A Certain Age
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FENCE OF THE HOUSE OF THE DUTCH ASSISTENT RESIDENT IN YOGYAKARTA OPENING TO THE STREET. 1936. KONINKLIJK INSTITUUT VOOR TAAL-, LAND- EN VOLKENKUNDE, LEIDEN
CHAPTER THREE

THE FENCES

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Sleep in gentle ease,
little eyes shut please,
hear the raindrops in the dark,
hear the neighbor’s doggy bark.
Doggy bit the beggar-man,
tore his coat, away he ran,
to the gate the beggar flees,
sleep in gentle ease.
—Lullaby of Wilhelm Taubert

CRIES OF HAWKERS

Most of the memories and (I guess) dreaming that I have recorded in Indonesia, and especially in Jakarta, happened in places where the noise of traffic deafened much of what was said, remembered, or dreamed. I have witnessed and was part of it as the voices struggled to be heard in that modern space. Inevitably, at least in part, the voices sounded as if aiming for a shelter, to be closer to the house, or inside the house, where it might be easier, perhaps, for them to be understood even without shouting.

Most of the talking thus, or so it seemed, happened in a space in between, where both the noise of the outside and the real or imagined quiet of the inside coexisted to some degree. And there were voices, too, heard from the outside—to complicate the world of the talking and the memories, to blur the line, to make the inside, at least in part, open, and the outside, at least in part, intimate. Most memorable (and much of it again is on my tapes) were the singsongs of street vendors, the cries of hawkers, as they resounded
in, out, along, and over a house, as they touted their wares on the streets, through the fences, and into the houses.

Mrs. SOSRO: I used to sell herb drinks. Prohibited herb drinks. It is why they still call me Siti Laramng [Lady Prohibited]. People still remember that I used to sell herb drinks on the street—“Herb Drinks from Lady Prohibited.” To attract attention, I shouted and used chimes.¹

Sitting on a front porch or inside a house — the deeper in the house it was, the fainter it sounded — after some time and training, even I was able to tell which sweets or fruits, what prohibited or legal substance, was passing by and might be ordered in. By the pitch and intonation of a voice, the color and rhythm of chimes, bells, a coconut shell, or of two little sticks of wood beaten against each other, different woods for different goods, by a mood of singsonging, croaking, or rapping, I came to know what smell and what taste would follow.

“This speech comes in response to a waiting rather than to a question.”² It was all passing by and could be called in — not merely fried bananas, coconuts, noodle soup but also books, textiles, furniture — even baby grands, why not — might be coming the dweller’s way and by this way of dwelling. When Roman Jakobson looked back on his life as a linguist and social critic (possibly recalling his Saint Petersburg childhood, too) he noted in his diary with evident regret: “Several works remained unfinished — on rhyme, on the cries of street hawkers (The greengrocer’s come, the greengrocer’s driven up, peas, carrots, cucumbers he’s grubbed up).”³

As old Indonesians recalled their childhood, they often emphasized that “the front gate was open most of the time.” One was expected merely to shout across the fence, for instance, sepada!, which in Jakarta language means, “who is there?”⁴ Gates and fences between a house and the street are also remembered as being easily penetrated by cries and noise, of course, but also by music: troupes of street musicians, playing and singing Malay-Indonesian-Portuguese-Dutch krontjong melodies; peddlers of music were passing by.

[They] wandered through the streets at night, signing serenades. Kron/tʃ/ɔŋ competitions were held in parks and public places. . . . The [songs] circulated among the public because the gramophone was becoming widespread at this time.⁵

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The interior of the house in the colony, including the most salon-like, resonated by, and can properly be recalled through and measured by, the sounds of the street. Modernity, throughout the colony and into the houses (thus it was conveyed to me), had been peddled.

Mrs. DAMAIS: Bread was not a common thing in those years. But to our house, a baker from the city would bring bread. He came in a car, once a week.

RM: So once a week you had bread?

Mrs. DAMAIS: Yes. It was bread from the city. But it was not for everyone yet. Bread was something, how to put it, exclusive.6

Air Marshal DHANI: Until now, I still love bread. Perhaps, because in Klaten, it was a small town at the time, but there was already a bakery there. A Dutchman owned it, and, every other afternoon, they came on a bicycle from the bakery. We gave them a list. “What kind of bread do you want?” It was a door to door.7

This was a colonial modernity, and many kinds of “door-to-door” cries are remembered. Shouting pinda, pinda, “peanuts, peanuts,” is rarely forgotten. It sounded, and smelled, of warm pleasure to everyone, especially to the children, of course—house-wise, street-wise, colony-wise, and empire-wise. It became an often repeated historical fact, too—some Dutch and Europeans, mostly children again, would cry pinda pinda, “you peanut hawker!” as a slur against native kids when they encountered them on the street.8 The same cry, the same touting, welcomed those Indonesians who got as far as the real metropolis, to the Netherlands, to study, for instance.9

As late as during the Japanese occupation, when colonialism appeared to have been crushed once for all, some Dutch women, men, and children, dwelling now in the Japanese internment camps, are remembered to have held tightly to the cry: “This was an unreal feeling . . . a sort of slowing down of our hearts and the capacity to understand, an impotence to realize what one’s situation was . . . to look even at the Japanese as innocent. ‘They are just another kind of peanut hawkers,’ somebody said.”10

The gates, and fences between houses and between a house and the street, are most convincingly recalled indeed as a passage—as a space filled with

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the vibrations of sound, light, or dwellers moving through, reflections (as these are memories) coming alive by indistinctly belonging neither here nor there. In a passage, through the fences and the gates, the life of the period seems even to be most productively put into play.

RM: The neighbors just came in?
Mr. EFENDI: Just came in.
RM: There was no fence?
Mr. EFENDI: There was a fence, very low.¹¹

Mr. DAPIN: Of course there was a fence.
RM: What for — for the people not to enter, or to keep animals away?
Mr. DAPIN: Large animals would not come in. And people could step over. It was to make things clear. One could also enter the house though the front gate. That was also nice. One might have, of course, locked the gate. But why lock it, when people could step over? It was like attributes. All of this were attributes.

RM: Attributes?
Mr. DAPIN: Yes, it was modern, and it was to make it clear: here was the street; or, over there, there was someone else’s house. There was a fence, so that not just any person would come in. Our fence was about half a meter high. And toward the street we put on some stones. They were so arranged, very pretty. So, by that time, and in our provincial town, we were the middle class.¹²

Stealing fruit from a neighbor’s garden appears essential to childhood, and it was recalled for me often by the most respectable people: running with the spoil through the shrubs standing in for fences, jumping over them, back home, away from the neighbor’s place — like the wind.¹³

Professor SOEMARDJAN: Sometimes we played ball. But we didn’t have money to buy a real ball, so we stole a djeruk [citrus fruit] from the neighbor’s and we used it as a ball. At night, we children, boys and girls, got together and we played games and sang, until we felt like going to sleep.¹⁴

Professor Soemardjan shows it to me on a sketch. We sit on the front porch of his small Jakarta house. As he speaks about shrubs, he points to where
there are indeed some low bushes — by a very high wall separating his and his neighbor’s driveways. (It is how it must be to him now: “The old men they’ve buried upright in the wall covered with gillyflowers. . . . The fences are so high that you can only see the treetops moving in the wind. Anyway, there’s nothing to see there.”15)

Professor SOEMARDJAN: We had some trees and shrubs all around, here and here. (He is showing me on the sketch again.) Here was somebody else’s house. But it did not mean that you could not run in here — for the djeruk, and that you could not get through here.16

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When I asked the old people where the house of their childhood had stood, often they answered, “on a street like this,” or “precisely like this.” Often, a few steps from the skyscrapers, bypasses, and flyovers of Jakarta, I had a feeling — surreal rather than nostalgic — of being in a place “precisely like this.”

Kebon Kacang [Nuts Garden] is a neighborhood a few hundred steps from Hotel Indonesia and the high-rise heart of Jakarta. It is Thursday, and screams of goats being butchered for the evening meal are heard everywhere. A man in white, with a towel over his shoulder, steps out of a house, looks around, and then slowly walks, probably to a mosque or a neighbor’s house for a chat. The parties’ billboards are displayed as this is also a time before the elections.17

Especially during my early visits to Jakarta, in the early 1980s, I would be woken up, several times a night, by monotonous booming sounds, at first from a distance, then getting closer and louder, almost deafening for a while before leaving again. Like the gates and fences, the sounds were there to stake out the space. It was a neighborhood watch, ronda, making “rounds” — “precisely like when we were little,” the old people might say. Almost precisely. These were the neighbors beating drums, sounding the edges of the familiar, like the children did and do “running around and making a lot of noise”;18 or like the hawkers. Only, since the mid-1960s this making rounds and noise was done — mainly — to scare away the communists “lurking in the dark,” or so President General Suharto directed. In fact, of course, virtually all the communists had been killed in massacres by that time.

Especially at the moments at night when the ronda did not let me sleep,
but also in the mornings, as the songs of the caged birds, the children, and the hawkers woke me up again and again, in postcolonial Jakarta, I, too, felt “precisely like,” or “almost precisely like,” as if I was back in the Prague of my childhood:

Houses almost exactly alike . . . most of the windows were occupied, men in shirt-sleeves were leaning there smoking or holding small children cautiously and tenderly on the window ledges. Other windows were piled high with bedding, above which the disheveled head of a woman would appear for a moment. People were shouting to one another across the street; one shout just above K’s head caused great laughter. . . . A phonograph, which had seen long service in a better quarter of the town, began stridently to murder a tune.

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An Indonesian house might be standing on a city street for a generation or more, and yet it might still be inhabited as if lightly on the spot, a little distant to it and a little near.

RM: Rice field, you said?
Mr. SARLI: Yes, we had a rice field.
RM: But you lived in the city?
Mr. SARLI: We did. But there were people working in the field. There was still also our old family house. The field brought us some money, and we used it to buy kerosene and things like that.

Mrs. MIRIAM: We had a rice field, too.
RM: You lived in Jakarta and had the village connection?
Mrs. MIRIAM: Oh yes.

This is often told, like a homily: the father, deep in modern life and thus with only the modest salary of a colonial servant, official, or teacher, yet the mother—it was most often mother—“remained” as an important, basic source of the urban family livelihood. She, in many cases, kept a rice field in a village that the family might or might not still remember as the place they “came from.” The urban dwelling and urban time are often remembered as “waiting for the harvest season. Then the house got stocked up, and it also became really lively.”

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It became quite common for the houses of the Indonesians in cities, towns, and large villages, and it was almost inevitable in Chinese Indonesians’ houses, to have a shop on the ground floor. Sometimes this was a more formal kind of shop, sometimes less so—but always, like a gate or fence, it worked as a space in between. The flow of people, customers, hawkers, servants, guests, and inhabitants is recalled as passing through, again making for the intimacy of the house.

