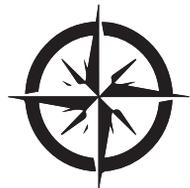


Seminar Paper	Presentation
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# Archive, a Reality of Power and the Other



The Third Annual  
Conference  
on Tanah Runcuk  
Studies

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Jakarta, 2017

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CENTRE FOR  
TANAH RUNCUK  
STUDIES

To comprehend the lengthy project of the Centre for Tanah Runcuk Studies (CTRS), initially I have to propose an appropriate perspective to apply. This entire project poses some questions about archive, which thereupon lead us to the question of “what is reality?” Boris Groys comes up with an interesting thought in regard to this topic.<sup>1</sup> For a quite long period of time, we have been understanding all texts contained in media, all historical records in archives, as representation. In this case, representation is interpreted as the second layer beneath the reality. Thus what matters is who can guarantee the existence of reality? According to Groys, reality is not more than a group of things unrecorded in archives. Hence, it is instead reality that occupies the second layer coming after the archives—it is because archives are not more than the representation of other archives.

At a glance, Groys’ idea seemed to be complicated. However, it is very relevant for the sake of reflecting, for example, our visit to a museum. While observing some archives of colonial drawing about the situation of the colonies around 5 centuries ago, we often imagine how the illustrator captured certain reality into drawings. But, is that how things really work? Are the drawings the representation of reality? Actually, it can not be firmly answered. What we can be sure of is the fact that the existing illustration within the drawings is not the reality itself. The reality of the colonies is every single thing unexisting in the drawings, something we imagine after looking at the drawings, something which will not be anyhow defined as fixed and definite.

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<sup>1</sup> Boris Groys. 2012. *Under Suspicion, The Phenomenology of Media*. Columbia University Press.

Visiting the archive exhibition of CTRS, apparently the visitors will be conditioned to read the colonial era legacy in the form of archives regarding a certain region in the archipelago: Tanah Runcuk. Bearing in mind that the archipelago spans a very wide extent and it is impossible to memorize all regions, Tanah Runcuk seems like a forgotten land, yet the land which “turns out” to be containing various important, unique, and mystic stories. Who would not be attracted after realizing that Tanah Runcuk has a history of unique animal called Runcuk Horses? By means of a mildewy black and white photograph archive, we can clearly see a horse whose head is in the shape of a megaphone.

Runcuk horses must lead the audience to curiosity, did such species of horse really exist? What do other stories about the horses tell? How was the reality of the horses back then? And furthermore, some other questions from different layer arise: Were those real horses? Did people make up these stories? Is it a manipulated photograph? Right at this point, archive is no longer an adequate answer for us to understand the reality. On the contrary, archive triggers us to shape and question the reality concurrently. The questions of the first layer present different issues from those of the second layer. As we go deeper into the second layer, the problem shifts from the representation of stories embodied in the text to the very medium of the old photograph. To say it in other words: the medium turns into a significant site in understanding the reality beyond the images exhibited by the CTRS.

## CTRS, a Lengthy Project

The project of CTRS began in 2014 as a part of the Memoir of Tanah Runcuk exhibition. A mini museum was presented; it displayed a collection of archives which are the legacy of Ludwig Stern Jr., whom the stories told as having explored Tanah Runcuk. Other than exhibition, the first project also published the journal *Malalongke* containing ethnographic records of Tanah Runcuk. At the end of the journal, an epilogue is placed as a disclaimer that reveals the project as mere fictions. CTRS as an institution, and other articles in the journal *Malalongke*, were adopted for the sake of legitimizing a project of the artist Timoteus Anggawan Kusno.<sup>2</sup>

What is captivating is that the creative practices in collaboration with Angga's fictional project did not end in 2014. In the following year, another related project entitled *Anatomy of the (Lost) Memory – Collective Remembering through Institutional Art* was presented in a collective exhibition called *Limanal* taking place at Cemeti Art House. This time, Angga did not explicitly employ the institution of CTRS. Instead, he used a pseudonym, Daliho Kusbirin, to be the caretaker of the displayed archives. The name Daliho Kusbirin could be found in the previous Journal *Malalongke* as the author of a science-fiction writing about the Mythology of Runcuk Horses. Regarding this name, Angga—also familiarly known as Dalijo—clarified in an article of a mass media that the name Daliho

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2 Irham Nur Anshari 2014. "Memoar dari Ingatan yang Hilang", in *Malalongke*. Centre for Tanah Runcuk Studies.

derived from a mistaken pronunciation of his nickname by a Spanish friend.<sup>3</sup>

The pennant of CTRS was raised once again in 2016 in a project entitled *Tropika Selekt: Echoes from Terra Incognita*. The initiative was developed from an experience of collective exhibition in the Ark Galerie under the theme of Masculinity. This project concerned with some archives in regard to the issues of body and gender of Tanah Runcuk people. The name Daliho Kusbirin once again appeared here, ignoring all confessions Angga had made in the past. The project which was also exhibited in Sullivan + Strumpf, Singapore, again, presented the CTRS typical figure of Runcuk Horse.

