

Imagined Spaces Through Public Space Typography: Preliminary Studies Using Multimodal Ethnography

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Abstrak

Teks tidak dapat dipisahkan dari konteksnya, begitu pula kompleksitas realitas tidak dapat direduksi. Keterkaitan teks sebagai elemen visual antara ruang-ruang imajiner yang ada setelahnya inilah yang coba dijelaskan lebih lanjut oleh penelitian ini. Dalam artikel ini, penulis memilih kutipan “Bumi Pasundan Lahir ketika Tuhan sedang Tersenyum” yang diklasifikasikan sebagai tipografi di ruang publik sebagai objek penelitian. Dengan menggunakan etnografi multimodal sebagai alat pencarian data, penelitian ini akan dianalisis dengan menggunakan analisis wacana, diskusi ini akan menjawab bagaimana kutipan, sebagai elemen visual, direproduksi dan dicitrakan sebagai ruang yang ‘indah’ melalui media sosial yang menciptakan citra yang spesifik tentang ruang dibayangkan.

Kata Kunci: media sosial; multimodal ethnography; ruang yang dibayangkan; seni publik; wall phrase

Abstract

Text cannot be separated from its context, nor can the complexity of reality be reduced. The relationship of the text as a visual element between the imagined spaces that follow is what this study tries to explain further. In this article, the authors choose the quote, “Bumi Pasundan Lahir Ketika Tuhan Sedang Tersenyum” / (English: “Bumi Pasundan was created when God was smiling”) which is classified as public space typography as the object of research. This discussion uses multimodal ethnography as a data search tool that will be analysed using discourse analysis to answer how quotes, as visual elements, are reproduced and depicted as a “beautiful” space through social media, creating a specific image of the imagined space.

Keywords: imagined space; multimodal ethnography; public art; social media; wall phrase

1. INTRODUCTION

In April 2015, Bandung, the capital city of Indonesia’s West Java province, hosted commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Asian-African Conference (also known as Bandung Conference). In preparation for the historical celebration, local authorities rejuvenated certain parts of the town where the conference took place in 1955. Among

those new beautifications, there is a phrase from Dutch scholar Martinus Antonius Weselinus Brouwer, displayed at the renowned Jalan Asia Afrika. Brouwer is quoted to say, “Bumi Pasundan lahir ketika Tuhan sedang tersenyum” (The Land of Pasundan was born when God is smiling). His quote becomes a visual extravaganza that fills the space that

blends with its surroundings to create an amalgam of everyday life.

However, this concept does not refer to objects only as inanimate beings. Consolidating various things becomes significant in human life: as an identity also shows the relationship between people and social, economic, as well as political protection [1]; [2]. Furthermore, the relationship between social identity and objects shows the relationship between persons and things [1]. Therefore, it was presented on a construction allegedly to bring up the image of a space imagined by the author.

"Imagining" has become a concept that has been emerging for decades. Some scholars, such as Castoriadis (1987), see imagination as a tendency towards cultural abstraction, reification, and homogenization. Meanwhile, several other scholars such as Lacan (1977), Ben Anderson (2006), and Charles Taylor (2004) have different convictions that are at odds with Castoriadis. In Castoriadis' conception, imaginary is fundamental capacity to see something outside the visible [3]. From this formulation, Castoriadis put forward the concept of 'Social Imaginary', which is defined as what is imagined by a group of people [3]. It can also, in other words, what the community imagines [4]. Of course, the argument is different from Lacan, who views Imaginary Concepts as an illusion and fantasy [4]. This opinion is based on Lacan's perspective, which is heavily-influenced by the structuralist way-of-thinking in perceiving symbols and how psychoanalysts think about consciousness. For him, symbols and imaginaries obscure what is considered real [4]. Despite concurring with Castoriadis and Taylor on imaginary as something constructive and the result of creative imagination, Anderson believes social imaginary can transcend the limitations that Castoriadis previously stated. This difference lies in how they place this concept about imaginary in different positions. Castoriadis places social imaginary as a way of looking at the life of a centralized group of people [4]. Meanwhile, Taylor defines social imaginary as 'how people imagine their social existence', and how social reality is related to places, spaces, and several 'other people'; other humans, other forms of life, and non-living things around us.