Mrs. Oei: Our house had a shop in front. We sold groceries and tea.
RM: Was there an upper story in the house?
Mrs. Oei: No, only one story, with a porch in front. We turned the porch into the shop. My parents had a room for themselves inside the house, and in front there was the shop. Next to it, there was another room where my grandma lived, and yet another one for us, the children.24
RM: You spent much time at home?
Mr. Oey: Yes. I had to help my mother take care of the shop.25
Mr. Usman: We were poor, Mr. Rudolf. All the time we got, we had to help with the selling, from our house. Mother cooked, and we were selling it around the town.26

Especially the Chinese Indonesians’ houses are recalled as indicating the modern times—how lightly the dwellings stood on the modern colony ground, and how easily everything, the passersby, the cries of the hawkers, and the winds of the time, were allowed to pass through them. I saw the lightness still, in its postcolonial version, in 1997, during one of the bad and recurring anti-Chinese pogroms. As the mob of the other Indonesians (with the army-supplied provocateurs mixed in) raged through the Jakarta streets, the city’s Chinese Indonesians boarded up in haste their shops on the ground floors and front porches of their houses. The people took flight or moved upstairs. And there was that lightness in the notices they put on their boarded shops on the street level, such as “CLOSED JUST FOR TODAY.”

Shops in the front of houses, like the memories of the rice fields “back in the village,” even if never really seen, and like the cries of hawkers, are recalled to draw the line between the house and the street, to make the neighborhood and the city passable, or at least to quiver, to get blurred, or, best of all, to be lively as an echo or as in a moment of waiting.
RM: In your case there was no shop.

Dr. ONG: There was. On the front porch—next, still closer to the street, there were some trees, and yet another row of some plants in flowerpots.27

RM: You sold furniture in your shop?

Mrs. OEI: Not furniture. Boards and planks, wood. There was a sawyer and some other workers. My brothers helped in the shop, and we women did the cooking.28

Mr. GESANG: We had a stall at the sidewalk in front of our house; like that one over there.

RM: Your mother worked there?

Mr. GESANG: Oh, we all did.29

RM: Was there a sign on your shop—like “MR. MINGGU: TAILOR”? 

Mr. MINGGU Sr.: No. There was just me, a tailor in the house. They all could see me.

RM: So the people knew.

Mr. MINGGU Jr.: He was famous.

Mr. MINGGU Sr.: If they had no money, they brought coconuts—ten coconuts sometimes.30

There can still be seen in Jakarta today, in some streets and sometimes just off the main roads, tailors (or sometimes dentists or scribes) sitting at the sidewalk on a chair or crouching on the ground, with a sewing machine, for instance, working and talking to the passersby. Very much of the street, they exude a velvet intimacy in the public space (let me recall in this place my mother sitting in our kitchen, darning the heaps of my father’s, my brother’s, my, and her socks and underwear).

It often seems that only across the low fences and through the intermediary space between the inside of the house and the outside of the street, the smells, touches, and tastes of home might satisfactorily be recalled.

Mrs. OEI: In front, in the shop, for some time, we sold leather and hide, buffalo hide. It first had to be scratched on the inside, then soaked in some solution. We also cut the hide in small pieces and made chips of it. I recall this, cutting the hide and making chips of it. Most of the time, my mother did it and we children helped. We had to help to make

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the chips. The smell of the hide filled everything, especially as it dried in the sun. To this day I cannot eat chips. But the same thing, you see, makes me most often recall my mother.  

Often by ancient means, yet progressively without a doubt, softly, often sensually, through sounds, smells, and touch, the modern house, as the colony into which it opened, became ever more an itinerants’ place. Doctors are recalled as retailing from house to house.

Mr. EFENDI: My father was a doctor, and we had an office and pharmacy in our house. He examined a visitor in his office in the front part of the house, and then mother wrote a prescription. During the vacations, I also worked in the pharmacy.  

Mrs. MIRIAM: Father was constantly on the move, from house to house. Doctor calls, they called it. He was always on the move.

A neighborhood made modern sense, was convincingly and correctly memorable, as a space of peddling.

Mr. OEY: I was born into a petit bourgeois family. My father died when I was nine, and I lived only with my mother. She opened a small shop and sold rice, charcoal, and kerosene. It was a small shop. She was a peddler.

RM: What did you do?

Mr. OEY: What I liked best were my trips to my uncle. He lived rather far away from us. Once a week, about, I went there on bicycle.

RM: Not for pleasure?

Mr. OEY: Oh no, it was my work! It was forty kilometers away. I went for material, to make clothes. Textiles were very expensive. And then, my mother sold the fabric in town.

As in so many other matters of dwelling and modernity, the coming of the Japanese in 1942 and the thrashing of Dutch normalcy did not stop, or even slow down, the process. On the contrary, under the impact of the invasion, war, and the almost four years of occupation that followed, the modern (or aspiring-to-be-modern) houses and homes in the colony became almost fully, and in many cases fully indeed, peddlerlike and itinerant—
or “nomadic,” as Le Corbusier might say about the inhabitants of his high modern and avant-garde creations.

RM: Was there poverty in all families during the Japanese occupation?

Mrs. RAHMIATI: I would rather say that everybody had to sell things. At the end of the occupation, everybody was selling all kinds of stuff, all around: some began to make charcoal at home and sell it throughout the city. Others mixed and cooked all kinds of oils and tried to sell this, too; not on the level of professional merchants, of course, but everybody did it. The salaried people, even those who still worked in an office and so on, had to switch, and to make efforts to survive, to do this.35

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Buying, selling, peddling—and the smell, touch, and sound of it—seem a crucial part of how the fences were kept low and how the homes opened. Intimacy had been turned inside out. The centuries-old art and culture of batik, the painting, waxing, selling, storing, and wearing of the cloth—the thing most intimately connected with the land, pliable, fragrant, touching, sensual—became a storming modernity carried on a wave of avant-garde, breaking into all places, across the colony.

NATIONAL MUSEUM IN JAKARTA: At the entrance to the main hall, there stands an iron tricycle: “Dutch, 19th century, unbroken.” Next to it, in a big glass case, there is an enlarged 1902 photograph of a young woman clothed in Javanese batik, painting another piece of batik. Next to the photograph is another piece of cloth like that in the photograph: “Daughter of Regent, Kartini, batik, and a piece of batik hand-painted by this fighter for the emancipation of the Indonesian women. The width of the cloth: 106 cm, length 260 cm. On loan to the National Museum from Dr. Rahman Santoso, Mrs. Rukmini’s [Kartini’s sister] grandson, at Hang Lekir Street 1/4, Kebayoran Baru, Jakarta 12120, tel. 710428.36

Whenever batik was mentioned to me, a rich connection emerged between home, childhood, and the innermost core of it. At the same time, the street, the market, and all that of the outside came close to home as batik began to be talked about, until both the inside and the outside, by the force of batik, became virtually one thing:

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RM: What did you do when you were home?

Mrs. TRIMURTI: I batiked.

RM: Batiked?

Mrs. TRIMURTI: All girls had to batik. The idea was that, in the ideal case, every piece of cloth you wore would be batiked by yourself. Thus to batik was a duty. When I was not batiking, I was helping in the kitchen; or I went to the market with our servants to do the shopping. Since we were very little, we were taught to do this.

RM: Were you close to your parents?

Mrs. TRIMURTI: I was closer to my mother than to my father. Because, for example, when we batiked, we were together. Speaking to my father I had to use respectful language, to speak up, and to behave that way.

Batik was painted with wax inside the house or in the shade of the house. The cloth was then washed and boiled in color in the yard, and finally dried in the sun. It is recalled as a sound of paddling, water splashing, workers singing, and as the smell of wax that penetrated throughout the house and reached beyond onto the street and in the neighborhood—so widely and intensely as did the housework. Through batik home is often recalled both intimately and as a shop, as a “workplace” or often as a “factory.”

Of all the things of home, stamping the batik with wax (more expensive cloth was hand-painted, less expensive batik design was made by big stamps dipped in wax) was recalled most often—

wax stamping the cloth before it was soaked in colors. This was the part of the work that I liked most—perhaps because it required a sense for art, but especially for the rhythmic sound of the stamping. It was like music. Our hands as we stamped were like parts of a machine. I stamped and I hummed to it.

Mr. GESANG: I helped my parents to make batik until my adult years.

I went around to buy fabric for the batiking.

RM: All the batiking was done at home?

Mr. GESANG: Oh sure, at home.

RM: How many people have worked there? Your father, your mother?

Mr. GESANG: Father, mother, my sisters and brothers, other workers; about fifteen people.

RM: It was all at home?
Mr. GESANG: Yes, at home, from *morning* to night.
RM: So there were many people around all the time?
Mr. GESANG: Many—adults and children; many children.40

There is one of the strongest, most agile, and most sensual ways of inti-
macy recalled with batik—one’s eyes, ears, hands, nose; the whole body
was involved. At the same time, and it seems to be at the root of the matter,
the intimacy flowed through the house and beyond—it was a streamline
intimacy.

RM: It looks like only women lived in your house?
Mrs. MASKUN: Yes, and we batiked all the time. A younger sister of my
mother became a widow very early on, and she moved in with us. She
took care of us because she did not have children, and she batiked day
and night, she *batiiiiik* all the time.
RM: To make money?
Mrs. MASKUN: Yes, for food. We batiked to sell. When a piece of batik
was considered delicate, it might sell for ten rupiahs. In the past, ten
rupiahs, it was a jackpot!41

Batik is often remembered as the sublime of the house. It is still fre-
quently a part of a family heirloom, and it is kept in a closet, in the inner-
most part of house. It can be remembered, at the same time, by the same
people, and at the same depth, as the fastest and most widely ranging com-
modity; hawkers peddled batik from the street, across the fence, into the
homes.

*Mr. Hardjonegoro lives on Jalan Kratonan, Court Street, near the Susuhunan’s,*
*the local prince’s, palace. His family is highly respected, as he shows me in a*
*book, “Prominent Indonesian Chinese.”42 Sukarno’s second wife, Inggit, also*
*came from a good batik family, he tells me, and this is why, even when president,*
*Sukarno liked batik so much. He had often asked him to make batik especially*
*for him. He came to this place; often before sunrise to see it all. Mr. Hardjo-
negoro takes me around. The house had been built around 1900: plaited bamboo,*
*rather curtains than walls divide the space inside. At one side, there are two*
*monumental carved wardrobes; from the eighteenth century, he says. Plaited*
*bamboo also separates the house from the backyard, in the middle of which there*
is a large barnlike building also of wood and bamboo; about twenty-five meters long and ten meters wide. As we enter it, about two dozen women and girls sit there on the floor in three rows, singing, laughing, and batiking. The fourfold smell of wood, wax, sun, and work is all around. As we head back to the house, on the left there is a much smaller building; just for him, he says. There, he shows me truly an elegant dagger, a kris, which he is now working on. “For the descendants,” he says.43

In the new times as in the old, neighborhoods were made by sounds, cries, and songs as they penetrated the house. A rift between the old and the new, especially the one carried by a sound or a song, could sometimes be striking, and other times almost imperceptible.

Mrs. MIRIAM: We came back from Holland [Mrs. Miriam’s father got one of the few scholarships for Javanese medical students in the 1930s] just when my grandmother died, and we went to attend those ceremonies. I did not know what ritual we participated in, it sounded to a child merely like allla ullah mullahah—(Mrs. Miriam sings a melody but does not make the words.) It was so very impressive to me because of course at home I had never heard anything like that.44

RM: So, you had piano lessons?
Professor RESINK: I had lessons in [Javanese] gamelan, too. And it was a disaster! It had been too difficult for me to learn these two kinds of music at the same time. But the thing was that I got accustomed to hearing gamelan from afar, from the Javanese quarter of the town. And this is still in me, that indistinct music from afar. (A clock somewhere deep in Professor Resink’s house sounds the hour.) This was my musical education.45

Like batik, kris daggers, or gamelan, wajang—the shadow puppet theater—not merely survived in the modern times and in the memories but it carried the modern times, fast, forward, and through, like the peddlers’ cries.