“The Untold Stories of Archipelago”, another project of the CTRS, presented as a part of the *Power and Other Things* exhibition, will be the final project of CTRS. On one side, this fictional idea is worthy of examination within different frames—in this context, in Brussel, Belgium. While on the other side, maybe this very project should be brought to an end, bearing in mind as a medium, it is gradually losing its aspect of “secret”, the very aspect taking the audience to curiosity and question about reality. Of course, the representations to display are completely different; and the stories to tell are new. This time, Angga engineered a story of Rampokan Macan tradition in Tanah Runcuk. It raises a question: do we still need to conceal a certain idea under a fiction? Or is it still necessary to cover the fictional with the discovered archives?

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3 Anang Zakaria. 2015. “Sepotong Arca yang Mengecoh” in Koran Tempo, 25 June.

## **Fictional History, a Representation of Idea**

In the history of art, an art project of fictional institution, like the CTRS, is not something new. In the late 1990s, an artist named Walid Raad created a fictional foundation called The Atlas Group. Under the label of The Atlas Group, Raad presented his works that talk about the civil war in Lebanon. The archive-like artworks were attributed with some appropriate dates and admitted as the donation from several parties.<sup>4</sup> Preceding the time when The Atlas Group was known as a fictional institution, Raad usually came as the representative of the foundation and attempted to raise the issues of the civil war in Lebanon through some dialogues as well as question and answer sessions. For Raad, this performance is an attempt to present the history as something which is not necessarily chronological based on time and event. Otherwise, it is an abstraction of various discourses and ways in comprehending existing data all over the world.

Borrowing Jacques Ranciere's slogan, "The real must be fictionalized in order to be thought"<sup>5</sup>, the utilization of fictional institution seems, in this case, a choice of disguise used to talk about the reality. But if we refer back to Groys' idea, all archives are representation. All archives, either labelled as fictional or factual, will basically trigger the

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4 Alan Gilbert. 2016. "Walid Raad's Spectral Archive, Part One: Historiography as Process" in *e-flux journal* #69

5 Jacques Ranciere. 2004. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. Continuum.

audience to imagine the reality. At this point, it does not matter anymore to label the project of CTRS as fictional or factual. In practice, the CTRS has been consistently operating for four years. What is important in this final line shifts to the texts, the images of reality in the colonies, not only in the colonial era but also in the post-colonial time.

In understanding the last project of CTRS, we should switch from comprehending the medium to grasping both the poetic (semiotics) and political (discourse) representations of the text. Angga introduced the story of Rampokan Macan tradition in Tanah Runcuk, the one which is different from the *Rampogan Macan* commonly known to occur in Java. In Java, the figure of tiger was the central point that was Othered. Meanwhile in the version of Tanah Runcuk, it was a tiger-masked human that was Othered. With such tiger mask, the “tiger” deserved to be judged by other humans. This make-up story brings about a reflection towards the universal condition of society in which marginalization is a daily grind. In Indonesia, take some cases for example, the mass are eager for judging someone frontally right after labelling their target as “Dukun Santet” (shaman), “Kafir” (infidel, unbeliever), “PKI” (Communist) or even “Cina” (Chinese).

In regard to the situation of presenting this project in Europe, maybe we can take this notion of Othering into the colonial and post-colonial contexts. The history frequently leads us to imagine a black-and-white reality of the colonies, about how the white colonized the black. This imagined reality brings a quite similar post-colonial impact, for example the slogans of nationalism and antifoignism. Looking at one of Angga’s artworks titled *Power and the Other (things)*, we can see a figure

of a nobleman sitting at the same level as the cannon as pointing his finger to the tiger-masked man. It is the moment when archive takes me to the imagination of reality. A black-and-white reality, which is not between the colonizer and the indigenous. Maybe this is the reality occupying the position of the main idea in Angga's artworks. The reality we should be continuously suspicious of, regardless any racial or national identity: the reality between the ruler (Power) and the Other.