

## Imagining the New Order Nation: Materiality and Hyperreality in Indonesia

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**Abstract** *This paper examines the tension between the materiality of information and communications technologies and the hyperreality which they are thought to produce. The setting for our analysis is Indonesia, where the most recent innovations in communications technologies co-exist alongside ancient – but still functional – ‘predecessor’ devices. Building upon Benedict Anderson’s work on late-colonial Indonesia and Chandra Mukerji’s work on seventeenth-century French formal gardens, we examine how the national imaginaries specific to Suharto’s New Order state are embedded in the materiality of the present.*

### Nonmodern or postmodern worlds?

For two decades now research in Science and Technology Studies (STS) has tried to revive and redirect materialist analysis in the social sciences and humanities. Drawing on experiences from laboratories, an engagement with engineering practices and the historicisation of scientists’ relationship with Nature, STS has developed brands of materialistic social theory that try to move beyond the sticky problem of realism while nevertheless grounding ‘the social’ in ‘the material’ and vice versa (Latour 1993; Mukerji 1994; Knorr-Cetina 1997). While there is nothing intrinsically revolutionary about this (the ‘material’ has always been around in social theory) the STS focus on the importance of material culture in producing sociality has helped to deflect or defer the idea of material objects as being merely reflective of the social systems in which they are produced (Latour 1994).

Interestingly, at the same time as material culture analyses were being deployed in studies of science and technology, other strands of post-Marxist social theory were giving greater and greater emphasis to the roles of discourse and language in constituting different forms of sociality. This was happening more or less independently, but perhaps in spite of, a concern with the materiality of cultures. The concept of ‘postmodernism’ – in particular a Baudrillardian form of postmodernism – speaks both to theorists’ turn to

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the science wars with reference to these positions see Latour (1999: 216–35).

discourse as the maker of worlds as well as to the historical sense that the world is inexorably being reduced to discourse (Brown 1987). In this mode, the excesses of language play themselves out in part through an erasure of 'the material' – things as such disappear. It is as if recognizing the impossibility of an absolute correspondence between the word and the world is supposed to make us give up the work of reference altogether as signs replace referents in the production of meaning.

Despite the possibility of more nuanced readings (Gane 1991) it is fair to say that Jean Baudrillard has become a focal point for the development of dematerialised social theory (Peiffer 1994: 1–2). Those who have read nothing else will be familiar with Baudrillard's anti-realist stance with respect to late twentieth century culture:

By crossing into a space whose curvature is no longer that of the real, nor that of truth, the era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials . . . it is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine . . . (1983: 2)

Baudrillard's kind of anti-realism with respect to meaning can also be seen to make way for an anti-materialism in which the overwhelming mode of social organisation moves from the circulation of objects to the circulation of signs-as-objects (Baudrillard 1988b). Baudrillard's hyperreal worlds are ultimately devoid of things.

Yet in spite of Baudrillardian theory's legendary 'fatalism' (Gane 1995; Baudrillard 1990), we want to argue that this kind of postmodern hyper-realism shares a great deal with science and technology studies in terms of what we might call, following Bruno Latour (1993; 1999), nonmodern constructivism. Despite the charges of realist critics in the science wars both Baudrillard and Latour (as representatives of theoretical constituencies) agree on the importance of 'the real'. The postmodern hyperrealist insists that the success of reference is an increasingly *real* illusion in the sense that 'the real' is a manufacture of the 'precession of simulacra' (Baudrillard 1994: 94). The nonmodern constructivist insists that the success of reference is a product of careful social-material manipulation making 'the real' an accomplishment of co-ordinated action (Latour 1995). Both models of world-making take the idea of the 'real' very seriously so neither will succumb to a simple epistemological relativism yet the two models have us spiraling off in seemingly opposite directions.<sup>1</sup>

In hyperreal worlds the point is that we become increasingly distant from an originary materiality as objects disappear in the play of simulacra. In such a world material objects and human subjects disappear with the collapse of the nature/society divide leaving only signs without meaning. By contrast, in nonmodern worlds the distance between ourselves and the materiality of objects is shrinking and we are becoming increasingly enmeshed in complicated imbrications of material, social and representational interaction. There are no subjects and objects in nonmodern worlds either – there are only

'hybrids', 'subobjects' and 'factishes' (Latour 1999). As a consequence of the nonmodern condition, the world is becoming more materially real. The referent is not being erased or replaced but becoming ever more pronounced in the making and unmaking of forms of sociality.