RM: Where did you learn to be a puppeteer?
Mr. NARYO: I watched it and I mimicked it: there is a battle, and here is a warrior, and here, you see, is his jaw, moving, like this—it means that
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he is a nobleman, he raises his hand, like this; then battle is over and he changes—like this.

Jan, my son, introduced me to Mr. Naryo. Jan had taken lessons with Mr. Naryo for the few preceding months, and Mr. Naryo had served as a proxy father in my absence, a year before, at Jan’s wedding.

JAN: Everybody knew that you would become a puppeteer? Since you were a child? You inherited it?
Mr. NARYO: I was taught. I was ordered to watch. My father sometimes played in our house—for me to watch.
RM: When you played with other children, you knew?
Mr. NARYO: Children knew it. I cut puppets from paper, a whole box of puppets. Every day I played and children watched.
RM: Did you have a screen?
Mr. NARYO: Just a little screen. For the paper puppets.
RM: You did not use music?
Mr. NARYO: Mouth music. But when I was ten or thirteen, I helped by moving boxes and handing puppets to the puppeteer as he played. Then I played myself. We traveled around in a horse carriage.

We did not think, alas, to ask Mr. Naryo how he touted his wares.

JAN: How much money did you make?
Mr. NARYO: A puppeteer used to make sixteen rupiahs, which is as much rice as one got in one harvest from two patoks of a rice field. A patok is about one-fifth of a hectare. It means two-fifths of a hectare for playing one night.

Shadow-puppet theater was performed on the occasion of a home or neighborhood celebration. The puppeteer, who made the puppets move, and speak, and also conducted the music, who brought the homes and neighborhoods together this way, had the respect—and still has—of a priest.

Mr. NARYO: People used to come to me for various reasons, like when they were not happy with their naughty children, for instance. Sometimes they might come and ask for help in other matters, and the
puppeteer made a suggestion. When someone in a family had been ill often, they came to a puppeteer and he might help them out. Yes, when I was thirteen, I was already a puppeteer. And I had to know how to do it.46

The shadow-puppet theater is recalled by the old people as an itinerant spectacle and much more—space and time opened by and for the play, moving, “running around, and making a lot of noise,” between homes and beyond the home, through the gates and fences: like the shadow finger play by the father on the wall of the childhood house, yet unquestionably of the world:

RM: Such a little girl, and you could stay outside till the morning?
Mrs. HARTINI: We did not feel sleepy; it was so full of everything. Our eyes were wide open all the time.
RM: So you could stay there till the morning?
Mrs. HARTINI: Of course we could; till the morning, till five or six in the morning.
RM: It meant that it was safe in the dark for such a little girl?
Mrs. HARTINI: Yes. It was a safe place. Because everybody was there.47

The thing about the shadow puppets, as with batik, ceremonial daggers, or the gongs of gamelan, was that they were recalled for me in the postcolonial Indonesia through the filter (and mist) of the colonial, of war, of the occupation, and of the (failed) revolution. Again, one might call it nostalgia. As I listened, however, it began to sound more like a mechanism for living in and passing through penetrable fences, open gates, and houses still well standing.

Mr. TIMU: People sang. And when something important happened, our place was overflowing with people.
RM: It was a good life?
Mr. TIMU: Now, everything is progressive. But as lively as it was, it is not.48
Mr. JUSUF: Our house stood close to a mosque. But it was not the worship I am talking about. It was the sleeping there—delicious, in the late afternoon, after all the running around, to sleep under a bedug. [Bedug is a large drum suspended horizontally at a mosques, to summon

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people to prayer.] And we always could sleep in such a place, in the mosque; or we could just lie on our backs and see the sky.

RM: You were young!

(Again, one flaw in this book appears clearly. Out of excessive politeness, or distance, I did not ask about sex.)

Mr. JUSUF: There were a lot of youths. But also old people—and they asked to be taken there, also, after they would die. My father was always telling me: “After I die, I want to be buried there.” There was a sleeping mat—

RM: Did it happen?

Mr. JUSUF: Yes, sadly, when I was still too young. He died but yes he was buried behind that mosque. At the place he chose himself.49

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Some places where the living space of the house extended into the outside were to be avoided. Especially to the children of the house, this was told with urgency. Some bodies of water, for example, like ponds and wells, should be touched only at the edge.

General KEMAL: There was a fishpond very near our house. We played at the pond, my sisters and I; and I fished.

RM: You fished with a rod?

General KEMAL: Yes, for carp, and my mother baked them.50

A river is the life of every community blessed enough to have it. Indonesia, moreover, is a tropical country: everybody bathed in the river in the heat, played at the river, took water from the river; it was old wisdom, too, in many parts of the country, to test one’s physical and spiritual fortitude by the river: one might be advised to stay outside and close to a river through the night to bear it and to meditate.51 It all was done, but done by lightly touching the space beyond the usual. This word returns—lightly.

There was always the possibility of drowning. Regularly, too, in the rainy season, water got bloated—in the memories of the old Indonesians, bandjir (now banjir), the destructive floods killing people and tearing down houses, are never missing.52

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Mr. ROSIHAN: Our house stood near the river. Its name was Bandar Bakalien, but everybody called it the Bandjir Kanaal, because bandjir, the floods, were supposed to be diverted by it.53

Father MANGUNWIJAYA: We played at the Bandjir Kanaal. We lived close to it, and the older boys took me there to play. My mother did not like it at all. We stole away, my friends and I, we ran to the water, got out of our clothes. I was always scolded a lot when my mother learned about it.54

The allure and danger of the ponds and the rivers, besides the water, were the trees around and along. Children in particular had to be told, and in no uncertain terms, that there really was a danger—like the spirits in the trees:

Mr. DAINO: We bathed in the river; we played with the buffaloes in the water. There was so much excitement in this, and there still is, when I think about it. But there were many things that made me afraid. Like the big trees, and we were told that there were Geister in them. (Mr. Daino uses a German term for “spirits” or “souls.”) My grandfather told me a story about a woman Geist. Sometimes, he said, she changes herself into a white spider—I have never seen it myself. But one day my brother was dying. It was at night, and I remember the darkness outside the house, and the black big trees. It is still in my mind. And people said that—

RM: —?

Mr. DAINO: — they said that there was a white spider! My brother cried, he cried to the very end. He could not speak anymore, only: “Hhhh . . . , hhh . . . , hhh . . . .” And what was it? Was he not able to say any more what he had seen? I was afraid of those dark trees. There was not much electricity yet, you see? It was pitch-dark outside, and these Geister—

RM: But when you left for a city? In Bandung, also —?

Mr. DAINO: No, in Bandung they disappeared.55

RM: Your childhood, were there not ghosts also?

Dr. ONG: No. Well, there might have been a few. In the big tree in front of our house, there was one.


Dr. ONG: Waringin. They said that that tree could embrace — you may say
strangle—a rainbow. It was an enormous tree, several trees had grown into each other. Full of mystery. And there also was gendruwo, a spirit in our well. There were a number of spots around the house where you had better be on guard.

RM: As you wandered?
Dr. ONG: Yes. There was a place, near the garage—

Roads and streets belonged to the family of ponds, rivers, and trees as one moved out of the house, and again children especially needed to be warned. It was ancient knowledge that Kala, the god of time, “may eat those who wander.” The danger belonged to the roads and—naturally and progressively—increasingly so as the traffic increased.

Father MANGUNWIJAYA: We could play only close to the house. Luckily, we lived in a small, villagelike lane. Compared to the street in the city, it was still quiet. It was just big enough to play ball on it; when we were children.

A child could even draw on the asphalt road with chalk or a piece of coal. Asphalt roads especially were “abstract, intact, dazzling.”

Dr. ONG: I would have liked to play on the street, but the old people were very protective. I could rarely get to the street alone. Somebody was with me whenever I went, even if it was near the house. They were strict.

Like trees, ghosts, and fences, the roads and streets staked out space, as well as the sense of home, neighborhood, and colony, as they changed:

Mr. DAINO: Purworejo [Central Java], where I grew up, was a military-garrison town. There were troops of the KNIL [Royal Netherlands-Indies Army] stationed there, and so there were many Dutch and Indonesian soldiers, from Ambon and Menado.
RM: There were parades?
Mr. DAINO: Sometimes. But all the time the streets were like a frontline. Nobody felt really safe. The main streets especially were like conquered territories. People were afraid, and, believe me, I was afraid. These soldiers, of course, would not shoot at you; it was not what their orders
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were. They all, those from Menado and Ambon, as well as the Dutch, of course, had discipline.61

The roads and streets, like the ghosts, in all their increasingly modern, impressive, and often scary strangeness, complemented the home. They extended only as far as the sense of hominess did, to the edge of it. The people warned their children and themselves out of affection: also this is recalled as the warmth of the home. The ghosts and the rest — stretching, groaning, growing in multitude, and in complexity — staked out intimacy.

Mrs. BEBSI: OK, how should I start? Oh, yes — we should not play on the street. At home, we were taught the elementary things like this.62

It was in the nature of these border things. Ghostly and frightening, yes — yet they suggested themselves to be handled with ease, touched lightly, bypassed, flown over. Often, in that mood, they are recalled almost as toys.

RM: When as a child you were sick, did a doctor come to your house?
Mr. HARDYOYO: Yes, we called the doctor from town, nineteen kilometers away. He came in a car. When there was no car, it was during the Japanese occupation, it was even more interesting; he came in a two-wheel carriage, with a horse!63

The first things of the roads and streets, the machines on wheels, to be remembered are bicycles, those one had or those one desired.64

Mr. NARYO: When I was a boy, only a very few people had a bicycle. In our whole place, there might be two or three bicycles altogether. If you were not a well-to-do person, you would not have a bicycle.65

The bicycle was called either by its Dutch name, fiets, or in Indonesian, kereta angin, “carriage moved by the wind or moving through the wind,” another spirit of the brink of home.

Mr. RUSLI: As far as bicycles were concerned, we had to have lock and key. Otherwise the bicycle might disappear. The houses, however, they still used to be left open. There were almost no cars in the town at that

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time, just a few, so the streets were not jammed and we children could play on the street. Not high officials, but schoolteachers, even the Dutch ones, traveled around on bicycles. They rode their bicycles in white jackets, white trousers, and boots. My Dutch teacher, she always rode on bicycle to school. So, in the past, streets were more — how to put it — peaceful. They were peaceful, and they felt pretty.66

The things with wheels, on the roads of childhood, at the edge of home, ride in the memories, solid, clicking, handle-prone and knob-full, often named like pets (using trademarks), shiny. The roads populated by those spirits become intimate cum modern in an almost good-interior, indeed, the salon way.

Mrs. TORAR: I had a bicycle, Fongers. I still remember it. Fongers.
RM: There was not much traffic on the street those days?
Mrs. TORAR: Mostly horses. First, we had a sado [two-wheel horse-drawn carriage]; in the sado two of us sat, side by side, plus a coachman. Then we got a délman, and in the délman — here sat two persons and here one person and the coachman. Finally, we got a car, Oldsmobile.67

I was talking to an old lady in Jakarta while a convoy of heavy trucks was passing on the street. She was telling me how she as a girl rode a bicycle on the street and how pretty it was. She shouted over the trucks:

Mrs. RAHMIATI: And sometimes I roller-skated, too. On the street. It could not be done at home [no asphalt there]. There was a small plein [square], and we could go on bicycle or roller skates as far as the plein. We had girls’ bicycles; priests also used them. Men’s bicycles had a bar, so you could not wear a skirt.68

The roads and streets of childhood felt new, modern, and, in the new and modern way, intimate. The sense of them, their surface and their perspective, it seems, never disappeared since.

