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## <Book Review>

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**Ariel Heryanto. *Identity and Pleasure: The Politics of Indonesian Screen Culture*. Singapore: NUS Press in association with Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2014, xiv+246p.**

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from each other to advance scholarship in Southeast Asian studies? Finally and collectively, in which direction should we move in order to develop a new Southeast Asian scholarship that reflects a shift to a more autonomous Asian paradigm of Southeast Asian studies?

Though this current volume does not answer all issues I raise, after having read the book with great interest, I believe it is, nonetheless, a very useful contribution to a new and better understanding of the state of the field of Southeast Asian studies today. As stated at the beginning, it marks a good beginning for a new scholarship of Asian studies of Southeast Asia. I certainly recommend all serious readers in this field to read it and to make an intelligent comparison with previous field review volumes.

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### ***Identity and Pleasure: The Politics of Indonesian Screen Culture***

ARIEL HERYANTO

Singapore: NUS Press in association with Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2014,  
 xiv+246p.

At the risk of rehashing the old orientalist clichés we must acknowledge that contemporary Indonesia can be a bewildering place. This holds true both for outside observers and for Indonesians engaged in fashioning the practice of daily life. During my daily motorcycle commute to Universitas Gadjah Mada in Yogyakarta (Jogja) in 2012–13, the massive billboards at major intersections never ceased to fascinate me and make me question what I thought I knew about Indonesia. Advertisements for self-help seminars by Muslim televangelists competed with images of Korean boy bands; Coca-Cola offered itself as the perfect drink for breaking the Ramadan fast; an appliance store suggested buying a refrigerator to celebrate Kartini Day (a national holiday honoring a Javanese princess who promoted education for women); and portraits of political candidates in stock poses blocked the view of Monjali, a massive monument left-over from Suharto's authoritarian New Order which now housed a nightly display of Hello-Kitty-themed paper lanterns. In March 2013, after a bar fight led to the murder of an off duty soldier and a commando squad broke into the prison and executed the suspects, banners applauding Kopassus (the elite army special forces) and denouncing *preman* (street thugs) mysteriously appeared at these intersections. I was constantly amazed by what one saw on the street of Jogja. Fortunately, Ariel Heryanto's latest book offers wide-ranging and insightful analysis into Indonesian political culture and cultural politics since the fall of Suharto in 1998. *Identity and Pleasure: The Politics of Indonesian Screen Culture* is a brilliant study of the diverse and seemingly contradictory forces at play in the world's fourth largest nation-

state. This ethnography of urban Indonesian youth and mid-career professionals explains that what I witnessed in the streets of Jogja were public manifestations over the struggle for identity. Heryanto delves into the ways in which his subjects actively negotiate consumerism, Islamicization, social media, and the violent legacy of authoritarianism.

While an important book, *Identity and Pleasure: The Politics of Indonesian Screen Culture* will frustrate some readers. Despite the title, Heryanto is very clear that the book is not a history of Indonesian cinema. Nor is it an encyclopedic account of Indonesian television and film. Rather, the book uses screen culture (television, film, and social media) as a prism to explore post-New Order identity politics. Heryanto analyzes certain films, certain television shows, and certain aspects of social media to understand the ways in which certain Indonesians are actively engaged in the construction of their own identity. That his study discusses “certain Indonesians” is seen in his clear focus on urban middle-class young people and mid-career professionals (what Americans used to call “Yuppies”: young upwardly mobile urban professionals) in several Javanese cities, including Jakarta, Surabaya, Semarang, Bandung, and Malang. Thus, this is not a study of all elements of Indonesian society, only of a privileged subset. Heryanto states that his analysis is narrowly qualitative rather than broadly quantitative. But the author’s admittedly tight focus does not diminish the work’s larger significance. Indeed, this may be one of the most useful contributions to the understanding of contemporary Indonesia, comparable to John Pemberton’s history of the present, *On the Subject of “Java,”* which probed the New Order in the mid-1980s (Pemberton 1994). Perhaps the most striking feature of *Identity and Pleasure* is Heryanto’s ability to find meaning in seemingly trivial and mundane aspects of popular culture.

At times Heryanto’s description of Indonesian cultural politics can seem pessimistic. Cynical politicians use Islam to garner support from pious voters and Muslim televangelists seem more preoccupied with promoting a path to material wealth than spiritual salvation. If terrorist attacks are rare, the violent thuggery of the *preman* (gangsters) permeates many aspects of urban life from presidential elections to public parking rackets. He suggests that the nation may never be able to come to terms with the bloody history of over three decades of authoritarian rule, human rights abuses, and rampant corruption. Heryanto calls attention to rampant sinophobia, yet acknowledges it is no longer state policy as under Suharto. He repeatedly states that social media, rather than liberating or empowering the average Indonesian, is furthering social atomization and making communication increasing artificial and superficial. He concludes the book by revealing that “[t]he underside of the politics of identity and pleasure are plight, predicament, and pain” (p. 209).

