CHAPTER 5

Shaping Spaces

*Video Art Communities in Indonesia*

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This chapter discusses the rise of video and new media art communities in Indonesia since the late 1990s – ‘communities’ in the sense of groups of people with shared artistic and social interests who work collaboratively in ways that will be illustrated and analysed below. These communities have been formed partially as a result of the greater freedom of speech of the post-Suharto era, the globalization of information and communication networks, and the availability of increasingly cheaper and easier to handle media production and consumption equipment. I argue that the various communities derive a sense of identity predominantly from the way in which they situate themselves in relation to four fields of discourse and activity in Indonesian society: firstly, the modern art establishment; secondly, mainstream television and popular culture; thirdly, community media and local development; and fourthly, formal and informal education systems. Each in their own way, the Indonesian video and new media art communities adopt and/or react against aspects of these four different fields.

Video art was introduced in Indonesia in the late 1980s and early 1990s by a few pioneering artists, including Teguh Ostentrik, Krisna Murti and Heri Dono (Hujatnikajennong 2006, 20). These early pioneers used video projections and television screens as integrated parts of art installations that also included other media, such as painting, sculpture and performance (Hujatnikajennong 2006, 25; Hasan 2003, 156). Throughout the 1990s, it was especially Murti who consistently focused on video as a medium of artistic expression (Murti 2009a; Jurriëns 2010). The international video art pioneer Nam June Paik inspired him to use video art as a critique of the Indonesian television culture of the 1990s, which was undergoing a new phase with the introduction of domestic commercial channels (Hujatnikajennong 2006, 21).

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A new generation of Indonesian video artists, born in the 1970s and predominantly based in Java and Bali, have built their own communities and organized and participated in national and international art festivals since the late 1990s. Due to the increased freedom of speech and the availability of relatively cheap communication technology, video currently enjoys broad acceptance as a tool of creative expression in Indonesia. Video applications on cameras, iPods and mobile phones have become widely available, especially among the Indonesian middle-class youth. These youth have positioned themselves not merely as consumers but also as producers of media content, including video art.

Unlike the video art pioneers, the majority of the younger generation do not integrate video technology into art installations, but present so-called ‘single channel’ videos on television or cinema screens as art objects in themselves (Hujatnikajennong 2006, 25). The main source of inspiration for this ‘second generation’ is usually not the conventional fine arts, but contemporary popular culture such as television commercials, music videos, soap operas and Internet sites. They often take a multi-disciplinary approach, with ideas derived from such diverse disciplines as art history, media studies, anthropology and sociology (Hujatnikajennong 2006, 26; Murti 2006, 60–61).

According to publisher and art critic Ronny Agustinus (2003, 115) the new generation of video artists grew up in a time of repression by the New Order regime and searched for alternatives in computer technology, alternative music videos (especially early MTV) and experimental films (such as Quentin Tarantino’s). At the same time, they were also influenced by mainstream Hollywood films, Western pop music and commercial television series. In a similar way to other Indonesian art critics (Hujatnikajennong 2006, 26; Murti 2006, 60–61), Agustinus (2005, 17) criticizes the young video artists for adopting rather than taking a critical distance from these genres of popular culture.

I believe a more fruitful approach is to explore the diverse and sometimes paradoxical discourses and practices of contemporary Indonesian video art across generations. Some of the younger artists are concerned with politics not in an overtly ideological sense, but in more subtle and varied ways. For instance, young Indonesian video artists have addressed the politics of the body, gender and the representation of historical events. In this chapter I will show specifically how Indonesian video art communities have come into being and

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2 Examples of young Indonesian video artists who have addressed the politics of the body and gender in their work are Reza Afisina, Tintin Wulia (Wiyanto 2003, 46) and Nerfità Primadewi (2006, 32). Examples of youth art communities that have critically discussed the representation of Indonesia’s 1965 state coup and its traumatic aftermath are Taring Padi