Issues of rhetorical style notwithstanding, the nonmodern constructivists in science and technology studies (STS) have been notoriously and unfairly critical of postmodern theorising.<sup>2</sup> Surely a more productive dialogue might occur. It is odd, for instance, that STS researchers have never been particularly taken with Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality even though there is a general obsession with practices of (re)production and simulation in the laboratories of scientists and engineers (Pickering 1995; Galison 1997). In this paper, we engage the tension between hyperrealism and constructivism through a case study of communications technologies and nationalism in Indonesia. This is not as strange an empirical context as one might think and while some pieces of the puzzle must remain undeveloped due to a lack of space, our aim is to explore the notion that contemporary Indonesia is both a materially produced and hyperrealised nation using an interpretive frame that facilitates the alternation and engagement of nonmodern and postmodern perspectives on common but foreign ground (given that neither nonmodern constructivism nor postmodern hyperrealism has been of particular interest in South East Asian studies until now).

### Informatics and the nation

We contend that it is in the realm of communications technologies and informatics that hyperrealism and constructivism cannot avoid meeting head-on. For postmodern hyperrealists the advent of the Internet and digital communication has produced new readings of Baudrillard's work and popular fantasies of a world reduced to streams of data but little is made of the materialities that enable such fantasies.<sup>3</sup> For nonmodern constructivists used to technicians engaging self-consciously with discrete material things (instruments, microbes, soil samples, etc.), new information technologies present something of a challenge in the problem of virtual sociality as forms of interaction and organisation seemingly independent from the materiality of technique, place or even bodies. In the production and flow of information it would seem that hyperreality and materiality come ready mixed, taking the form of what we might call, following Virilio (1997), a 'glocal' matrix of ordered, convertible and scalable sign-objects.

Unfortunately, in the growing field of information technology studies the 'glocal' mix seems often to be painstakingly separated into postmodern hyperrealist studies of the forms of sociality generated by – or in – the matrix (read as a focus on virtual communities, flexible identities, etc.) and nonmodern constructivist studies of the forms of sociality that make the

<sup>2</sup> See for example Latour (1993) and for an extended discussion of the relation between postmodern theoretical perspectives and science studies see Ward (1996).

<sup>3</sup> See for example Stone (1996) or the online journal *Ctheory* ([www.ctheory.com](http://www.ctheory.com)) and in popular culture witness magazines like *Mondo 2000* and *Wired*, and films like *The Matrix*.

matrix possible (read as a focus on issues of access, design, and the human-computer interface). We want to propose a reading of informatics that not only resists the excesses of both nonmodernist materialism and post-modernist textualism but also encourages an interpretive frame that can make sense of hyperrealism and constructivism at the same time (also see Hayles 1992; Bolter and Grusin 1999). While we pursue this frame here in the context of South East Asia our larger project is to enable a general rapprochement that does not abandon the potent analytical qualities specific to each perspective.

Our specific ground for elaborating this interpretive frame is an exploration of the relationship between the modern 'nation' as one of the most hyperreal categories we can imagine and communications technologies as a culturally embedded system of socio-material relations. Our too-simple thesis expands on the work of Benedict Anderson (1983) on the one hand and Chandra Mukerji (1997) on the other. Imagining the nation is a material practice that can neither be reduced to that practice nor split from it. Following from this we suggest that to imagine the nation is to hyperrealise it via information technologies embedded in socio-material infrastructures.

In this paper, in part to facilitate our conversation with Anderson, we focus our argument on the Indonesian national imaginary in an attempt to make sense of the nation as both material and hyperreal.<sup>4</sup> Our concern is with the emergence of an information matrix in one of the world's largest and most durable Cold War-era totalitarian regimes: the Indonesia of Suharto's New Order. After the aborted communist coup of 1965, Suharto continued the post-colonial process of unifying the archipelago and building a national consciousness – a *Wawasan Nusantara*, or 'archipelagic world-view' or 'vision'. Two information technologies were central to this project. One was an appropriation of the *keritongan*, a neighbourhood-scale signalling device typically made out of a hollowed-out tree branch; the other was much more technically complex, the Palapa geo-synchronous communications satellite which was launched in 1976 to facilitate domestic communications throughout Indonesia and other parts of South East Asia. These technologies form part of a matrix for the nation that is both irreducibly material and quintessentially hyperreal.