Based on the perspective of these scholars, the discussion about imaginary in spatial context is introduced through an orientalism approach [5]. Said originates the concept of Imagined Geography to designate a phenomenon of space defined by term called 'Orient' that was made through Western culture's point of view, or the 'Occident'. One implication from the presence of this term is that Oriental space is always perceived through the Occident's point of view. As Said also mentions in his work, "*A line is drawn between two continents. Europe is powerful and articulate; Asia is defeated and distant*". Said places the imaginary process within framework of power and tendency to over-reduce the existing realities. Through these various perspectives, the imaginary process is seen as both constructive and destructive. This condition occurs because of the presence paradigms as the initial pedestal to view the present phenomenon. From the last perspective that has been discussed, there is a connection with the existing conditions; in this case, the relationship with space.

1.1 Public Space Typography: Imagining The City Through Wall Phrases

Letters are an element of written language and are one of the essential elements of building a word or sentence. The series of letters in this sentence not only can give meaning that refers to an idea but also have the ability to voice an image or impression visually. [6]. Typography can be the core idea of graphic communication, and letters are the only effective form of visualization. [6].

The delivery of this idea can be in the form of typography arranged in a public space. In the study of architecture, public space is a public space in urban areas outside buildings that can be used by the public and provide opportunities for various activities. In the study of graphic design, the composition of letters displayed in a monumental public space can be exciting and encourage the desire to take a closer look at the area. [7].

Depending on the context, the text can be structured to provide information such as signage that guides people to find direction and purpose in a place or related to typography in space; usually, the text is enormous, sometimes even monumental. Compared to

typography arranged in a smaller area of design, such as in books, posters, or other printed objects, public space typography has slightly different rules, especially in terms of display context, which relies on the size and material of the typography itself. Also, the relationship between space and public attention is an important thing that is highlighted.[8] A monumental effect that is manifested in a large size, the color composition that contrasts with the surrounding environment—which can be achieved with the effect of color or material from the typography, can accompany the idea or idea behind it, which is displayed in the visual text.

Meanwhile, according to Berger [9], the use of typography in the public sphere began a long time ago, presumably in the era of widespread power, where initially, text was only used as a road marker, then developed into a landmark marker. Letterings arrangements used as the city marker by the great leader also to show the great victory of a particular ruler, such as Trajan's Column, which tells the Roman – Dacia War led by the Roman emperor, Trajan. The marking of this event can be in the form of a wall phrase arranged in a typographical arrangement in a public space.

Through this explanation, the author wants to show that public space typography is one of the media that forms the relationship between humans and space. The relationship between humans and cities can emerge in various forms. The one discussed here is related to the wall phrase *"Bumi Pasundan lahir ketika Tuhan sedang tersenyum* (The Land of Pasundan was

born when God is smiling)," which presents in public spaces typography form.

Public spaces typography is often associated with architectural functions, shapes, sizes and materials used in general which are adjusted to the material elements in buildings and made in three-dimensional form [7]. Depending on the context, the text can be arranged to provide information like signage that guides people to know the direction and destination in a place or related to the topic of quotes that are being displayed in public space; usually, the text is enormous, sometimes even monumental. This monumental effect can be achieved through large size and composition of color contrast. All of the concept mentioned before accompanies the ideas behind that are displayed in the visual language of the text. [8]. The ideas contained in this text can be inspirational so that the text in public space is not as simple as the decoration of two-dimensional letters on the wall.

Like a work of public art functions as a part of the system of signs and symbols [10], this placement of this environmental typography also contrasts the environments with another place and time. This paradox or juxtaposition of environments transports the viewer on a journey from local reality into a new space. According to this research's scope, the text visualized in a wall phrase has a function as a city landmark, just like Brouwer's public spaces typography functions as an identity marker of Bandung as a part of Bumi Pasundan. These conditions also apply as well as create an image of Bandung in colonial times that is reproduced until today.