Father MANGUNWIJAYA: I still remember that the road led from our house up to the market. Only after I grew up did I realize that the ascent, in fact, had been very small. In the eyes of a child, the street was steep, as if leading up to a big mountain. The impact was so
immense. It can never again be an ordinary road from a house to a town.  

Even nostalgia, if it was nostalgia, the longing for the lost home, became a feeling of the road.

**R.M.** When you grew up, what did you do?  
Mr. BENGGA Sr.: I wandered. **(Mr. Bengga Sr. is an old man who does not care terribly much about anything. He is almost deaf, and his son is eager to help me.)**  
Mr. BENGGA Jr.: What do you say, father?! He asked you, what did you do as you grew up.  
Mr. BENGGA Sr.: I wandered. I tramped. In the past, ah—  
**R.M.** In the past what?  
Mr. BENGGA Jr.: He means that it used to be better in the past.  
**R.M.** Because you were young?  
Mr. BENGGA Sr.: This used to be an ordinary place. You did not have to ask everybody for directions as you moved around. You just went.  
There was Waru, you knew, the hill over there, and there was that big tall stone in the valley, by the river. Some people lived in one place, and other people lived in another place. Nowadays, it is as if even the Waru Hill was not there truly anymore. Once, as I wandered around, I met a girl. Boy, she was gorgeous! And she never came back.  
**R.M.** Modern life.  
Mr. BENGGA Sr.: You said it.  
Mr. BENGGA Jr.: You said it.  

“Violence,” as Paul Virilio argues, “can be reduced to nothing but movement.”  

“Service cars” were most fondly recalled for me, cars owned by private companies or by the state and provided to select employees for as long as they worked for them. Out of the garages and gates of a modern house (standing lightly on the ground anyway) service cars moved onto the street and road. Almost as a rule, by the way, almost as courtesy, in postcolonial
Indonesia, I was led into houses through their fronts, which was through the garage.

Through the service cars, as I often heard from my interviewees, the tricky space between a modern house and the modern beyond could be best negotiated—as a weekday trip to work or, even more memorably for the children and still closer to the dream, as a Sunday outing. All that might have been left behind at home, and of home, could then be seen, from the service car, as moving, sporting away, (as) in a rearview mirror.

Or, the vehicle of the new could “only” or “still” be a dream of a service car, a sporting ghost possibly, even more powerful because it involved longing.

Mr. SUDARMOTO: My father worked in a hospital in town and he often went to the places, around the whole area, to ondernemingen—

RM: Plantations.

Mr. SUDARMOTO: Coffee and cocoa plantations. He often went there; in a dienst car.

RM: Service car.

Mr. SUDARMOTO: Yes, he drove it himself, and sometimes he let me go with him.\textsuperscript{72}

Air Marshal DHANI: My father had a service car, and sometimes we could all use it. It was so beautiful. Especially at night, with the fireflies.\textsuperscript{73}

(Note here, as in so many other instances: something like fireflies, not something like mosquitoes.)

Air Marshal DHANI: When my father was promoted, he got a car that we called Jeffrey. Jeffrey was convertible. A cabriolet. It still used a carbide lamp. It was a big and very high car, made in 1915. Then my father got a new model again, Dodge. It was always like a present to all of us.

RM: Could you go far?

Air Marshal DHANI: Yes, even for a couple of days. When we got a flat tire, early on, we did not have a spare. We had to carry everything on the outside of the car. But we could go fast. On some roads, we could make 40 kilometers an hour! We might stop at some place and have a picnic. It was nice. When we had a flat tire, we stopped at the side of the road; we always took food with us.

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RM: Your father drove?

Air Marshal DHANI: My father drove. But there was always a man who helped us. He sat behind the backseats: the back of the car could be yanked out, and it made a little place for him to sit in. Sometimes, also, we the small children even could sleep at the side of the road, under a tree, when the car broke down. The servant went for what was needed to repair the car. Then, I remember, we got a Citröen, a 1926 Citröen. One man put it all together; the motor, everything. He shopped for spare parts all around. He said: “Now, we need to put motor in.” I watched it all. I was very happy at the time, you know.74

Ideally, ultimately, in that service (which meant functional) life nothing was impossible — in driving, entering the wider space of the new.

Mrs. RAHMIATI: We had a French veranda, as we called it, in the back of the house. In front on the left as you faced the street, we had a garden. There also used to be a small garden in front on the right side, but we needed a place for the car. My parents had a car, not a big one, I still remember — a sports model, an English car; cabriolet. We did not have a driver. Father liked to sport. He always drove the car himself. There were just my mother, my younger sister, and I in the car.75

Mr. HARDJONEGORO: Yes, of course, we had a radio. And we also had a car. My grandfather had — a most terrific Buick.76

A new feeling of space was being produced on the road and on the roadside; the new intensity — or, better, speed — of the feeling increased as the vehicles became more powerful. It was a playful sort of freedom in the colony, “something resembling freedom”;77 to drive or to be driven. Some did it, and everybody watched:

RM: But it was just for the rich — the motorcycles and the cars?

Mr. SUTIKNO: We had our first car already in 1936 or 1937, a secondhand one, of course.

RM: You had a driver?

Mr. SUTIKNO: We had a driver, because my father was not interested in driving. At that time we lived in Kudus [Central Java]. There were only few cars in the town. We had number 53.78
RM: Before the war, did you often travel outside Surakarta?
Princess BROTDININGRAT: Not often, to Surabaya, Bandung, and Jakarta [all on Java].
RM: By car?
Princess BROTDININGRAT: By train. My father had a train carriage; his own wagon lit. De luxe. It is still there, in Yogyakarta.
RM: De luxe?
Princess BROTDININGRAT: It was a wagon de luxe. It belonged to us. Papa owned factories. There used to be cigarettes and tobacco made by Papa’s company. He was a rich prince, my dear. That wagon is now in Yogyakarta, and I keep telling people: “Bring it back here [to Surakarta], so that everybody can see it.”

In the new and expanding traffic-excited and traffic-determined space, whoever did not have a wagon-lit, or a driver, or at least a car, so it seemed, might feel free to ride a bus or, say, a city tram:

Mr. DES ALWI: It was so nice. In Jakarta you might go by tram everywhere! It was quite cheap, too. Even when I had no money I could just jump on and watch for the conductor. When he came close, I jumped off. I remember my first time on the tram. We passed through the Van Heutsz Boulevard. Toot toot, and you could go as far as the harbor. I loved just to sit there, in the tram, just to sit there.

One was supposed to breathe modern as much as one was able — to get on the road in fact or in a sense, in a machine with wheels. One’s land, town, city, and the metropolis were also supposed to breathe that way, be modern-livable, and driving-meaningful:

A landscape cut through by an express train or a car loses the describable details but acquires a dense intimacy. The doors of a train carriage and the windshield of a car have one thing in common: they change the aspects of things.

Seeing the world like that, the new sort-of-wholesome, new “volumetric effect,” becomes “most intense for a spectator in motion.” One has as many chances to survive as avant-garde as one is able to become: “The beauty is in speed.” By the same logic and intensity, in the same perspective, most of the roads of the past newly appear strikingly aimless. This is a new nos-
talgia—one begins to wonder whether such roads ever existed in the first place.

Mrs. OEI: We just walked. Adults were watching over us. If a road seemed too long, we just sat down, at the roadside. There was always a canari tree somewhere. We sat and we ate canari nuts. All the children were there. We sat there, and not always to have a rest, but for the sitting. Then we went home.85

The beauty, attraction, and meaning of the road and of the land along the road were erased and newly produced by the motion—or, better, by speed. The road thus traveled was able to signify—in “a dense intimacy” and without “the describable details”—everything. This was a land that the modern and aspiring-to-become-modern people of the colony were getting—land, certainly, like the people themselves, in motion or, better, speeding:

Mr. ROESLAN: My father got into the car, and the driver tried to start the motor. He tried for quite long time, \textit{wrrr wrrr wrrr}, It was a \textit{Fiat}. I was told to sit beside my father in the back of the car. He pointed out things to me as we drove. I was nine, it was in 1923, and there was the big railway strike in Surabaya. The communist and Islamic unions were striking in unity. The workers’ housings at that time were in Pacarkeling, near the main railway station, and, as the strike began, the Dutch authorities decided to evict the workers from their homes; in the middle of the night! Their flats were to be auctioned to the wealthy Chinese and Arabs in the city. And we went to see it. We drove slowly by and father pointed out for me: “Look at this. See the harshness of the Dutch. In their own land, the people are being evicted, and Chinese and Arabs can buy their houses cheap.”

RM: You saw it from the car?

Mr. ROESLAN: It was raining, everything was fuzzy. But I saw something. Police were taking people from their houses, and there was furniture in the rain. Where were these people supposed to go? That much I could see. Father did not dare to stop, of course. There were only few cars around, only three or four, and there were the police everywhere. We just drove on by.86

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\textit{The Fences}
Maybe André Breton was right: “The street,” to a modern human, may become indeed “the only field of experience.” A poem by a Chinese Indonesian, about an early colonial modern road, a railway on Java, decades before Breton stated it with an even greater conviction:

With the train there’s nothing to fear,
No need to accompany the freight.
The line is straight without deviating,
With the train there is no worry. It is easy.

Theodor Adorno, with his own experience on the modern roads closer to our own, put it in a slightly more complicated manner, yet his message seems the same: “Perhaps the cult of technical speed . . . conceals an impulse to master the terror of running by deflecting it from one’s own body and at the same time effortlessly surpassing it. . . . In the fanatical love of cars the feeling of physical homelessness plays a part.”

THE ART OF NOT TOUCHING

RM: Your family—
Mr. ALI: Yes, it is of Arab origin.
RM: Wealthy people?
Mr. ALI: Wealthy.
RM: What did they do?
Mr. ALI: The usual thing. They were Arab Indonesian merchants. My father got it from his grandfather. The grandfather dealt in horses.

Mr. HARDJONEGORO: My great-grandfather got the title from the Dutch colonial government—“the lieutenant of the Chinese.” He got a license, too, a monopoly to sell opium and salt. Naturally. This was the Chinese Indonesian thing.

(Repeatedly, from the Chinese Indonesians, Arab Indonesians, and all the other Indonesians, from the “natives” as well as from the Dutch, one gets that sense of “the natural,” which is an order that, except for moments of “irregularities,” pogroms, most dramatically, evokes the sense of calm.)

Mr. HARDJONEGORO: You should never forget that in all the towns, like Solo, Yogy, or Cirebon, it was the same map: toward the south, there

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was a palace, north of the palace, there was the main square, and, next to it, there was a Dutch garrison, the government house, post office, and so on. North of the main square, still further to the north, you see there was a Chinese quarter. Why? So that the Chinese Indonesians do not live with the native Indonesians. If they would, the Chinese would be crushed sooner or later. All the [Chinese] merchants have always lived there. In the middle of town, there was the colonial government. You can still see all this in Yogyakarta; the market ends at the palace—and the same in Cirebon.91

Mr. Oey: My connection, of course, was only with the Chinese children; no contact with the Javanese children of our age.