### Taman Mini: Indonesia's hyperreal garden

What do we mean by 'irreducibly material and quintessentially hyperreal'? Consider the following example. Like many middle-class Indonesians, Baudrillard would undoubtedly feel mildly nostalgic were he to take a stroll through Taman Mini Indah Indonesia (Taman Mini), the Indonesia-in-miniature garden 'dreamed [into] reality' in the early 1970s by Suharto's wife, Ibu Tien Suharto, and opened in 1975 (Pemberton 1994: 153). Located in Indonesia's capital, this garden consists of a miniature version of the

Indonesian archipelago carved into the landscape, around which are scattered a mosaic of life-sized houses simulating the 'traditional' architecture of each of the major islands' ethnic groups. The park also includes 'ancient monuments' in miniature, a hotel, a shopping centre, an artificial waterfall and a stage for outdoor performances (Pemberton 1994: 152). While one can walk around the miniature archipelago, the best view is to be had from directly above it. This view from space, as it were, is facilitated by an electric-powered cable car, which the park's designers were thoughtful enough to include in their plans.

Aside from the obvious correlation between Taman Mini and the Disney worlds of Baudrillard's *America* (1988a), a different connection comes to mind.<sup>5</sup> At first glance, a walk through Taman Mini appears to us an exercise in state-craft reminiscent of seventeenth-century formal promenades through Louis XIV's gardens at Versailles as described by Chandra Mukerji. As Mukerji persuasively argues in her book the gardens were much more than just a symbolic display of the King's authority.

The French formal garden was a vital political resource for state-formation in its time and place. It was a laboratory for the techniques of land control used to construct the territorial state. The very elements that went into building the garden were the ones necessary for rebuilding the landscape to make it a politically marked and fortified territory that both enhanced and defined state power. (1997: 304)

These gardens acted as a laboratory for the material engineering of France as a territorial state as well as a means of doing politics – imagining the idea of France as a territorial nation and the power of the Sun King through the manipulation and control of the garden lands. We are struck by the way Taman Mini might accomplish something similar with respect to generating a national consciousness in regard to Suharto's Indonesia but something in Mukerji's argument does not extend well to Taman Mini.

It is true that both Versailles and Taman Mini are material constructions on a large scale that seek to represent the ideality of the state's political unity under the authority of an autocratic ruler (Louis XIV and Suharto, respectively). However, there is an important difference between the two cases. Versailles appears as a dynamic geo-political laboratory, Taman Mini seems to be just a spectacle. Mukerji's argument about the material production of the territorial state locates the gardens at Versailles not just as a symbolic staging of the state's power but also as a means for producing territoriality. We suggest that Versailles in this sense is an example of hyperrealised materiality: it was meant to be a France in miniature of sorts, a place where 'simulating' and 'imagining' the political and territorial unity of the state and the king's power are made possible through concrete material practices.

<sup>4</sup> For the purpose of our argument we wish to bracket (for the moment) the general critique of the concept of a 'national imaginary' proposed by Chatterjee (1993) and others.

<sup>5</sup> Apparently Mrs Suharto became interested in developing Taman Mini after a trip to Disneyland (Pemberton 1994: 152).

Taman Mini does not have the laboratory function of Versailles; it is a place for quotation and simulation, not for experimentation. Taman Mini by contrast is an example of materialised hyperreality: it simulates materially (it has a material form – the miniature village, the walkways, the pond, etc.) the image of a unified archipelago consisting of islands inhabited by distinct ethnic groups, each with their own 'tradition'. In doing so, it provides a 'place' for middle-class Jakartans to go 'home' to without experiencing the transportation fatigue, eating difficulties and familial frustrations that would normally accompany any trip back to their villages of origin (Pemberton 1994: 159). Versailles is a construction while Taman Mini is merely a façade, tied less to the ordinary villages than to the ideological fantasies of its designers. In this regard Taman Mini is not so much a centre of state power or a locus of territorial ambitions as it is the reterritorialisation of a tourist map on a giant scale (giant in relation to the map, miniature in relation to 'reality'); it is the materialisation of an idealised representation rather than a co-construction of a material and representational mix.

