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Gairah Tabu: Re-imagining Indonesia through Pornography

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Abstract

This essay draws a parallel between the Indonesian Romance industry and Pornography industry; and Indonesian "legacy" media (print, radio and television news) and social media. In the classic romance narrative, true love can only be found when the heteronormative moral order has been restored. In pornography, there are always two players—the voyeur and the narcissist, who are locked in a feedback loop of transgression and pleasure. The essay charts how pornography played an important role in the development of internet technologies, not only through the injection of capital into innovation, but also in the way users subjectively engaged with these images. As human interaction and political discourse increasingly shifts online, it is timely to consider how online technologies determine those interactions.

Keywords: romance, pornography, technology, legacy media, social media

Gairah Tabu*:* Mengimajinasikan Kembali Indonesia Melalui Pornografi

Abstrak

Tulisan ini menggambarkan posisi paralel antara industri romansa dan pornografi di Indonesia, dengan "media konvensional" (media cetak, radio, berita televisi) dan media sosial. Di dalam narasi roman klasik, cinta sejati hanya dapat ditemukan ketika tatanan moral heteronormatif telah dipulihkan. Dalam pornografi, selalu ada dua pemain—sang pengamat dan sang narsistik, yang terjebak dalam lingkaran umpan balik pelanggaran dan kesenangan. Tulisan ini juga memetakan bagaimana pornografi memainkan peran penting dalam perkembangan teknologi internet, bukan hanya melalui suntikan modal ke dalam inovasi, tetapi juga melalui bagaimana pengguna internet secara subjektif terlibat dengan gambar-gambar ini. Seiring dengan meningkatkan pergeseran interaksi manusia dan wacana politik ke arah daring, inilah saatnya untuk mempertimbangkan bagaimana teknologi daring menentukan interaksi-interaksi tersebut.

Kata kunci*: romansa, pornografi, teknologi, media konvensional, media sosial*

In 2024 I closely followed two elections. I wasn't able to vote in either of them, but they would both surely impact my life. The first was the Indonesian election in February 2024, with Prabowo Subianto becoming the Indonesian

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President. The second was the US election in November 2024, where Donald Trump became the US President. There has been a huge amount of analysis about what contributed to both these candidates' success, and undoubtably there were multiple reasons. However, what interested me was the way each of these men, since the previous US and Indonesian elections, managed to restructure how their voters imagined them, and the significant push this gave to their success.

Trump's ability to control political narratives is well acknowledged. Leading up to the election he managed to dominate the headlines for most of the year. I personally don't read any news sources that are pro-Trump, and yet even the left-ish papers that I read always positioned Trump stories at the top of their news feeds. Even though they sided against him, his name in the headlines drove traffic (and dollars) to their sites. Which was of course Trump's strategy—by dominating the election narrative, he set the agenda. Even as he breezed through trails for rape, for paying hush money to sex workers, for the Capitol Hill insurrection and more, nothing seemed to stick to him. I became addicted to *Trump Porn*. I knew I shouldn't, but I couldn't stop watching.

The Indonesian election was in some ways similar but in other ways different. Prabowo is a nationalist with strong ties to the military. In the previous 2019 campaign he seemed to embrace Trump's campaign tactics, even using the phrase "Make Indonesia Great Again". Prabowo's 2019 campaign featured an alignment with Islamic fundamentalists, fake scandals and identity politics used to divide and conquer. In 2019 those strategies ultimately did not succeed. In 2024, his third attempt at the presidency, he (or his PR team) changed tactics. He worked hard to present himself as the *gemoy* (cute) grandfather of Indonesia. He secured the endorsement of the well-liked President Jokowi. One of his key campaign promises was to deliver milk to school kids across the country. He did a daggy dad dance on stage, he made cute Korean heart symbols, stories circulated about his cat Bobby, his lonely heart, a possible get together with Bu Titiek (his ex-wife). On social media, his campaign played out like *sinetron* (soap opera); the message was all about stability, harmony and the restoration of moral order. Personally, I found it all a bit disingenuous, but 66% of Gen Z (under twenty-six years of age) and 55% of women voted for him[1] … so what would I know.

[1] Bambang Setiawan, "Prabowo-Gibran Unggul di Semua Gugus Pulau," *Kompas.id*, February 14, 2024, https://www.kompas.id/baca/riset/2024/02/15/prabowo-gibran-unggul-di-semua-gugus-pulau.

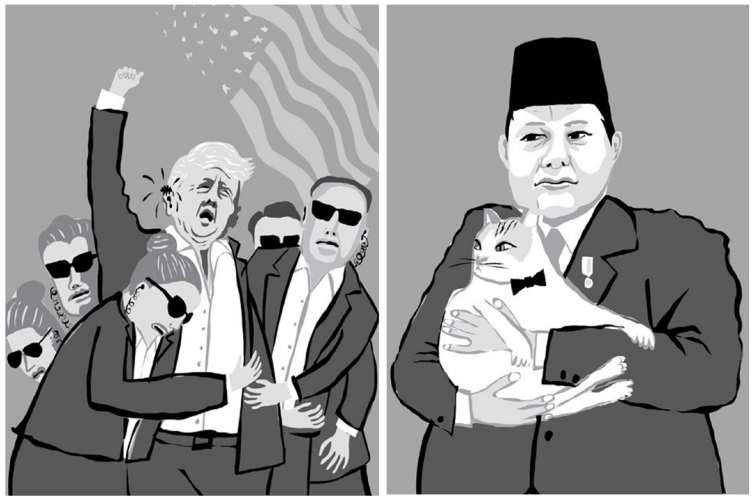


Image 1 and 2: Trump and Prabowo's 2024 election campaigns were *imagined* through popular media in distinctly different ways. Trump was presented as an aggressive disruptor whereas Prabowo was presented as a *gemoy* (cute) grandfather.
Image source: Malcolm Le Smith

My interest is in the role images play in the production of subjectivities. Images never exist on their own; they are only legible within systems, so my interest in images also extends to the systems within which they are produced. For example, I'm interested in how the image of a bloodied Trump fist bumping after his attempted assassination produced a certain subjectivity in voters in the US election, but then why an image of Prabowo with his cat Bobby produced a different kind of subjectivity in Indonesian voters.