RM: No contact? Even on the street?

Mr. Oey: Some, perhaps. But no, there was no social life in common.

RM: But you lived so close to each other?

Mr. Oey: We did. But these were the circles we moved in. Yes, they were there, of course, we knew about them. But there was no closeness between us. My mother sold candies to the Javanese or Arab children. They came as customers to our shop. But as for contact, there was none.92

Mr. Asrul: Social life was like that: Dutch and Eurasian community, Chinese community, and Arab community; the lowest stratum were the inlanders, the “natives.” In Jakarta, the Dutch community lived in Menteng, between the governor-general’s palace and the Tosari Street in the south. Jakarta Chinese lived in Glodok, in the north. Even the “natives” in Jakarta lived according to the region or island from which their families came, even when in these cases the lines were not so sharp. But still, for instance, those from Minangkabau [West Sumatra] usually lived here, in Sawah Besar—

Mr. Asrul, one of the best-known Indonesian writers of the century, also came to Jakarta from Minangkabau as a young man and lived in Sawah Besar.

Mr. Asrul: —some Minangkabaus also lived in Tanah Tinggi. Most of the houses around the Kebun Jeruk belonged to the Arabs. And also, it was typical for the cities that the “natives” lived in the little alleys and

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rarely on a major street. Like you see, you had to walk quite a distance from the bus stop to my house, right?  

So it might have been since premodern times. But as colonial modernity pushed through and excited the separate communities, as it made them increasingly into communities on the move, they moved—parallel, and naturally, at different speeds.

Mr. NARYO: In the past there had been electricity, for certain people, for certain rich people, for certain rich people in the city. The Chinese [Indonesians] had electricity.

Through the multitudes of separate senses of home and the multitudes of separate modes of moving, the colony came to feel wholesome.

RM: How did it feel to be a child from Menado [Sulawesi] and live in Batavia?

Mr. WAWOROENTOE: We kept close to the other people from Menado. We tried to stay together. We said: “When among ourselves, let us not call ourselves Jakarta or Batavia folk.” We kept feeling like arrivals. Our parents worked here, in the city, and there were also brothers and sisters, cousins, uncles and aunts; and they also came from over there. Some of them later moved even farther, deeper into Java and to the other places. And there also they found other Menado people. Of course it felt like a patch here and a patch there.

Even when on the move, very much so when on the move, when walking on the street or driving through a city, one was fairly sure where one happened to be at the moment. The very style of houses, the very facades, in a blink of an eye, seemed to tell it all.

Mrs. BEBSI: We lived in Jakarta, Karet neighborhood, at the time, and so our house was an Arab house—with a little courtyard, you know, a flower pool in the middle and all that.

RM: Was it a big house?

Mr. HARDYO: Actually our house looked strange in that place—it was a little like a Chinese house.
The ultimate late colonial cityscape met the eye with a multitude of patches—Chinese, Arab, Indonesian, and Dutch facades, homes, and lives, each evident in itself, each luminous and colorful in its own way. Ultimately, as the most various people were being ever more tightly squeezed into the urban space, the patches came to more closely resemble a mosaic, increasingly complex or messy, its outlines and shapes increasingly difficult to make out, with each particular tiny piece competing for one’s separate attention, rather gray, in fact, in its overall effect—a sort of a newspaper page.

Mr. SUTIKNO: Some parts of the city were predominantly Dutch. Others were Dutch with a few Indonesians living here and there. Some quarters were Chinese, and yet others were purely Indonesian. We have lived in Rejosari, on the main street, and there the different groups already lived very close together.

RM: How close?
Mr. SUTIKNO: Next door to each other on the main street.98

Mr. ROESLAN: My father owned a couple of taxis, and so he was an entrepreneur. Some people even looked at him as if he were Chinese.
He owned a few cabs and he rented them. You must see the place. The house is still there.
RM: Good neighbors?
Mr. ROESLAN: Our neighbors were Eurasians.99

The Dutch were exemplary in the colony, in this, too, and leading the way, by being the most separate, in their own distinct color—white, “truly white” faces, all-white, in fact, in how they faced the colony and how they dressed. They were the most offish patch of the patchy togetherness. They were symptomatic of it.

Mrs. SOERONO: As a child, I never met a Dutch person on our street. In fact, I have never touched a Dutch person in my life.100

Mrs. OEI: When I was little, we lived in a small town. Our house was not far from a garrison, and on some evenings we could hear drunk Dutch soldiers on the street.101 Then, we, the children, were ordered to get in, to go to bed early. Until after independence in 1945, I never had any connection with a Dutch person.102
Mr. Mewengkang: I grew up in a village, and there were no Dutch people. Only, on some Sundays, about once a month, a Dutch priest came.103

Mr. Rosihan: Oh, no, of course, I knew Dutch people before the war. There was a Dutch controleur [financial district official], and he was quite close to our family. It was in Talu, Agam, in West Sumatra.

RM: But it was his choice. He could get close, if he wanted.

Mr. Rosihan: He could get close, if he wanted. It depended on the person. This controleur even used to come to our house! I remember this: during the Lebaran [the end of the Muslim fasting month], he came to our house. My father put on his official uniform, with the epaulettes of his rank and all the rest. The controleur came with his wife as my parents would wait on the front porch and offer them the chairs. I was about eleven or twelve years old, and I had been ordered earlier not to come outside while they were there: “You stay in the back!”

RM: You did not show up? You just watched?

Mr. Rosihan: Yes, always just watched, of course. We called him “Sir.” But this particular controleur once came to our house and he asked about me. And, actually, my father called me: “Come out and greet Sir!”104

Mr. Oey was not a village or even a small-town boy. He grew up and lived in big cities, Surabaya and Batavia-Jakarta, his whole life.

RM: So you met them on the street?

Mr. Oey: Yes.

RM: But not in the house?

Mr. Oey: No.

RM: Where else, except on the street, could you meet them?

Mr. Oey: I could see them at the swimming pool.

RM: You could go there.

Mr. Oey: Yes! There was a swimming pool, and there were the Dutch.105

Nobody I knew among the Dutch persons who used to live in the colony had such a good name of being “pro-Indonesian” as Professor Wertheim:

RM: As Dutch, you had a different feel even for the layout of the city than the Indonesians had?

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Professor WERTHEIM: Yes, I think so.

RM: When you said “Batavia,” or “Jakarta,” you would have certain streets in mind. Indonesians might recall different places, right? It was not the same city for you and for them?

Professor WERTHEIM: Of course, you mean there were native quarters, poor native quarters, sure, there were. I sometimes went to a native quarter. I even had a friend who lived in a native quarter! One of my colleagues teaching at the law school lived there.

RM: You are famous for being an exceptionally progressive Dutch person living in the colony. When I talk with other Dutch of your age, almost all of them say that, until the war broke out, they did not feel anything much that would seem fundamentally wrong in the colony. They had their work, easy or complicated, but otherwise the things of the colony appeared to them to be functioning as they should.

Professor WERTHEIM: Yes, it is true.

RM: Might it be that one lived there without a sense that something was entirely not all right?

Professor WERTHEIM: There were moments, of course. Once our maid who took care of our children came and told us that two of her children had just died. There was no doctor available to her. It was a moment when one suddenly felt that something was entirely wrong in that society. At moments like this something occurred to me. But I have to say that my real interest in politics began, I think, not before 1938, when racism became such an important issue in Europe.106

The traffic-wise togetherness seems to explain much of the modern urban skill of not touching.107 If modern and urban, one was expected to move forward and not bump into another or another’s vehicle, as they were similarly moving:

An intersection without gods, without passions, and without battles these days represents the most advanced stage of society and prefigures the ideal of all democracies.108

Among the vehicles of modernity (moving forward), of course, modern houses and neighborhoods, and that sense of dwelling were included. Crises of the modern might happen when someone momentarily lost one’s focus; stopped looking ahead. Accidentally, Professor Wertheim learned about the death of his maid’s children.
Much of my talking with the elderly Indonesians happened at the moment of the fall of a bad regime, but also of anti-Chinese riots — of beating and much worse than that, of that kind of accident, that kind of bumping into each other, that way of touching. Especially at this moment, horrified, scared, and with fervent nostalgia, the old Indonesians recalled not so much the peacefulness of the past but rather a normalcy of separation.

Air Marshal DHANI: Oh, the relations between the Chinese Indonesians and us where I grew up were just fine! There were not these —
RM: Riots?
Air Marshal DHANI: Not at all. Nothing of this madness. Nothing at all!

Mrs. OEI: Many of us [Chinese Indonesians] are afraid.
RM: Is this new?
Mrs. OEI: Of course!
RM: But when you were a little girl?
Mrs. OEI: It did not exist.
RM: So you don’t have any memory of an anti-Chinese pogrom when you were a child? You have not even heard about it happening in the past?
Mrs. OEI: It did not exist.
RM: You have no recollection of it?
Mrs. OEI: Well, after the war ended, in 1945. But those were not the people who lived in your own neighborhood. Now, they know us and still they drag us out of our homes. This is new.
RM: Why is it so?
Mrs. OEI: Yes, it is true — at one time, my father told us that we had to leave in a hurry. And these were Indonesians who drove us out. Perhaps it has been around for a long time. People were never really nice to us, the Chinese. They never had a real feeling for us. But this time, this is new. They break into everything. Everybody is “anti,” this is how they feel now. I am so afraid.

Mr. OEY: They always used to call us not pretty names. But I do not think there was as much of this feeling in this as now. Often it was just as if you were not there.
RM: So you were not so afraid at the time?
Mr. OEY: No, it was not like this.

* * *
Mr. Oey: Yes, perhaps.
Mr. Oey: Throughout the time.
Mr. Oey: No, not closed.

In the case of the Dutch in the colony, the dominant and emblematic case, the modern art of not touching was most closely practiced, watched, and it is most vividly recalled. It most closely approximated the colonial urbanity.

Mr. Rusli: Not really. We did not hate the Dutch. As long as they did not try to come back after 1945, there was no hate toward the Dutch. We just wanted to be free. In the colony, there were many Dutch people who were good. They lived their own lives, and we, Indonesians, lived our own lives. This is, mostly, how it was.

The Dutch as well as the rest cannot be explained without the Eurasians. The Eurasians, a significant group in the colony, yet another patch, had to be as exemplarily separate as the Dutch; they had to work as a layer, buffer, in between the Dutch and the rest of the colony, modern and patchily united. Born to a European (Dutch mostly) father and a native mother, their way of life, of dwelling, and of moving forward was to work as a kind of fence.

Professor Resink: My father had a pure—Dutch complexion—try this cookie.

Professor Resink: So he had no trouble in the colony. He did not finish school, the [colonial officials’] academy in Delft. Yet he made it here, and we moved in the circles of very good society.

The Eurasians, as a fence, had to be visible. Both the Dutch and the Indonesians saw the fence as the space—quite penetrable, attractive, luring, in fact—yet, at the same time, as a possible and dangerous line of too-close a touching. Here was the warm kind of feeling of the other that should be evaded—like an illicit love (there was a pervasive lore of young Eurasian

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men and women as “perfect concubines”\textsuperscript{114}, diluting one’s character into the other. It should better flash out and stay on the level, let’s say, of children street-fighting.