*Identity and Pleasure* contains eight chapters. In the opening chapter Heryanto sets up his theoretical framework, states his arguments, and defines his parameters. He holds that the social group he is studying is actively engaged in both negotiating and transforming established and traditional identities with the new freedoms of consumer capitalism and potential liberation of web-based social media. The title refers to both the debate over identity and the pleasures of

popular culture. The second and third chapters consider Islamic cultural politics. Heryanto argues for the analytic (not descriptive) model of Post-Islamism for contemporary Indonesia, a model which can include conflict, dissent, and disagreement within the Muslim world. He notes the ways in which politicians, self-help speakers, and filmmakers use Islam for their own purposes. In his discussion of Islamic themed films, Heryanto explains the unprecedented success of the 2008 *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* [Verses of love] as stemming from its depiction of young, hip, and fashionable Muslims. The film and several others that followed demonstrate the ways in which young urban Indonesians are actively engaged in shaping their own identities as both Islamic and modern. Chapters four and five both analyze the difficulties, if not failures, of coming to terms with the violence of 1965. Heryanto persuasively argues that the New Order's silencing of critical voices has effectively destroyed both popular understanding and meaningful historiography of the destruction of the PKI and subsequent reign of terror. These chapters demonstrate how Suharto's silencing of non-New Order narratives of 1965 has made it impossible to have a meaningful discussion about the mass murder of hundreds of thousands of individuals. Indeed, with few people understanding the meaning of the word "Communist" as anything other than a catch-all term for evil, Indonesian political discourse even lacks a terminology to discuss these foundational events. Heryanto charts how New Order screen culture, with its bloody propaganda films, has tainted post-authoritarian Indonesia. He also notes the historic importance of Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing* (2012), hoping that this documentary might create the conditions to speak of the events of 1965. Chapter six looks at another silencing, that of the role of ethnic Chinese in the film industry. Once again, contemporary Indonesia has trouble escaping the legacy of Suharto's sino-phobic policies. Chapter seven posits the recent K-Pop craze as an avenue for young Muslim women to express agency in public spaces. Heryanto discusses the obsession with Korean soap operas and boy bands (subjects which some scholars might dismiss as trivial and faddish) with the same critical insight he applies to independent filmmakers probing human rights abuses. The final chapter argues that screen culture and reality television shows helped to create the phenomenon of "celebrity candidates" in the 2009 elections. With politicians such as President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono appearing on Indonesian Idol and releasing recordings of his music and local candidates becoming famous for outrageous stunts, Heryanto demonstrates the blurring of the line between politics and entertainment. The 209-page book lacks a formal conclusion.

While a brilliant book, *Identity and Pleasure* is not without its shortcomings. Specialists made be frustrated with the interdisciplinary nature of this collection of essays. Writing in several different registers, which make sense in the context of each chapter, the book as a whole does lack methodological depth and rigor. Sociologists, cultural anthropologists, and social psychologists may agree with Heryanto's theory that as an orally-oriented culture Indonesia has a unique relationship with social media, but this position is merely stated rather than proven with detailed primary or secondary evidence. Elsewhere discussions of research as a participant-observer seem

anecdotal and lack evidence of broad social research. One of the most striking shortcomings is in the discussion of the Chinese and the film industry. Heryanto persuasively shows the importance of ethnic Chinese in Indonesian cinema as producers and actors and contrasts this with the shocking lack of significant Chinese characters in these films. While his linkage of this silence with the New Order's sinophobia is excellent, he fails to make the obvious comparison with the history of American Jews; a vilified minority who were well represented in the Hollywood studio system and as actors who adopted non-Jewish names. This curious missed opportunity does not invalidate the chapter's argument but it left this reviewer unsatisfied.

Much of *Identity and Pleasure's* genius lies in Heryanto's willingness to take the seemingly trivial as serious evidence. This allows him to read significant meaning into flash mobs, cover dances, and adolescent crushes on K-Pop idols, as well as the work of human rights activists, independent filmmakers, and national political figures. Furthermore, such an approach shows his respect for the young urban Javanese that make up the subject of his research. With strong use of selected theory, ranging from Ernst Renan to Marshall McLuhan to the ever-present Benedict Anderson, Heryanto situates these essays in the wider discussions of media studies and the politics of nationalism. *Identity and Pleasure* will be of use to scholars of Indonesia as well as the politics of popular culture in Southeast Asia as a whole. This reviewer found it essential for unraveling some of the daily mysteries of the contemporary Indonesian city.

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K. W. TAYLOR, ed.

Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2015, 180p.

"Four decades removed from the fall of Saigon, now is perhaps the right time to revisit the Vietnam conflict, for no longer pressing is the impulse to assign blame, discredit others, or find excuses" (p. 159). So begins Lan Lu's contribution to the collection *Voices from the Second Republic of South Vietnam (1967–1975)*. Edited by Keith Taylor, it consists of chapters by 10 different contributors, each of whom played a role in the administrative, political, and military milieu of the Republic of Vietnam based in Saigon from 1955 to 1975.

The collection can be situated in two different contexts. One is the growing interest in the