Picture 1. The view of the Brouwer's quote that being displayed in Alun-Alun Bandung
[Source: Private Collection]

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a multimodal ethnography approach whose presence is a response to changes in the media ecosystem, which is the object of study in this field. Multimodal ethnography itself is part of qualitative research, as well as an extension of the visual and sensory ethnography method. In this study, researchers were involved in various event settings to record sensory captures as part of the data. The observations are written daily in the form of field notes, which are then analysed by discourse analysis. Observation data used (either direct or indirect) are based on social activities in the research area, often termed social practices or practices-based identities, for which a social practice is an adjunction to the social interaction between people within a spatial entity [11]. These observational subjects are then defined as those who interact with the research (wall phrases/quotes, and Bandung City). Indirect observations are made to be compared with direct observations, in this case, carried out in areas where the wall phrases stand. Literature and archive studies are also conducted to obtain historical data. The aim is to get a context in the past related to 'their' view of Bandung represented by some members of the social class. This view can be translated into various outputs, and it can be written text or images (which are classified as visual text). Both the historical data collected through the literature study method and indirect observation, both of which will be used for the

re-contextualization of the object of study, reading the wall phrase in the city of Bandung (quoted from the view of Brouwer in the past) with its context today.

The authors use discourse analysis procedures to process historical and actual data collected as the next step. Discourse analysis is carried out to look for patterns that shown through texts (both through visuals and written archives) from various actors' points of view, in this case; colonial government, travellers, local citizens (who lived in the past and also in today), and the city government of Bandung.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The relationship of texts as visual elements between imagined spaces that existed after is what this paper seeks to explain further. Begins with historical data and observations in virtual space, we find a gap between reality and idealization.

3.1 The Dynamic of Bandung Through Literature Depiction

This article tries to discuss the object of wall phrase research at the Alun-Alun Bandung's Pedestrian Bridge (JPO Alun-Alun Bandung), which is quoted from a Dutch scholar, Martinus Antonius Weselinus Brouwer. This quote has become one of the prominent icons in the city of Bandung (henceforth is called "Bandung"), especially after the revitalization of the city along with Jalan Asia Afrika in welcoming the Asia Africa Conference. The presence of this wall phrase is a must-visit spot for tourists

because it is considered to represent the visitor's nostalgia about Bandung. This phenomenon has become problematic; in the vicinity of the area, historical buildings represent Bandung in the past. It is different from the wall phrase, where the visitor still has to imagine and relate to the context of Brouwer's interpretation of Bandung in the time when he was alive. How far can the quote from Brouwer that represents the condition of Bandung today be relevant? How and for whom, the spatial representations of Bandung's beauty and charm be reproduced from the colonial period to the present day? This study tries to discuss similar patterns found in how certain social classes perceive a space called the Bandung and how a quote can create imagined spaces.

To understand the dynamics of Bandung from different eras, we try to present historical data of various interpretations of Bandung, which are manifested through several forms; newspaper articles, expressions, satires, to daily journals, using Brouwer's expression as an entry point. In the National Daily Kompas dated July 10, 1975, Brouwer's stated in his article entitled "Bandung":

People who leave Bandung to travel the world always return. It is based on the fact that our world is indeed round. Those who move towards the west comes towards the east. He would feel at home, at last, feeling content and singing home sweet home, or in our local language: ciri sabuni cara sadewa, mas di nagri asing batu di nagri urang, langkung sae di nagri urang (Different regions, different customs. Facing hardships in one's own land is much better than obtaining prosperity in others'). Bandung is indeed a city worth to be named the "Queen of West Java". It is often said that West Java appears when God is smiling. The statement does not only apply to the region (the enchanting and dazzling Parahyangan), but also its residents for whom are commonly called Sundanese people ...

Brouwer presupposes Bandung as the "Queen of West Java" as well as associates Bandung as part of the enchanting and dazzling "Bumi Parahyangan". Brouwer does not appear to use the term "Pasundan," as written in the quote displayed today. Instead of using the word Pasundan, Brouwer chooses Parahyangan.