Mr. SARLI: Do you know that my father was a descendant of Prince Diponegoro [a nineteenth-century Javanese hero fighting the Dutch]? It tells you everything! Like, when I was little, a Dutch boy hit me. He hit me with a stick.

RM: Didn’t an Indonesian boy ever hit you?
Mr. SARLI: Never. They did not dare.
RM: Because you were a descendant of Diponegoro?
Mr. SARLI: Yes. They did not dare, least of all the boys in the village. But this was a son of a Dutchman who worked on a plantation. He hit me with a stick. I was so angry.
RM: He was a son of a Dutch?
Mr. SARLI: A Dutch boy. Well, he was Eurasian.
RM: Not a full-blood Dutch?
Mr. SARLI: No! A Eurasian.
RM: Didn’t you fight with other Indonesian children?
Mr. SARLI: Yes, it might happen. But there were these fights between the Indonesian children and the Eurasians. These were the real fights.\textsuperscript{115}

It was to be expected, almost inevitable and certainly on everybody’s mind, that to move toward modernity meant to move close and often through the fence, this layer in between: the Eurasians. This was when one brushed really close to the fence, one of the crucial moments on the road, and the most prone to an accident. Professor Resink, Dutch but born in Java to a family living in the colony for more than a century, began talking to me by saying, proudly, that there was “Javanese blood” in his ancestors. This should have put him among the Eurasians. Yet in his view of himself and of the Eurasians, Professor Resink was quite categorical, or, rather, delicate:

RM: How did the neighborhood feel to you as a boy? Like playing games, running around in the street?
Professor RESINK: No! We were not allowed to play in the street. That was a difference between me and the [other?] Eurasian children. In the afternoon, after lunch, we had to go to bed, and servants made it
sure that we stayed in our room. We were not allowed to go into the street. Because if we did—for my parents Eurasians were a cultural phenomenon—the Eurasians loved krontjong [music], the Eurasians spoke petjok dialect [today spelled pecok], the Eurasians had money [were reckless with their spending], the Eurasian children played in the street.116

Krontjong, we might recall, was distinctly a street music; petjok, similarly, was a street argot, a mixture of Dutch and local languages. This was all a modern and urban phenomenon, and it gained strength as the colonial system matured and aged. Professor Resink’s parents had been increasingly conscious of the Eurasians:

Professor RESINK: My three older brothers could still speak petjok. But my sister and I, it was the 1910s and 1920s, we were already strictly forbidden—117

This was a moving and a sensing of the modern as much as of the colonial. As the Japanese came and went, as the Indonesian revolution of 1945 happened and failed to achieve most of its aims, the mode of the traffic and the working of the fences—modern, colonial, postcolonial—progressed, and aged, rather than fundamentally changing.

Mrs. MUNARDJO: During the Dutch times, I often felt insecure. Because, you see, I am the type: I look like a Eurasian. The Dutch sometimes even thought that I might be Dutch. Actually, when I met a Dutch person, I felt often quite at ease. My Dutch also was quite fluent. Often, I felt more awkward among the Indonesians, because I sensed that I might have looked to them like a Eurasian. During the revolution, I took a job as a secretary in the new Indonesian parliament, and when I first came to the session, Sukarno [the president] raised his eyebrows. He said to Hatta [the vice-president]: “Look at her! What is a Eurasian doing here?” I was then wearing my hair like that—(Mrs. Munardjo undid her hair [still almost no gray in it], so it fell down over her ears.)

RM: Sukarno said it?

Mrs. MUNARDJO: Yes, he was chairing the session. I also colored my hair at that time. But Hatta said, “She is not Eurasian, she just looks like
that. She is from Sumatra.” “How do you know?” asked Sukarno. “Oh, I have a student, he is taking economics with me, and I know about her from him.” This was what the vice-president said.118

Genealogies, family trees, aristocratic and all the others, were often presented to me during the interviews. Sometimes they were very elaborate, illuminated and calligraphic, at other times they were scribbled on a piece of paper as we talked. All of them — like the plans of the houses and neighborhoods of the past — acquired their attractive and reassuring quality from the memory they carried, of course, but equally so from the webs of lines, the names and dates, on the page. Some of the genealogies might begin with Adam, the first man, Prophet Mohammed, or some ancient king or hero. Yet there were not many that felt, and were supposed to feel, originary. Instead, most of them impressed by being light, flat, and geometrical.

Mrs. LASMIDJAH: My mother is here. Trenggalek [East Java] was the place where we moved with her, a minus neighborhood at the time. There were many poor people in the area. I remember a hongersnood [famine]: people were being laid down, face up, by the side of the street. My mother bought cassava in the market, she boiled it and she gave a little to each of us. Here is my grandmother.119

One can get — and it seems that one is supposed to get — a certain sense of certitude, even purity, with the genealogies or plans or maps in hand, or as one draws them from memory for a visitor. A host, a visitor, or both together, as they recall the past may make themselves capable of seeing, showing, and believing “at a glance” houses, neighborhoods, the land in the past — and thus in the present, too: the people behind and ahead of us, above and below as a scheme is spread out or drawn. Like on the Gunther Holtorf’s digital map of Jakara mentioned in the first chapter — an order at a glance.

At the end of the interview, I asked Father Mangunwijaya — a priest and writer who had lived in a particular Yogyakarta neighborhood for four decades at least when I met him — if he could introduce me to some working-class people old enough to remember the Dutch time and willing to talk to me about it. He thought for a while and suggested his friend, Prince Puger, whom, he knew, I would see the next day. The next day, I asked Prince Puger, and he suggested
Mr. Daino: “He moves among these people all the time.” Mr. Daino, when I met him, after making a few telephone calls, gave me “five options,” all of them were through his young friend Agung of the Brawijaya [East Java] Army Division. Agung’s wife, Dr. Herni, was an anthropologist and she did “a project on peasants.” Mr. Daino showed me on my map: the peasants I might go to see all lived about two hundred kilometers away.120

At the time I was talking to Father Mangunwijaya, Prince Puger, and Mr. Daino, a series of killings had just begun to be reported in the Indonesian press, most of the murders occurring on Java, in villages, in towns, and as close as on the outskirts of Jakarta. Dozens and hundreds of victims—sometimes said to be mentally ill, other times simply strangers, deemed to be (flagrantly, radically) not belonging—were killed. The killings were described in the papers as communal—suggesting that neighborhoods, and their self-definition, were behind it. (The murders were still going on as I was writing this book.)121

In Paris in the nineteenth century, the builders of the most exemplary modern metropolis called all those in the city who might cause trouble, a revolution even, an “external population.”122 The killing of the “nomads” in postcolonial Indonesia, in villages as well as in the cities, is a high modern phenomenon, and it has everything to do with the new and ever-new urban way of (not) touching. “The bourgeois,” Adorno wrote, “is tolerant. His love of people as they are stems from his hatred of what they might be.”123 To put it another way, the bourgeois (modern urban) dwelling or aspiring to dwell is a self-assured way of clearing the urban space for oneself—it is “tactful”: “Tact is a discrimination of difference . . . it fails to engage the individual and finally wrong him. . . . The nominalism of tact helps what is most universal, naked external power, to triumph even in the most intimate constellations.”124

THE COMMONPLACE

The sound of the telephone, so it is frequently remembered, built up the space inside the newly modern house and neighborhood as well.

Mr. ROESLAN: My family was middle class. My father owned a shop close to the main street, and he had a telephone. At that time, when one wished to call by telephone, one had to ask for an operator; not like it is

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today. We lived close to the center of town and, when father wished to call north, for instance, he had to ask the operator first for “the north,” and then he was connected. Sometime the operator might not be there, and so my father had to wait. Other times, he got the operator, but the number was busy. Telephone for us was something exciting. People might talk without seeing each other! Father called centrale, he was connected, he told the number to the operator, and he was connected again. When he wished to call south, he called “south,” and he was connected.125

There were also the calls from a local mosque, regular and more predictable than the ringing of the telephone—five times a day, exactly on the movements of the sun, but equally architectural, neighborhood making, and as time progressed, equally modern and urban. The voice from the mosque mixed with the sound of the telephone. There were also, albeit in most places much less so, bells from Christian churches. There were gongs from Chinese temples, too, forming the neighborhood, or, certainly, what Le Corbusier called the “visual acoustics” of landscape.126

Radio was like that and even more so. It could sound bell-like as well as croaking-hawker-like. It also built up a neighborhood from a point resting in a distance that could be only imagined. In contrast to telephone—and gods—one was not supposed to be strong enough to talk back.

RM: So you went to the other people’s house to listen to radio? There were no radios in public places?
Mr. MULYONO: No. Only later did the Japanese put radios on the street, on high poles in the squares, and on main crossroads. There was one radio in the square, in front of the district office.
RM: Was there any music?
Mr. MULYONO: Yes, depending on the program. There was mainly music and news from the government.127

Princess Noeroel told me about an experiment known to many in Indonesia, in which she and the space-producing power of radio played roles. She had been in the Netherlands, a few years before the war, with her father and some other royals. For one evening, a program had been arranged for Noeroel, and three other princesses who were also there, to dance in front of

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the Dutch Queen with a Javanese gamelan playing back in Java, in a studio in Surakarta. Philips Broadcasting transmitted the sound. There was some static, the princess told me, but otherwise all went “without a hitch.”\footnote{128}

RM: Before the Japanese occupation, who could own a radio?
Mr. MULYONO: Around 1936, they opened a shop here that sold radios—directly from Europe. There were two types: \textit{Erres} from England [\textit{sic}] and \textit{Philips} from Holland. But then they had to wait for spare parts for a very long time. Those who owned a radio—
RM: Who was it?
Mr. MARDI SUWITO: The wealthy.
Mr. MULYONO: But ordinary people could already listen; they could hear it, at least. In some houses they brought a radio out, on the porch. Then, ordinary people could hear it, too.
Mr. MARDI SUWITO: From the street.\footnote{129}

The space-producing sound (and the machines to produce the sounds) progressively and increasingly came from the outside and, as time passed, from farther away. The modernity in that sense, the colonial modernity in particular, became increasingly \textit{perspectival}. To hear, understand, and enjoy, one should focus on the distant, which seemed to be closer to the source. Increasingly, one would better move, led by the attraction, and further on, off one’s house, through the fences, through one’s neighborhood, beyond.

Mr. KARKONO: There was a \textit{sociëteit} [club] in town. Near the Gedung Ombo there was the club.
RM: But it was Dutch?
Mr. KARKONO: Yes, it was Dutch. Often there was music.
RM: Had you ever been inside during the Dutch time?
Mr. KARKONO: Oh, no!
RM: No Indonesian was ever inside the club?
Mr. KARKONO: There was a Javanese musician, and he could go in. He played the violin: Soewandi. He was allowed in, but only to play the violin. When he was not there, it was only European.
RM: All-white?
Mr. KARKONO: All-white.\footnote{130}
Walter Spies played in that particular club. He was of German-Russian origin, a painter, a musician, and, especially, an émigré. During his time in Europe, in the few first years after the First World War, he became friends with some of the well-known avant-garde artists of the continent: the painters Oskar Kokoschka and Otto Dix, the musicians Ferucchio Busoni, Alois Hába, and Paul Hindemith.131 In 1923, tired of Europe as were many of the avant-garde, but more on the impatient side, Spies left—for the Dutch colony in the East. It possibly seemed to him that by escaping the high modernity of the moment he could not aim for a more remote place.

