

Sewing Marat, Revolution and (Sewing) the City : Urban (kampong) Performance Art

An essay that weaves historical perspectives with a unique interpretation of Kerensa Dewantoro's performance art's of Menjahit Marat Sade/ Sewing Marat Sade in Urban Kampong Dago Pojok, Bandung-Indonesia

Frans Ari Prasetyo

BRICK (Bandung Research Institute for Culture, Social and Knowledge)

fransariprasetyo@gmail.com

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In the city, we stand amidst the brutal chaos of a city forming structures. We begin from a civil society, from economic and political structures to bureaucratic structures which intertwine with one another to playing a certain role and gaining a certain position. The city is staged as a species that uses partisan propoganda. She performs referring to Marat's revolutionary agenda as a martyr in the truth that he/she believes. The backdrop is an all consuming canvas of monochromatic homogeneity, reminiscent of seamless spatial and spiritual patterns. The fact is that Marat is locked alone in his thoughts which trying to do good deeds in working for liberation or revolution

that was taken from us (citizens) before. He came to revolution with ideas that had been formed, and were very familiar with the high politics principles that they have become commonplaces for him.

Seeing how her/his hands are still able to move the sewing machine and her/his legs rotate the peddle for sewing the clothes, the free flowing string of her thoughts float over her/his disappointment at the chaos (himself) and the structures around him/her. Fragments of words, the writings remind us that she/he is one part of the public that needs to sew the threads together of her revolutionary thoughts. It is a whole religious image that is trapped in clear spatial and spiritual iconography. The revolutionary impulse, the brutal grip of self-forming and the city structure deal their cards as usual, through a public hysteria that she/he absorbs in this revolution that her/his mind stitches. At the outbreak of the revolution, tired of the persecution that had been suffered for so long in the hands of those who are powerful, Marat eagerly embraced the opportunity to defeat his/her oppressors and achieve a precise position. Marat's best known publication was created in 1789, entitled, L'Ami du Peuple (The Friend of the People). His motivation for his career in journalism, and the birth of this publication was to advocate for the poor. Marat adopted the idea of program issuance through the press by establishing L'Ami du Peuple. Marat started it with a heavy but honest tone that a man can tell the truth without violating the conventions of society.



This parallel inspiration became the cause of his ambition to promote revolutionary activism and thus he acted as a magnet for the revolution and lending his support. This Marat publication was interesting because it was also a product of propaganda. The selected words and phrases reflect a dictator of the twentieth century, "... the enemies of freedom ..." and "... crimes against our country". Enemies of freedom in the city/ country analogy is repression act of the city / country and also crimes against humanity in the form of crime or intellectual crimes which committed personally, on behalf of the group or the legitimacy of the country and city. This Marat story is then appropriated by Kerensa Johnston, a female theater artist from Australia who lives in Bandung through a theatrical performance titled "Menjahit Marat Sade".

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It was staged in a village in the city of Bandung named Dago Pojok on 24th October 2015. A village that has historical record and collective memory as one of the forming parts of Bandung as a city of colonial representation (till date). This town village, as other town villages in Bandung is facing the city de-humanization and de-structurization that leads to the neo-aristocracy structural and communal in accelerating the pace of urban development. The city (Bandung) needs revolution as villages are restructured. Changes in the form of colonialism surely intertwine with neo-capitalism and neo-liberalism that work in specific spatial regions, in this case the city (Bandung). The dictatorship of the city (leadership) reflects how the role of the city is no longer working for the public but for neo-capitalism, neo-liberalism and neo-colonialism in the scheme of globalization and development. The public is positioned as passive objects rather than active subjects so that the bargain value is very low. Somehow, the liberation effort needs to be done regardless of whether or not it is with revolution.

The same thing happened in the context of Marat's preference when they experienced the French Revolution. Marat's ideas and thoughts are interwoven by Kerensa using words and using a sewing machine in the context of the city (Bandung); she/he creates her 'freedom' clothes yet also criticises herself at the same time using satire and irony in her efforts for revolutionary action that is adopted from Marat and adapted towards the situation and condition of Bandung nowadays. Theatre, in this case works as an imaginary public court over the situation and the real conditions experienced by the public. Marat with no doubt is a man of the people, but in this theater Marat is presented in the form of woman.

"Hello Bandung" hatched as an appropriation, is a critique and satire of the Bandung city which refers from rhythm of the city fighting song titled "Hallo-hallo Bandung", which in its essence is the fighting song for the city's freedom from colonialism. Through the "Hello Bandung" of Kerensa, she wants to show that there is a new aristocratic scheme in Bandung which is reinforced by neo-colonialism that is moving quickly to create new society social system which reduces (our thoughts) freedom because of the city patterns. Naturally, this is intertwined with and involves global capitalism and neo-liberalism.

This gal is shown to assure about the freedom and happiness (in the city). But armed with a sense of false humanity in the social class packaging supported by the bureaucratic structures has her arms tied locked. She positions herself/himself as one of the most influential characters of the 18th century and the French Revolution, enticing others to violent revolution through radical publications and gives his/her life for this cause.