It is this last point that also distinguishes Taman Mini's hyperreal nationalism from a more material nationalism described by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (1983). For Anderson, the creation of a national identity occurs in the symbolic domain through the articulation of three main forms of representation: the representation of populations in the census, the representation of territories in the practice of colonial mapping, and the creation of a cosmopolitan *lingua franca* through the spread of print capitalism (providing a common 'we' that transcends local identities). These forms of representation come together in the homogeneous and simultaneous time created by instantaneous news-wire services (something that Baudrillard or Virilio would now refer to as a 'telepresence'), making it possible to imagine a community of individuals who share an identity, territory, and language: in other words a nation.

However, even though Anderson emphasises the key role of the socio-symbolic dimension in the formation of the nation-state, his 'imagined community' is still one remove from the kind of objectless and subjectless virtual communities of postmodern hyperrealism and Taman Mini. In many respects, Anderson's world is actually more like a 'glocal' mixture, for he shows how capitalist and state formations (the work of surveying engineers, census-takers, book publishers, etc.) provide the material structures through which symbolic identities take shape. Even his treatment of language is as much an argument about the importance of the materiality of signs (the newspaper) as it is an argument about the power of language to interpellate a national subject in the domain of the real.<sup>6</sup> In this regard, Anderson's nationalism can be opposed to the New Order hyperreal version of nationalism found at Taman Mini: whereas Anderson's nationalism is

produced by the emergence of a new imaginary out of new material conditions, Taman Mini is produced by creating a material representation of a purely symbolic (and highly ideological) construction. In this sense Taman Mini is – at best – a simulacrum of the 'real' nationalism described by Anderson.

What about Mukerji's Versailles and the French territorial imagination? It is probably not entirely coincidental that Anderson's theory regarding the origins of nationalism in general was the result of his research on Indonesia in particular. Unlike France, Indonesia does not lay claim to a single landmass but rather to a string of islands separated by large bodies of water. It also consists of thousands of linguistic and ethnic groups rather than just a few. Thus, while Mukerji sets out to explain how Louis XIV managed literally to carve out a territorial unity through the mobilisation of techniques of land control, Anderson is faced with a territorial imagination with no obvious material basis. To Anderson perhaps Indonesia appears to be more symbolically unified through an act of collective imagination rather than materially unified as an aspect of naturalised state power.

Yet we maintain that Suharto's Indonesia is not really any less material than Louis XIV's France. Imagined communities ultimately depend on technologies of communication (like print media, radio and television). This suggests that Indonesia is a material production, not of the manipulation of land but primarily the manipulation of electromagnetic energy in the form of radio and television broadcasting. The importance of communications technology in Indonesia is evident at Taman Mini if one strolls out of the portion of the miniature part of the park to the more recently built 'Telecommunications Museum' just inside the park's gates. This spherical structure is designed in a manner reminiscent of the Guggenheim in New York City; for it makes visitors follow a singular path that spirals around the building. In this museum, the permanent exhibit traces the evolution of Indonesian telecommunications from its first primitive technologies – like the *kertongan* signalling device – to the telegraph, telephone, satellite and on to the latest mobile technologies. It is a Baudrillardian story line, with the constraints of land, water, place and distance being superseded through the progressive dematerialisation of communications. This 'satellitization', as Baudrillard calls it, expresses an increase in speed and a decrease in movement (a telepresence) whereby land (and by extension all things material) become superfluous. In the museum this story-line is clearest in long-distance communication, where cables give way to VHF and UHF radio, these to terrestrial microwave, terrestrial microwave to satellites with ground stations, and finally to direct broadcast satellites.

The intermediary link between this story about the dematerialisation of communications and the story of the hyperreal nation in the miniature garden is provided by a statue in front of the museum. The statue is a larger-than-life materialisation of a mythologised thirteenth-century Javanese King, Gajah Mada, with a sword pointed toward the heavens. Inscribed beneath the statue is the so-called Palapa oath taken by the king. According to legend, Gajah Mada swore not to eat the mystical fruit of

<sup>6</sup> Anderson's choice of the term 'imagined community' has been viewed in anti-materialist terms (see for instance, Poster 1999). Here we juxtapose the national imaginary of Taman Mini with Anderson's argument in an attempt to re-materialise the concept of imagining (as well as related concepts of desiring and even dreaming).