The first job Spies laid his hands on in the colony was to play piano “in a Chinese cinema” in West Java, in Bandung, and to do a few chamber music concerts and recitals in the same city “with other émigré Russians.”132 It is known that at one of the concerts he played a Rachmaninoff sonata, and the roccoco variations by Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky, and another famous Proustian sonata by César Franck. He asked his friends in Europe to send him more music: “Busoni-Bach all that is there; Schönberg, three piano pieces; and six piano pieces by Křenek; some passacaglia or chaconne . . . smaller piano compositions by Hába, Petyrek, Hindemith.”133

From Bandung, after a short time, Spies moved further east, to the town of Yogyakarta, where he played in De Vereniging, The Association, the club Mr. Karkono was telling me about. As the European sugar, coffee, and cocoa planters drank, smoked, and talked, “the band played light classics with Walter Spies at piano.”134 At the same time Spies had been engaged as “the Master of the Sultan of Yogyakarta’s Music,” with a salary of 100 gulden a month—a low salary, by the way, for a European in the colony at the time.135

Like the telephone, a voice from a mosque, bells from a church, or radio, the music from the European clubs was heard—or sensed. The newly significant music sounded through the houses and through the neighborhood. It filled and resounded in the space yet—this was a colony, mostly of houses and neighborhoods still “undeveloped” or “developing”—the new sounds testing the space often found it inadequate for listening, for getting across the message. With an increasing urgency, a new, truly new, modern, and progressive off-fence space was required, where the new sound and music could be played and listened to in full. However artificial, overtechnologized, foreign, virtual the space might be—the more so, in fact, the better—there the modernity should resound naturally. Something like the Dutch club Spies played in. Space like that, only more so.
Mr. Gesang, in his eighties when I met him, still sang and played for his town neighborhood and, in fact, very much beyond. His was the *krontjong* music—now like back in the 1920s, when he started to play it—an Indonesian, popular, modern, and distinctly street music, as much a part of the street as the cries of hawkers. Of the same space, of the same mood.

*Gesang* means “life” in Javanese. It also sounds quite a bit like *gezang*, “song,” in Dutch. Of course this does not make any sense linguistically; it is just the sound of it and the man who is, indeed, “almost nothing but a song.” As I was getting closer to Mr. Gesang’s house in Surakarta, still not very close, neighbors (in this neighborhood of several tens of thousands) took me in their care and, from one street to the next one, they led me to him.136

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**Mr. Gesang:** First I listened at home. It was a lively place, full of work.

**RM:** There you learned to sing?

**Mr. Gesang:** There was no learning. I just did it; by myself.

**RM:** Then you put together an orchestra?

**Mr. Gesang:** We got together, a few of us.

**RM:** And eventually you were asked to play on the radio?

**Mr. Gesang:** Yes, in the evenings, or late in the afternoon.

**RM:** A live broadcast?

**Mr. Gesang:** Live. On Monday, it was in the evening.

**RM:** Did you get much money for it?

**Mr. Gesang:** Five or six rupiahs, I think, six gulden; one group, one broadcast; one hour; or sometimes two.

**RM:** It was not much.

**Mr. Gesang:** My, it was nothing!

**RM:** How many people in the group?

**Mr. Gesang:** About thirteen: three singers, ten players; one who arranged the things. I did not use *drums*, I had only maraca, ukulele, cello, guitar, violin, few violinists, three accordionists.

**RM:** There were other *krontjong* groups in Surakarta?

**Mr. Gesang:** Many. When I was young, about ten.

**RM:** But not all of them were on the radio?

**Mr. Gesang:** Sometimes they were. If you became good you got on the radio. You were tested and found good. So they let you on the radio.

**RM:** How did the broadcast go?

**Mr. Gesang:** We might have a horse cart, but only when there was big

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action. Mostly, we went on bicycles. When there was a big action—one horse, one carriage.

RM: What do you think? Is gamelan a more difficult sort of music than *krontjong*?

Mr. GESANG: It is on a higher level. And it is more difficult to play.

*Krontjong* is for ordinary people. We sung in Indonesian.\(^{137}\)

Mr. Gesang still liked to think of himself as a street musician. The space that he entered, filled, and further built up, keyed with his songs, was street, market, neighborhood, with low fences here and there. However, inevitably, the new thing got into it, and it tuned in best with radio.

Mr. GESANG: First we played on the street and, sometimes when there was a celebration, in people’s houses. Then we got bicycles. We rehearsed more, and, in 1937 or 1938, we got on the radio.

RM: Who liked *krontjong* at the time?

Mr. GESANG: Everybody liked it.

RM: Javanese?

Mr. GESANG: Javanese, Chinese.

RM: Arabs?

Mr. GESANG: There were not many Arabs.

RM: Dutch?

Mr. GESANG: Not so many. But one Dutch has played with us.

RM: What was his name?

Mr. GESANG: I forgot. His stage name was *Angin Lalu* [Breeze of the Past?]. He may still be alive. He was from here, but he moved to Jakarta.

RM: So he was Dutch?

Mr. GESANG: Eurasian.

RM: It all changed when the Japanese came?

Mr. GESANG: Radio began to be called Hosoo Kyoku. In Solo it was Solo Hosoo Kyoku; in Yogy, Jogja Hosoo Kyoku; in Semarang, Semarang Hosoo Kyoku. No longer SRV [Solo Radio Vereniging]. . . . And we played there.\(^{138}\)

Whenever a feast is recalled, neighborhood appears most distinctly, festive-distinct.

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Mrs. LASMIDJAH: When I was little, we lived in a small town, a regency town. The regent was like a king. He was close to the Dutch controleur and assistent resident, and his house was like a palace. In the front of the house there was a large open space, and in the middle of it there grew a waringin tree. The big tree was to indicate that here was something special. During a feast, we used to gather there, and first we paid homage to the regent’s house — like that.139 (Mrs. Lasmidjah made a sembah for me — “respectful greeting made with palms together, fingertips upward and touching the forehead”140 — toward the inside of her house on whose porch we sat.)

Topography and a sense (or map) of order of a neighborhood is recalled as being defined by the feast.

Air Marshal DHANI: My father was a regent, and he was required to report everything to the Dutch administration. And he reported everything: how the people suffered, what they lacked — so that the family that suffered too much would not become disorderly. He tried to do what he could.

RM: So there was no disorder?

Air Marshal DHANI: When there was a big feast, for instance, it was always at my father’s place. Everybody came and brought something, a chicken or a coconut, whatever one could. When there was a feast at the regent’s place everybody had to bring some food, a dish ready to be shared by all.141

Through the feasts — which happened at an exclusive or neutral place, or one belonging to the common — togetherness of neighborhood was articulated, and changed in time:

Mr. Timu, as he recalled his childhood, that being together, had a slip of the tongue — or perhaps switched, or perhaps was naturally speaking about the same thing — calling a big feast of the past once pesta, a “feast,” and other moments atraksi, an “attraction.” When I asked him about it, he explained that “attractions of the past” or “feast” were increasingly “entertaining,” as they contained more and more new and curious things like gramophone music, or puppet theater brought from the far away.142

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This meant from Java, in this case, as I talked to Mr. Timu at his home in Flores. There was even dancing to music, Mr. Timu said, talking about the 1920s: this could hardly be done anymore in one’s own house. On the same occasions even a corso was recalled.143

The feasts and attractions, happenings of togetherness, festive gatherings, defined a space and required a space. They might sound, smell, and appear in an eternal way, but, in the spirit of the modern and the colonial, new kinds of large, open, and neutral spaces offered themselves to accommodate life also for the time to come.144

Most flagrantly, festive “amusement parks” and “variety places” emerged in the colony at the beginning of the twentieth century. They were built on vacant, “undeveloped” spots of towns and cities or, rather, on what, at the moment of building, began to look like a vacant spot.

Princess BROTODININGRAT: Oh, we could be naughty, and we could make some trouble.

RM: Naughty, trouble; in what way?

Princess BROTODININGRAT: I had five brothers, all of them younger than I, and we played soccer in the palace. Have you already been there?

RM: Yes, I saw it.

Princess BROTODININGRAT: It was some place at that time already! And there, in front of the main audience hall, we built goals and played soccer. Father got angry: “You will tear down the hall!” and so he founded a park of Sriwedari, in 1914, in an empty area, for all kinds of sports and fun. Now it belongs to the Harto [Suharto] family. They took away everything.145

During the 1920s and 1930s, as colonialism and its particular kind of modernity culminated, the birthdays of the then Dutch queen Wilhelmina became the most order-guarding, place-defining, spectacular feats and attractions of all—with the loudest of music, krontjong as well as brass, and also chamber music and recitals in special pavilions, the most colorful gatherings through and of the neighborhoods. These were the occasions when hawkers were most acutely present. The largest selamatans—ceremonial and festive community meals that hold out the promise to live together in peace and harmony—would take place in the new amusement parks alongside the other attractions.146
Even people of the country, who might never have been to an urban space before, visited the parks. The colony is remembered as gathering around the amusement—“the altogether unprecedented gathering,” on a site that promised “peace, love and hope,” “unprecedented success,” the new “technical-media event” that, like language clichés—trivial, ephemeral, and commonplace—had a highly attractive quality “to fold in on self.”

The space was opened to everything modern, including of course the Dutch government and all the other corporations, plantations, trade companies, and banks in the colony, to participate in this new get-together—of all races and classes—with their own jubilee feasts, processions, and very often also selamatans. This quote is by a Dutch writer and, at that time, a soldier of the Dutch colonial army, Willem Walraven. He writes about the time very early in the century and about a young Javanese woman who later became his wife:

Itih . . . was born in the village of Tjigugur, close to Tjimahi in Preanger [West Java]. While the exact date of her birth was not certain, it had to be before the turn of the century, because Itih recalled the feasts on the occasion of Queen Wilhelmina’s wedding. She remembered the time when she was a little girl of four or five, her childhood, foremost as feasts and catastrophes. She recalled the trains that rushed by her village, and she still liked to watch a passing train.

The new feasts were spectacular, and at night their sites were brightly lit. Gates would be wide open. For a moment, people were free to enter a space filled with amusement. As the feast sites emerged and continued to emerge, transient and exemplary urbanity was being established and fixed—stalls and booths, merry-go-rounds, an architecture of the spectacular, bright, and unquestionably modern. In a roundabout way the space approximated the clubs where the likes of Walter Spies played and into which the likes of Mr. Karkono were not admitted. Except that these particular clubs, the varieties of the late colonial, stood welcomingly open.

Mr. JUSUF: I used to play saxophone.
RM: Like Clinton?
Mr. JUSUF: Like Clinton. I could make some money.
RM: You played in bars?
Mr. JUSUF: Oh, no, there were no bars yet. We played wherever there was a feast.

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RM: Jazz band?
Mr. JUSUF: Jazz band. I played saxophone, there was a trumpet, and sometimes we used two saxophones or trumpets, trombone, piano, and bass. We already had that. We might get three guldens for a night. If we played till the morning.¹⁴⁹

The most characteristic and most often recalled, new, urban, virtual, absorbing, and expanding spaces of modernity-equals-amusement, modernity-equals-commonplace, were, obviously, the movies. In Willem Walraven’s early-century recollections again, he wrote: “On the other side of the street stood a gigantic movie tent built of bamboo. These were the earliest times of film. As the new posters were being pasted up, I saw Itih shuffle there on her little feet.”¹⁵⁰

Mr. ROSIHAN: I saw my first movie in about 1930.
RM: Do you still remember how the movie house looked?
Mr. ROSIHAN: It was in Padang [West Sumatra] and there were, at that time, already one, two, three, four movie houses, four cinemas. And three of them were built of stone.
RM: They were built originally as movie houses?
Mr. ROSIHAN: As movie houses. One was made of wood, Cinema Pondok.