Marat's general analysis dominated radicalism in itself, but there was also speculation about the character of the blind admirers and enemies which were constantly excited. Through the degree of respect for the public, Marat did not want to stop. He continued to knit revolutionary thoughts; he wanted no position or retirement. His ambition was just to continue saving people: let them be free and happy and all my wishes will be fulfilled. There is a sense of security that comes with this (Marat's) promise. Promise to defend the rights of ordinary people as well as to keep them.

Someone must have organized them and almost certainly that the person must have been a savage like Marat - Was Marat the power of instigator? This quote does not only describe the allegations against Marat, but uses what is called "fiery language" and self-esteem. The same thing happened in the theater played by Kerensa, she organizes the public (audience) to get involved in her stage provocation with the fiery language and self-esteem to show what kind of the revolution the city (Bandung) has today? The city that is (and will be) producing and consuming something. But apparently this public is the imaginary public just the same with Marat's imaginary thoughts which are interwoven in the text on the background fabric of this performance. Likewise, the production-consumption relation between the play on the stage and public (her audience); reflects Marat's rhetorical fantasy.

Marat (through Kerensa's role) was broken. She was tied in a straight jacket and metaphorically she seems to say *I broke my arm because many public (audience) slandered me, but they did not stop accusing me as a grumpy person; cowards, blind, rogues and traitors have joined to portray me as a complete lunatic*. Kerensa translated the writing style which flows elegantly yet very strongly because of her choice of words such as "killers" and "anger" to be appropriated in the form of theater. Marat (through Kerensa) not only incited violence through terror, paranoia and a sound foundation of violence. Every crisis needs a scapegoat, and immediately the indifference of the suspected enemy will be found by false accusation and political war followed by engagement with the court.

This idea that there was an enemy of the revolution within the city limits was not only shaped by this theatrical performance, but rather encouraged as a disastrous experiment with freedom through paranoid propaganda tools. Even so, his colleagues do not always respect Marat; his disease-ridden body smelt and many stayed away from him. Marat imprisoned alone with thoughts that later contributed to the revolutionary movement in response to a dying society. Marat was a suffering example for people who wanted to expand the imaginations of man who seemed mocked by executioners of morality.

Disappointment in finding that revolution did not produce the whole expected effect, he got angry because of the public officials whose lies continued to grow. Bitter satire increased, projects filled with inequity and public misfortunes had to be moderated by replacing satire and irony to criticize values. This is the revolutionary way. Faith in the absolute heresy from the old regime supporters and the enemies of freedom, Marat felt that there was nothing gained from them except by force. Revolted by their efforts, with a repeated plot that had no end except a punishment by killing innocent people.



Photos by Frans Ari Prasetyo (2015)

He was angry at the people's representatives with their deadly enemies and laws that served tyranny to ordinary people who were not guilty and should have been protected. He chose to side with sovereign people for they had nothing else to hope for from their representatives. They served justice for themselves again and again. Despite insecurity and hatred of himself, he had an ability to relate to people via his writing skills and his passion for his country brought him great respect among the people, while his publication was considered to have a major influence in many of the violent incidents that took place during the revolution. Kerensa tried to draw this into her theater practice to be correlated in the spatial form of the city (Bandung). Although Marat was often regarded as an extremist, his intentions were never in question: Even Marat, believed [he] was motivated by patriotic or altruistic impulses which were the result of the ability to appreciate their good intentions which are higher than human life.

Marat did not live and stay in Bandung or in Indonesia as a developing country, and also does not live in today's era. Marat was in France with bourgeoisie society and its ideas of a civil society. However, France has a little link to Bandung. Remember, Bandung 'was' called Parijs Van Java, Bandung people also enjoy the atmospheric cafés, fashions and culinary delights (just as Parisians do), besides Bandung also has a sharp social life class, urban infrastructure with extraordinary beauty in one corner of the city whilst other corners have infinite gloom (physical and aesthetic), just as Paris, France does. The efforts of the civil society movement were so intense there (Paris) to obtain social justice and spatial justice and these efforts are still seen today. Marat was a small part of that effort with different context of time and situation, but the spirit is the same for Bandung today.. Revolution.



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Revolution was in the colonial era and now many people see it as a castle in the air; revolution is just a style. But Kerensa through Marat wants to show that there is a concrete effort although it is 'just' an artistic role (played in the city) through theater. It the art of awareness in the city public (Bandung) - that there are problems that exist around us which we ignore in our daily lives . Through the art of awareness, the revolution is actually working massively, structured and systematically in the minds of the people (city) that could come up to the surface in concrete actions or in the thickness of critical thinking to see, to change something even on an individual level.

Perhaps The Revolution Betrayed by Leon Trotsky may not to occur in Bandung (if there is a revolution), or maybe Bandung is able to produce revolutionary figures like Che Guevara and Chavez in Latin America so that the revolutionary theory and practice can happen by adjusting to the local context (Indonesia) , especially Bandung. The revolutionary's dream (in the city) is intertwined in a theater that is carried out by Kerensa using Marat as a martyr of the revolution in her/his practice. Hopefully it can happen in the real life theater of the city of Bandung.

Source :
<http://darahrouge.blogspot.co.id/2016/02/sewing-marat-revolution-and-sewing-city.html>

Original in Indonesian:
<http://www.katakini.com/berita-menjahit-marat-revolusi-dan-menjahit-kota.html>



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