Palapa until all the regions of the archipelago had been unified.<sup>7</sup> It is an oath that school kids across Indonesia must read about repeatedly for it explains why Suharto gave the name Palapa to Indonesia's first domestic communications satellite. It is this satellite (which in the miniature portion of the park visitors can almost inhabit subjectively by way of the cable car) that provides the material anchor for New Order hyperreal nationalism.

### Materiality and hyperreality in the satellite

On August 16, 1976 Indonesia became the world's third country to use a satellite for domestic telecommunications. To understand the magnitude of this step, it is useful to recall a few facts. At that time the only other countries to use domestic satellites were rich countries (Moenandir 1981: 3): Canada (since 1972) and the USA (since 1974). With an initial cost of \$400 million, the satellite system – consisting of two satellites and 40 earth stations – represented a projected expenditure of 10% of the national budget for that year. With cost over-runs, however, the real budget was more like \$1 billion, roughly a quarter of the entire 1976 budget (Jones 1976: 1). This unprecedented expenditure came at a time when much of the population still lived below or near the poverty line.<sup>8</sup>

From the beginning, the satellite was viewed as something more than just a radio relay station in the sky: it was an object of tremendous symbolic political power, hanging 36,000 km over the archipelago in a geo-synchronous orbit, drawing the islands together under the shadow of its 'footprint'. According to Willy Moenandir (1981: 9), who along with Major General Suhardjono was the main Indonesian architect of the system, Palapa would unify 'tens of thousands of islands, reducing the communications distance between them'. It would allow 'ideology' to be 'taught in a continuous manner to the whole population in all places of our country', since TV programmes could be 'adjusted to the ideology of national unity'. Religious and ethnic conflict could be avoided, because the 'idea of harmonious relations [could] always be delivered at ordered times, showing examples [of harmony] evenly to all layers of society'. In these ways, the so-called *warasan Nusantara*, in which the Indonesian people, nation, and state were to be imagined as a perfect and indivisible unity, could finally be made manifest (Moenandir 1981: 9).

In effect, what the military and telecommunications ideologues who defined the *warasan Nusantara* concept were promoting was a government fantasy about controlling the shape of Indonesia's imagined community. Despite the fact that the satellite was used for long-distance telephony, the

<sup>7</sup>In the museum's handbook (Museum Telekomunikasi), the old Javanese text that in English is translated as 'integrated' and in Indonesian as 'unified' (*dipersatukan*) is actually left implicit. A literal translation of the Javanese text might read: 'I will taste the fruit of Palapa (that is, retire) when I have arrived at the limit of the archipelago.'

<sup>8</sup>For more details on the Palapa system relative to other countries see Schwartz (1996).

content of this fantasy was from the beginning one of unidirectional communication emanating from Jakarta to be received in the most remote corners of the archipelago. Indeed, the material and legal infrastructure for the satellite was built to support this fantasy. Rather than installing earth stations that were capable of broadcasting locally produced content, the government promoted the spread of ground relay stations that were effectively 'receive only'. The 'border television' programme launched by the development planning agency ensured that regions of the country near borders with foreign countries were heavily inundated with relay stations so that their inhabitants would tune into Jakarta rather than to Sydney, Kuala Lumpur or Singapore (for many years, those who bought parabolic antennae capable of receiving foreign and domestic satellite transmissions directly had to receive government permission to use them). At the same time, the government ensured that through its 'television to the villages' initiative that every village in the nation would have at least one (public) television set.