Several studies relate to Parahyangan (Priangan or Preanger) with the area where gods (*hyang*) reside in the location, referring to high places in Hindu cosmology, namely the mountainous areas of West Java [12]. In relation that according the geographical aspects of Bandung, this concept is aligned with the term Priangan, instead of Bumi Pasundan. Pasundan refers to geographical and cultural unity, the official naming for the province of West Java in colonial-era [13] as a place where Sundanese ethnicity lives [14].

Following its geographical and cultural definitions, Bandung has become part of spatial unity. The development that takes place in various vital cities on the island of Java is what later leads to the expression "*Europa in the Tropen*" [14] or Europe in the Tropics. In this place, Europeans reconstruct their preferences and perspectives in their colonised country. Imagining Bandung as the beautiful and scenic place (and vice versa) is not only initially coined by Brouwer, but also by some individual citizen that their memories recorded through daily notes, which today, through these quotes, associated by beauty and charm. One of them is by Yulian de Silva, a freeman who wrote about Bandung as a quiet area. A century later, a Dutch corporal named Arie Top, along with two other brothers Ronde and Jan Geysbergen, and one exile from Batavia, added as a new population in this area. They set up a sawmill in Bandung by first clearing a wilderness. Later on, another nickname for Bandung emerges: "Paradise in Exile" [15]. It is contradict to the past time, the Dutch government also associate Bandung, at the time when the city was a mere wilderness, with the term "hell"; a disposal site for employees who conduct violations. This statement is similar to the famous local idiom, "*top maung, top badak*," which means "ready to be eaten by tigers and rhinos" [16]. Bandung, at that time, is considered an inhuman setting.

The development of Bandung as the capital city of West Java brings certain impressions among colonials at the time. The most prominent nickname is "Bandoeng Parijs van Java", given by Hendrik Berlage [17]. The phrase is originally intended to insinuate the architectural style in the city of Bandung that is considered "western-oriented", as in fails to highlight tropical characters. With or without realizing it,

this phrase soon becomes the slogan of that brings pride to the city of Bandung. Unlike Berlage, one of the anonymous authors, noted in Siegel & Mrazek [18], shows Bandung as an ideal city, where Europeans can feel the impression of being in their own land. In this expression, it can also be seen how Bandung is described as a location that surrounded by magnificent mountains, tropical plains, with a warm climate. Similar impressions are often found in other jargons, such as "The Garden of God," *"De Bloem der Indische Bergsteden"* (Flowers from a city in the Hindia mountains), or *"Bandoeng is het paradijs der aardche schoonen. Daarom is het goed daar to wonen"* (Bandung is a beautiful paradise on top of the world. Which is why, it is good to live there)" [15], which becomes the official slogan of Bandung during the colonial period.

3.2 Imagining Bandung Through Visual Depictions

In the beginning of the 20th century, one of the prevalent symptoms at that time was the presence of an art style that functioned as a way to see the space they called the East Indies. This style comes from western painter as a true representation from colonized countries with a romanticized portrayal of nature that brings the impression of orderliness. This style is known as the *Mooi Indie* (beautiful Indies). The natural features of

the Indonesian archipelago, such as mountains, volcanoes, and rice fields, as well as villages and local residents— craftsmen and aristocrats (both men and women) in particular— become favorite themes [19].

Mooi Indie's style in its evolution becomes the dominant discourse at the time [20]. According to Protschky [21], the style is considered an imaginative escape for the Europeans from a harsh reality they generate as a colonial party and the increasingly intense resistance from the Indonesians. Visions of space also present in visual renditions represented through paintings of natural landscapes. The natural landscape is a reduction of reality in the colony, imagined as a beautiful and exotic visual.

For instance, the depiction of mountains in the background and water elements filling the frame in the foreground. Minimal interaction between humans is shown. It shows a frictionless space devoid of labor with an abundance of nature's gifts in a calm and leisurely setting that represents the distant reality. This method also reveals a similar visual style that depicts the distinctive placement of wild plants with homogeneous vegetations, illustrates the clear separation between wilderness and the power of control/orderliness.



