from central areas and declared Jakarta as a closed city to immigrants" (Lim, 2008, p.217).

Lim shows that the infrastructure of new roads and bridges creates a displacement of traffic and citizens who require roads that can be used in flexible ways by various means of transport. The removal of *becaks* from Jakarta's city-scape is also parodied in Seno's short story, *Becak Terakhir di Dunia (atawa Rambo)* (Ajidarma, 1993, pp.51-61). Seno creates a dialogue with contemporary political discourse on who has 'rights' to the city and urban space. Sadikin's policies have been continued and strengthened through the governorship of Sutiyoso in the 1990s and 2000s.

Lim's overview emphasises the conflation of cleaning up the city (ridding it of unwanted like *becak* drivers) and providing newer and better facilities for personal health. Lim goes on to write that:

While cleaning the city from *becak* can be seen as one of some ways to provide more space for modern public transportation, it can also be read as a way to cleanse Jakarta from any symbol of backwardness and poverty. Operating *becak* had come to be regarded as a dead-end occupation for males

in the same way that prostitution has been viewed for females in Indonesia...The “Free from *Becak*” operation continued to be a main issue in each development phase of Jakarta and became a part of Suharto’s politics of marginalization during the New Order era (Lim, 2008, p.217).

It is still common to find *becak* on the outskirts of Jakarta. Furthermore, contemporary reports in *Kompas* and other newspapers also frequently state how current city administrations have enforced new measures to prevent domestic migrants moving from the city. The failure of the government is evidenced by the lack of other jobs available for urban men. The *becaks* may have been wiped out but *ojek* services continue to proliferate. The *ojek*, at least for the time being, seem to be tolerated as a more city-friendly means of transport. As far as I am aware, there are yet to be campaigns to wipe out *ojek* services. This is despite the fact that they operate in a similar manner to that of the formerly despised *becak*. The *ojek* operates as an informal kind of employment for urban men. The *tukang ojek* – those who take passengers by motorcycle – whom I have met and socialised with throughout my past three visits to Jakarta²⁰ frequently tell me of their frustration at having to work as *ojek* drivers. These drivers recognise that they are member of the ‘urban fringe’ and feel disempowered by the lack of economic stability.

Urban experience is fragmentary and the manner in which Seno approaches urban experience is also fragmented. This element of Seno’s writing reflects his postmodernist tendency to regard reality as fragmented rather than as something unified, coherent and total.

The city and urban life in general, Sennett argues, provides a necessary condition for an ‘adult experience of freedom’ (2000, p.71). He argues that to be lost amongst a crowd and to feel isolated in a crowd, allows for hybridity. This is defined as being ‘a mixture of social elements beyond any single definition of self’ (Sennett, 2000, p.70). Elsewhere, Rudofsky argues for a kind of European-style street-life in opposition to the disregard for streets and under-appreciation of streets in North American culture. In the U.S., Rudofsky finds that ‘the streets of this country simply have too many unpleasant connotations to be popular – filth, soot, stenches, an absence of shade and shelter; hold-ups, murder, riots, parades, traffic lights ordering one to Stop, Wait, and Walk’ (1969, p.16). A similar case could and is often made against the cities of Indonesia and Jakarta in particular.

CONCLUSION

Similarly with Seno’s literary fiction, the essays of *Kentut Kosmopolitan*, like a flâneur, explore Jakarta’s cityscape, space and urban condition. The essays negotiate and interpret the meanings of urban life in Indonesia. The flâneur and the practice of flânerie is a vital part of *Kentut Kosmopolitan*. Seno shows that the flâneur is a flexible figure who is able to assume different roles. Moreover, the flâneur is present in contemporary Jakarta, just as he was in late nineteenth century Paris, as well as early twentieth century Java. These essays are the fruits of flânerie as practiced by Seno Gumira Ajidarma. He moves through the spaces of Jakarta in an attempt to interpret and understand what he sees around him. In this manner Seno fulfils the more established and standard role of the flâneur.

²⁰ I was in Jakarta from July 2005 to January 2006, April-May 2007 and November 2008. During those times I used an *ojek* service in Bendungan Hilir almost daily. As a consequence I established friendships and mutual trust with these *ojekkers*.

Seno does this through documenting the lives of urban citizens who are often a part of the informal economy. Often, these people are outside the formal networks of governmental bureaucracy: they might not have legitimate access to land, work or residency within Jakarta. Yet, as is shown in numerous essays, they play a vital role in the functioning of the city. To borrow a term from *The Endless City* project, the essays of *Kentut Kosmopolitan* also engage with concepts of city-ness. This is evident in the essays' frequent questioning of the dichotomy between the key problems of public and private, periphery and centre, local and national identities, modernity and traditionality. These are notions, issues and problems that are central to Indonesia's understanding of itself – whether it be stated openly in the discourses on national identity or whether it is done through the semiotics of advertising and cultural artefacts. Sassen's definition of city-ness proposes an understanding of the city as something that exists on a sliding scale, rather than being an either-or proposition (Burdett & Sudjic, 2007, p.484). The city and cityness is something that exists in varying ways and as something in transition. As I have shown in this article, Seno's essays in *Kentut Kosmopolitan* explore cityness rather than provide specific definitions on what the city is.

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