In many respects, the materiality of the Indonesian New Order imaginary was thus parallel to the materiality of Louis XIV's French territorial nation. High-status engineers in the service of the state scuttled around from place to place, building the material and conceptual basis for a state that could be controlled by a powerful visionary in whose hands all key resources were concentrated. What distinguished Indonesia of the 1970s and 1980s from France in the seventeenth-century was that these state ambitions were realised in a different medium: electromagnetic waves rather than land and soil (or rather as an extension of land and soil to outer space via electromagnetic waves).<sup>9</sup>

One material element of Indonesia's satellite imaginary for instance rests in the territorial nation's relationship to the geo-stationary orbit. In 1976 the equatorial nations of Brazil, Columbia, Congo, Ecuador, Indonesia, Kenya, Uganda and Zaire signed what has been called the 'Bogota Declaration' claiming sovereignty over the region of outer space directly above their lands and the geo-stationary orbit along with it. While the declaration has a dubious legal status in light of the international Outer Space Treaty signed in 1967 (which treats the geo-stationary orbit as a legal commons much like the high seas), Indonesia's Palapa initiative can be seen as way of engineering the nation not just through the symbolism of the satellite's all-encompassing 'footprint' but also through the territorialisation of outer space.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Following the argument of Virilio, as a consequence of satellitisation one can also see territorial ambitions being realised through the manipulation of time (duration) rather than just space (distance). For Virilio territorial ambitions give way to extra-territorial ambitions in the moment produced by telecommunication (1997: 79).

<sup>10</sup>The international politics of the geostationary orbit is a fascinating subplot for our story as it speaks to communication in terms of a limited capacity and scarce resource and consequently as means of defining the nation in globalised information societies. There are a limited number of geostationary 'slots' for satellites to fill and satellites in space must vie for limited electromagnetic space or else run the risk of electronic interference that will disrupt communications. For a basic introduction to these issues see Martinez (1985).

In so far as one treats territorial ambitions as an aspect of collective imaginings only, they remain only as simulacra of their former selves. This does not mean that they will not eventually take material form (witness Taman Mini), but that they will be seen as constructed primarily at the level of symbols, and only secondarily at the level of parks, satellite transmission towers, and the like. Yet we also do not wish to undermine the strength of this symbolic construction that is still evident today in Indonesia. In mid-August 1999, when Ariane launched Indonesia's newest domestic communications satellite, an editorial in Bandung's main newspaper reminded readers of the significance of this event:

For the people of Indonesia, the presence of the Telkom-1 satellite not only manifests the hopes of realizing the development of a national telecommunications network [...] [It] has a far more important meaning, relating to the effort to build Indonesian national unity [...]. To make it easier to understand the strategic importance of the satellite, it is useful if we flashback to a time three decades ago. Before 1976, when we did not yet have a satellite, telecommunications transmission networks existed only on Java and Sumatra [...]. Only after the successful launching of Palapa in 1976 did a momentous change take place in our country's telecommunications system: Indonesia not only possessed terrestrial cables to build its network but also a satellite system. Its effect was incredible. The entire Indonesian territory was covered by the telecommunications system [...]. Not only that. With satellite services, Indonesians for the first time were able to watch television [...]. And furthermore, the satellite allowed the government and our power holders to control and surveil various phenomena across the country with greater ease. In this context, the satellite has done a great service in defending the integrity of the Indonesian Republic. (*Pikiran Rakyat* 1999: 8)

The point here is that considering the symbolic construction alone gives way to a reading of the nation in terms of a materialised hyperreality like Taman Mini. In this newspaper article not only is there a nostalgia for a hyperreal nationalism, but there is a nostalgia for the moment (the advent of Palapa) when that hyperreality actually seemed possible to possess. In today's Indonesia, when Suharto's order has crumbled, East Timor is independent and other islands are up in arms, the carefully fashioned hyperreality represented by Palapa must seem to many to be rather reassuring. We do not deny the desire for hyperrealisation along these lines, but we also seek to locate the material conditions that make such imaginings possible.

### Materiality and hyperreality in the *kentongan*

While Indonesia's telecommunications museum presents the story of technological evolution as a process of increasing dematerialisation, the fact of the matter is that even the oldest communications technologies are still around and being used. The most abundant of these is the *kentongan*, an instrument

of pre-colonial origins used for such diverse purposes as playing music, relaying messages from village to village, and calling village-inhabitants forth to fight a fire. Traditionally the *kentongan* is made from a hollowed-out tree branch with a slit down the middle. The slit is about one-fifth the size of the branch, runs lengthwise, and stops short of the ends of the instrument. They range in size from the length of a hand to a size greater than a man's body. Some examples of *kentongan* one sees are actually carved in the shape of an armless and legless man. Thus, at the top of the instrument a head is carved, with eyes and a nose. The body of the instrument is thus the man's trunk. At the bottom of the instrument a hole is drilled where a stick (used to strike the *kentongan* to produce a sound) is inserted such that it protrudes as an erect phallus.<sup>11</sup>