Picture 2. The painting created by Abdullah Suriosubroto (1878-1941) which heavily influenced by the *Mooi Indie* painting style comparison with Painting of Situ Patenggang created by Frans Wilhelm Junghuhn [Source: Private Collection]

The narratives of alluring Bandung does not stop there since Bandung was once again pictured in a phrase as the magnificent and prosperous city in the post-independence era. These expressions include *"Gemah Ripah Wibawa Mukti"* which means fertile land,

prosper citizen. In the view of the colonial and post-independence regional government, Bandung was expressed through heavenly parables and was seen as a beautiful, fertile, and prosperous space entity. However, different views towards Bandung are found in

several stories of local writers, such as Syarif Amin in his book "Di Lembur Kuring" (1964) and "Keur Kuring di Bandung" (1983). Those recorded events, on the contrary, rather bring impressions about the city's deviant issues. Some tragedies are mentioned in the article, including cholera and bubonic plague, a scourge in Bandung which claimed lives [22]. The city's snarling verdict can be observed through camera captures on Google Street application that show circumstances in locations around the quote being displayed. The road is known as one of the prominent lanes in the city of Bandung, for which it

becomes a place for both pedestrians and vehicles to pass through, while also congested with local residents' activities. The city's entanglement emerges as part of primarily discussed issues since some regions of Bandung become one of the world's most populous locations. In the release of the 2017 Community Perception Survey For Bandung City Development, the city's entanglement becomes the main focus in addition to the issue of waste management, floods, and economic prosperity.



Picture 3. Camera-captured images on Google Street application
[Source: Google Streetview]

In general, quotes that have declared by colonial officials, European travelers, and local governments who were present post-independence give an "ideal" depiction of how Bandung should be portrayed. This condition contradicts with what is represented by several other experiences through literature and visual imageries. Nevertheless, neither can assert which imageries described are the most representative. From these representations, there is a tendency based on the space discourse to be presented through fragments that invite readers of the Brouwer quote to imagine Bandung as part of The Land of Pasundan, using the distant colonial view from actual surrounding conditions.

3.4 Production And Dynamic Interpretation Of Space

From previous explanation, some various patterns can be seen; First, Bandung has been

imagined and reinterpreted in dynamic form. Quote itself is a phrase or short piece of writing taken from a longer work of literature, poetry, or something verbally delivered. In this case, excerpts in general is a linguistic phenomenon that has the function to mention/witness something [20]. However, seen from a different perspective, the language in quotations with symbolic meanings has an arbitrary nature. In line with Saussure, language as a sign is not always related with the existing condition/concept referenced [21]. This can be understood if the symbolic language is produced by different ethnic groups. Likewise, the second pattern that can be seen is, interpretations and images of Bandung really depend on from which perspective it is viewed, which in this research, ethnic groups [21] will be drawn into the definition of social class, to see how a specific ideology represents each

class and how they perceive the imagery of Bandung.

This condition indicates the presence of a gap, as in the conception by Lefebvre [22], referred to as reality and ideality. The views that idealized Bandung in the past was manifested in a symbolic form (in the form of text and pictures), which tilted towards the representation of colonial ideals and travelers in the past.

4. CONCLUSION

Through the chosen quote that Brouwer has created as the element of visual decoration of the city, shows that the quotes in this public space have succeeded in reproducing the imagined space of Bandung in the past. This imagery of Bandung also, from the research that has been conducted, has the same interpretation as what was imagined through the eyes of travelers and colonial residents in the colonial period. This part, of course, there is a reality that cannot be denied; Bandung still presents natural attractions and nicely arranged city aesthetic. On the other hand, the city deviance and urban disorganization phenomenon that occurs not far from the location of the quote being displayed, become overlooked. This condition shows how the quotes that visualize through typography in public spaces are, both through physical or virtual experience, able to perpetuate colonial myths and reduce the reality about to this day.

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