Pondok in Indonesian means “cottage, hut, or cabin,” but also “Muslim boarding school.”

RM: That one was more for the ordinary people?
Mr. ROSIHAN: The wooden one, yes, for the people. There, I saw my first silent movies. And, one night in 1930, my father took me to see my first talking movie; in the Cinema Scala, in Padang. We went in our horse carriage. I was eight years old.
RM: Where did you sit?
Mr. ROSIHAN: In a loge. Here, you had geiteklas or klas kambing, the goat section, the third class; here was the second class; here was the first class, and here, there were the loges.
RM: The closer to the screen, the lower the class?
Mr. ROSIHAN: Yes. I went with my father, and he was in high spirits.

There were the starlets, so we called them.

RM: Did the people behave?

Mr. ROSIHAN: Oh, yes! There was whistling, and applauding.

RM: Noisy?

Mr. ROSIHAN: Yes, it was noisy. People also stamped their feet. This was the first time I saw a talking movie; in 1930.

RM: There were also some traveling theater troupes at the time.

Mr. ROSIHAN: I liked that, too. There was one small group, Troubadour, coming to Padang. But they gave their performances in the open.

RM: Not in a tent?

Mr. ROSIHAN: No, it was in a square. When you wanted to see it from up close, you had to pay. Otherwise you could see it, but from afar, and you could not hear the dialogue.151

“’Lanterne magique! Pièce curieuse!’ With this cry, a peddler would travel through the streets of Paris in the evening and, at a wave of the hand, step up into dwellings where he operated his lantern.”152 As the magic lantern in the nineteenth-century metropolis of Europe, movies in the colony were the new space—off the street, not really of the house, and, thus virtual, truly virtual, to both.

Mrs. TORAR: We went mostly to Decca Park [in Central Jakarta]. It used to be the place for the movies. There was Palace Cinema, and President, and—I forgot the other one.

RM: It was across from the Gambir Station?

Mrs. TORAR: Yes. Oh, Capitol! This was famous. And Globe, too. It was all still very new at the time.

RM: There were Dutch and Indonesians and all the others going to the movies?

Mrs. TORAR: Yes, all of them—first class, second class, and the goat class.153

Closed to the outside, to the outside noise and light, open to anybody who could pay, the movie house greatly intensified the new, acute, and memorable sense of modern togetherness. There had also been, very early on, the traveling, “circulating” cinemas in the colony.154 Neighborhoods reached endlessly far, and it became difficult to stay off the net.

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Mrs. OEI: My father was active in Javanese culture. He owned two large gongs, and he had rented them to various groups of Javanese dancers and to puppeteers for the shadow theater. I liked to watch, but my elder brother, he was anti. He said: “Look, what is that!” There was already a movie house in town, and he said: “Better to go to the movies once a week!”

Mrs. DAMAIS: Oh, yes! At that time talking films arrived. We girls jumped on our bikes, and off we went.

Movie houses were on the road—the space to which, as it was becoming clear, modern people were to aim. Being at the movies was being (almost) there.

RM: So you moved to Jakarta. How did you feel the change?
Mrs. MINARSIH: Oh, it was fantastic. After we arrived, the first thing was to go to the movies. In Bukittinggi [West Sumatra], we also had movies. But it was all like one third class! When I came here, to Jakarta, the first thing was to go to the movies. It was in Kramat, near where the Gunung Agung bookstore is today—Metro or Megaria, I forgot the name, but it was fantastic. They just played that—

RM: —?
Mrs. MINARSIH: — cartoons. I was not yet fifteen, so I sometimes smuggled myself in—to see the movies, not just what was allowed to children.

Most of the people to whom I talked left their home and home neighborhood at the age of puberty at the latest. Perhaps because of this, their memories of the place were finite. Perhaps because of this, there was a striking wholeness of their recollections.

Air Marshal DHANI: Father was very strict with us: “Do not run around, do not shout! Behave!” We could play in front of our house, this we could. And sometimes we went to the fields, and we played with buffalo. There was also a little stream near the house, and there we could swim. Women did their washing there, but we did not feel free with them at all; it was not the custom of that time, especially not in
Central Java. And when someone died, everybody was sad: “Why did it happen? It cannot be!” One had to report it to the head of the neighborhood: “It happened. Where should we dig the grave?” They came as guests, and they were offered something to drink. All the neighbors already knew, and they only asked: “Where should we dig the grave?” “There.” Not everyone could dig the grave; there were experts in the community. People brought what was needed: “Do you need sugar, do you need tea?” so that the family that suffered would not get distracted. Without delay, the one who had died was buried. And there was that stream, about a hundred meters from our house. The water was clean in the small river and there were fish, of many kinds. Some people knew all the fish names. At night there were fireflies.158

Almost everything the old people recalled was given to me in this form of wholesomeness. Even the cities, as in this song to Jakarta:

To Cikini Quarter, to Godang Avenue,
I sing a sweet melody, my little one,
and you know why—159

Yet the old people could not help but recall themselves as children growing up, men or women maturing, and old folks nearing the grave. This passing made their recollections always profound. But what truly gave me the people as real and epical was how they made themselves appear straight, cultured, and thus, perspectival: “Perspectival culture, [is] a culture characterized by a manner of thinking that measures itself according to the idealizing abstractions of an ever-receding horizon. . . . The horizon is understood as the repository of all possible perspectives of an object.”160

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Physical violence is a way of touching. In a modern metropolis, and namely in Jakarta in the period, as I talked to the old people, it often seemed that all touching would bring violence. The modern, even postmodern, mode of behaving suggested itself as a way to survive in that given space. The place was felt to be bearable if—in a truly postmodern mode—“all things appeared as solved in accidental moments” and if experience did not appear to be formed “in continuous looking back and forward” but in “sequential jolts.”161

After colonialism, Japanese occupation, and failed revolution, dwelling
appeared to reach its ultimate shape as a passing by or a driving through. This is a poem from the time of the revolution quoted to me by several of the old people:

I run around with them, what else can I do now—
Changing my face at the edge of the street, I use their eyes
and go along to visit the fun houses:
these are the facts as they know them
(a new American flick at the Capitol, the new song to which they
dance) . . .
Hanging around at the tram stop, we wait for the Jakarta Chinatown trolley.

Georg Simmel’s description of the new urbane is perhaps more valid for this colonial and postcolonial metropolis than for the early twentieth-century cities of Europe, where it all was only suggested: “In the metropolis . . . , in the complexity and confusion of the external image of city life, one grows accustomed to continual abstractions, to indifference towards that which is spatially closest and to an intimate relationship to that which is spatially very far removed.” In a fundamentally more abrupt shock than their European counterparts, with much less preparation for it, the elderly Indonesians to whom I talked were attacked and overwhelmed by the newness of the modern urban and the metropolitan — by its “fullness” — even more than the early-century inhabitants of Berlin in Simmel’s description: “Here, in buildings and educational institutions, in the wonders and comforts of space-conquering technology, in the formations of community life, and in the visible institutions of the state, is offered such an overwhelming fullness of crystallized and impersonalized spirit that the personality, so to speak, cannot maintain itself under its impact.” As if Simmel had (almost) seen one of the early-century colony amusement parks or went to a Jakarta movie. In the radiant “arena of metropolitan culture,” he wrote, people have “to exaggerate” their “personal element” “in order to remain audible,” “even to themselves.”

A modern urban experience comes as a jolt, and it is indeed equal to the memories of the people who lived it all and now carefully look back. Both the city and the memories appear to be “committed to illusionism, with every material assuming, calion-like, the attributes of something not itself — columns dissolving into bars of light, or glass walls becoming opaque and marble ones appearing transparent due to their reflectivity — but even more importantly, with a mysteriousness built into the plan such that the building
is constructed without an approachable or knowable center and is in fact experienced as . . . a labyrinth. The resistance to the spectator’s grasp.” In a labyrinth for a spectator and for a passerby, as in an amusement park, and as a commonplace, more than elsewhere, and perhaps only there, things like “comfort civilization,” “social standing,” or “civic-mindedness,” trivialized enough, may go together. The colony becoming urban, like the memories of it, and like avant-garde and postmodern architecture, may be described as an “abstract sublime.”

All the old people to whom I have talked wished to fly. Their cities, with all the black exhaust of their aging buses and cars and motorcycles, and even with the black smoke from the riots, still appeared streamlined—or trendy, or trivial—like Le Corbusier’s utopian Maison Citrohan, a house designed in 1920 “to evoke the mass-production norms of a Citroën car,” thus “fast.” There was equally much in the old people’s postcolony, gasping, aging, and even burning, of the other Le Corbusier–like sublime and supermodern designs, like the famous chapel in Rochamp in the Alps, built on a model of a “ship’s prow,” with some of its segments resembling “a full sail” or even “an airplane wing.”

In spite of all the government measures, hawkers can still be seen (and heard, where there is less traffic) touting their wares against the background of Jakarta’s big and expanding malls and along the huge “avenues of skyscrapers.” Many of the old people to whom I talked in Jakarta still lived in those prewar one-story houses with high Dutch, red-tile roofs under the big trees, with skyscrapers sometimes visible and sometimes not. Virtually all of them were both strikingly and eagerly nonchalant about it. The octogenarian Omar Dhani, when he talked to me about his friends and neighbors of the past six decades or so, as we were sitting in the front room of his house, gesticulated toward places where they used to live and some even still did: “The most extreme separation between the places it links together—modern . . . motorways.”

I had to visit the friends, Mr. Dhani urged me, each time pointing with his thumb (in the polite Javanese way): they live a stone’s throw away, just beyond that little stream, a few minutes’ walk—if only it were not for this bypass and that flyover. Instead of a few minutes, an hour of driving around and around, from us to them, was needed (if, of course, they were not already dead).
Le Corbusier called some of his most famous urban projects “synthetic.” Maison Citrohan, for instance, was “conceived as synthesizing other type forms drawn from metropolitan culture.” To put it another way, through a modern urban space as a machine for living, a new sense of belonging was to be created against and over the other desires, tensions, and especially the sense of social difference, injustice, and class. As Marx might say, brotherhood (and sisterhood) were to be created: “The phrase which corresponded to this imagined liquidation of class relations was fraternité.”

When Mr. Dhani pointed me to his existing or no longer existing friends, as if they were still next door, and as if the bypasses and flyovers—as well as the other things in between him and them—did not exist, I thought his gestures were nonchalant. Georg Simmel would call them “blasé”: “No psychic phenomena,” he wrote,

have been so unconditionally reserved to the metropolis as has the blasé attitude. . . . in fact, every metropolitan child shows [it] when compared with children of quieter and less changeable milieus. . . . The essence of this blasé attitude consists in the blunting of discrimination. This does not mean that the objects are not perceived, as is the case with the half-wit, but rather that the meaning and differing values of things, and thereby the things themselves, are experienced as insubstantial. . . . To the blasé person . . . all things float with equal specific gravity in the constantly moving stream of money. All things lie on the same level and differ from one another only in the size of the area, which they cover.