The most important contemporary use of the device is for the neighbourhood or village nightwatch. Such watches, usually performed by local residents on a rotating schedule, use the *kentongan* to create a characteristic 'tong-tong, tong-tong' sound as they pass by each home on their beat. On such occasions portable *kentongan* are used and the hollow sound they produce is one of the few sounds to be heard in the city neighbourhoods at night. At first sight, such a practice might seem strange, since it would seem to let thieves and others keep track of where the guards are and to plan their crimes when the guards are not around. However, as one guard explained to one of the authors, the sounds are directed not to potential thieves but to residents in their homes (Barker 1999: 32). It is meant to keep them from falling into too deep a sleep, to keep them alert. Indeed in many rural parts of Java, people in their homes are still expected to shout out a reply when they hear the 'tong tong' of the nightwatch: 'on guard'.

The imperative of staying alert at night is part of a broader cultural pattern in Java that is frequently remarked upon by anthropologists. This pattern emphasises the need for the 'manifest' or 'material' (*lahir*) world of bodies, houses, and technology to be harmonised with the 'non-manifest' or 'immaterial' (*batin*) world of spirits, souls, feelings, sixth-senses (a world that is almost always explained 'scientifically' through analogy to radio-waves and electricity). Such harmonisation – brought about by attentiveness to both worlds – is achieved when material desires are held in check, daydreaming is avoided, and one is alert to one's immediate surroundings. The corollary of this is that, for many Javanese, the greatest threat to community integrity is posed by the combination of unrestrained individual desires and community lack of attentiveness. In this context, the *kentongan* – besides functioning as a communication device, musical instrument and an alarm – functions to ensure that people never quite sleep, that is, that they are both alert and not dreaming.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The form of the *kentongan* may also not be that elaborate and other materials used to achieve the same ends include electricity poles and car wheel rims.

<sup>12</sup> If for Freud, dreams – as virtual wish-fulfilment – exist to prevent people from waking up to a world where wishes are suppressed by the superego, then the *kentongan* is the opposite of dreaming: it keeps people awake and their desires suppressed.

One might expect that during the New Order such an archaic device as the *kentongan* would have been characterised as 'primitive' and relegated to the rubbish bin of Taman Mini-like 'tradition'. After all, Indonesia had entered the satellite era, so what good were communication devices made from wood with a sound radius of just a couple of hundred metres? Were they not too constrained by their materiality and social embeddedness to be of use? While this kind of mythologising of the *kentongan* did indeed take place, the more dominant trend was to extend their use. Indeed, the government issued a decree making it obligatory for all villages and neighbourhoods to have a *kentongan* and a guard post. As a result, regions outside of Java that had hitherto not used the device actually started using it and neighbourhoods in Java where the device had fallen into disuse took the time to carve out a tree branch and place it in the guard post.

Anthropologically speaking, the *kentongan* seems an important if archetypal piece of material culture yet it is no less modern and no more material or symbolic than the satellite. Here, we have articulated how the neighbourhood *kentongan* system was used to make residents aware of their 'place' in the waking world. The presence of *kentongan* in every neighbourhood certainly acts as a symbol of the larger community's power over disruptive local practices. The night-time sounds of the instrument both deters thieves and alerts or reminds dreaming residents of the communal context in which they live. We can in this sense say that the *kentongan* stands for the nation but we need to also point to the way that the sound of the device materially produces the nation by physically disturbing individual dreams.

### Materiality and hyperreality in New Order Indonesia

In our tale of the satellite and the *kentongan* we are struck by a peculiar irony. At the same time that the New Order government was celebrating the controlled, hyperreal 'imaginings' of the nation-state via satellite technology, it was also pursuing – via the *kentongan* – the non-modern construction of a materially-constrained technology whose main function was to *prevent* dreams or 'imaginings' that took people out of their immediate context of local co-residence and their relationship to the greater community. The satellite becomes a device for propagating dream-like imaginings of the nation across time and space (a move from the local to global) while the *kentongan* seems to be a device for preventing such 'imaginings' from happening (a move from the global to the local).

The combined effects of the deployment of these discourses and practices, however, did serve an important governmental goal: the construction of trans-local 'imaginings' were bound to a fetishised object in the sky whose 'meaning' could be controlled by the state; but at the same time, there was this *kentongan* system which acted to constrain any 'errant' imaginings and desires that might emerge from local communities. We read the *kentongan* then, as acting to keep community members alert to the controlled satellite imaginary of the nation. The pairing of the satellite and the *kentongan* creates a nation, built and imagined as a place where the only channel for desire is national unity and the divisive potentialities of local dreams and desires are repressed.

However, we do not intend for this to simply be a story about the control of the New Order State over the population. We note that other stories are made possible by this interpretive frame. The satellite's materiality in some sense also undermines the New Order imaginary. For example, in one small village in Sumatra, residents appropriated the ground stations to broadcast messages announcing community meetings (a practice that was quickly suppressed by the national TV authority), and, on a plantation in western Java, farmers avoided the strict censorship of sexual content by New Order broadcasts by tuning in to TFI (France) programming (Rajari 1995). While there is much to be said about these and other examples of subversions of the New Order imaginary, the general implication of such subversions may be that the fatal enclosures of postmodern hyperreality are, in fact, always already interrupted by material contingency.<sup>13</sup>

Consider more recent political shifts in Indonesia. At the end of the New Order, information flows became uncontrolled in part because of material developments (direct broadcast communication has given way to the multidirectionality of the Internet and wireless telecommunications) thus making room for new kinds of political alliances that took shape as powerful social movements (Marcus 1999; Tedjabayu 1999). The *kentongan* were also taken over by new political fantasies, as the main opposition party set up its own neighbourhood guard houses and patrols. These shared a common desire: to get rid of the existing regime. Thus, to focus on the strength or weakness of the hyperreal aspects of the satellite-*kentongan* imaginary or on the conflict of Indonesian versus American New Order imaginaries ignores the very materiality through which social change is occurring. Yet, the material cannot overdetermine the hyperreal imaginary. There is simply a displacement or a shifting.

Like the 'tong, tong' of the *kentongan*, the object inevitably spoils the fantasy even as it enables its control.<sup>14</sup> After all, what does the 'tong, tong' do? It wakes you up, and places you in time and space. But in Indonesia's New Order, the time and space in which you are placed is hyperreal (yet another dream); it has no distance or temporality; it is homogeneous empty time. So, the same object that ruptures the hyperreal imaginary makes possible an imaginary that replaces it, an imaginary that erases the conditions of its own emergence in the case of the New Order and an imaginary as yet unknown in the case of what has followed.

What of the original theoretical frame which has prompted our analysis? It is our suggestion that the kind of story we have told here is only plausible if we abandon the seeming exclusivity of nonmodern constructivism on the one hand and postmodern hyperrealism on the other. But the theoretical task as we envisage it is more dialogic than dialectic in character. Rather than seek a single synthetic frame for making sense of a material-discursive construc-

<sup>13</sup> On how the gift of an airplane spoiled the Taman Mini fantasy from within, see Siegel (1997: 3–6).

<sup>14</sup> A wonderful corollary to this is the phenomenon of 'computer lag' that often occurs to spoil the fantasies of 'virtual communities' and online computer games made possible by the computer systems in the first place.

tion of the nation we have erected these extreme poles (evident in the work of Latour and Baudrillard) as means to facilitate an alternation through which we may begin to identify the ways the respective materials, discourses and practices are deployed. The analytical concepts extracted from the non-modern and postmodern models ultimately propel the story. This means, on the one hand, showing that those people who deploy the material are themselves always fantasising (in the postmodern hyperrealist sense of the term), and, on the other, showing that those who deploy fantasy discourses are simultaneously creating material objects (in the nonmodern constructivist sense of the term). The rhythm produced by this alternation is the form of our story, one which is meant to alert us to the materialities of hyperreality as much as the hyperrealities of materiality in the hope of contributing to the opening up of hidden analytical and political potentialities wherever they might be found (Law and Mol 1995).

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