In this essay I will use the term "technologies" a lot, as in "romance technologies" or "porn technologies". "Technology" is used to describe the systems in which we are interpellated as subjects. It's a nod to French theorist Bernard Stiegler.[2] A technology is a relation of objects, including humans, that work together in a mostly predictable way. A technology can be a forest, a handphone, a religion or a political campaign. The objects that make up technologies can be man-made or natural, concrete or conceptual, they can be images, texts, sounds, ideologies, histories, beliefs… that all work together toward a common goal.

Technologies are never closed systems. They are porous, intersected,

[2] I could equally have used terms with similar meanings like "assemblages" (from Deleuze), or "matrix" (from Foucault), or "symbolic order" (from Lacan), but I've settled on "technics" because it seems most readable, and most relevant in this context.

constantly failing apart and constantly being improved. All technologies affect all other technologies. In this essay I'll look at how the technologies of Romance, of Porn and of the Indonesian Government often intersected, sometimes producing conflicts. Bernard Stiegler argues that all technologies form an infinitely complex *technosphere*, made up of technologies within technologies within technologies.[3]

As nodes within this constellation of relations we are produced as subjects. At any given moment we might be the subject of our families, the subject of our workplace, of our smartphones, of our nation and so on. So, our subjectivity is not fixed, rather it is constantly being produced as we are interpellated into different technologies. Each of these technologies gives us different kinds of agency; our smartphone enables communication; our workplace gives us a wage… But these technologies also often make conflicting demands of us (think porn vs the Indonesian state) meaning that most persons in the modern world end up feeling conflicted, anxious and disoriented.

To resolve this anxiety, we need to construct an ethical sense of Self that can remain reasonably consistent and predictable as we navigate the conflicting demands of technologies. "Self" is the way we want others to see us, or the story we tell others about ourselves. From psychoanalysis: it's when desire is sublimated onto a productive goal, which orients us to the future. Stiegler calls this "individuation". So Technosphere precedes technologies which precede the subject which precedes the Self. Stiegler challenges traditional philosophical views by arguing that technics is not external or secondary to humanity, but constitutive of what it means to be human.[4]

In this essay I'm going to discuss "Romance technologies" and "Porn technologies".[5] By "Romance technologies", I don't just mean love songs, ro-

[3] Bernard Stiegler, *The Neganthropocene*, trans. Daniel Ross (London: Open Humanites Press, 2018), https://www.openhumanitiespress.org/books/titles/the-neganthropocene/.

[4] "That which anticipates, desires, has agency, thinks, and understands, I have called the *who.* The supplement to the *who*, its prosthesis, is its *what*. The *who* is nothing without the *what*, since they are in a transductive relation during the process of exteriorization that characterizes life." Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 2: Disorientation*, trans. Stephen Barker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 6.

[5] I'm not implying that all images fall into these two categories. I could equally write about maps and the cartographic systems that produce them. I've previously written about pharmaceutical advertisements and the systems in which they were produced. Or how imaginings of middle class were produced in advertising.

mance novels or greeting cards, but rather a vast ecology of relations including writers, actors, publishers, movie studios, flows of capital, printing machines, paperstock, camera, videotapes and the internet. It would also include traditions, ideologies, histories, relationship experts, religious doctrines, educational programs, and government policies; each jostling to leverage their own interests over the world of Romance.

It would be too easy to assume that the objective of all these relations is to produce surplus profit. I'd argue that the true objective, the *Master Signifier,* to which this entire ecology of relations is oriented, is to produce "Romance". Accordingly, the "Romantic" is the subject enabled by the Romance industry—who is given the agency for Romance. Which begs the question: without romance technologies, can there be *Romance*? Indeed, can there be *Love*?

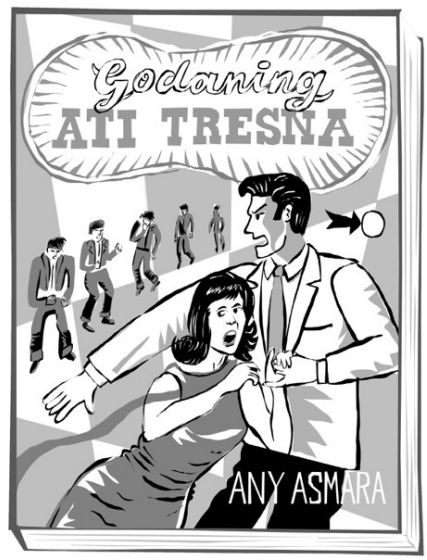


Image 3: In Indonesian romance novels in the 1960's only those who embodied the heteronormative ideals of the times could find True Love.
Image source: Malcolm Le Smith

Previously I've written about Indonesian romance novels from the 1960s,[6] which tend to follow a standard narrative arc. For example, in *Godaning Ati Tresna* (*Love's Heartache*, Any Asmara, 1965), Any is engaged to Swatama,

[6] Malcolm Smith, "Obat Kuat Libido and Hegemony in 20th Century Yogyakarta" (Master's Thesis, Yogyakarta, Sanata Dharma University, 2018), https://repository.usd.ac.id/30469/.

a wealthy but arrogant man from Surakarta. Then she meets Abimanju, one of her father's workers: a simple man with a good heart. Jealousies and conflict ensue. These romance novels from the 60s are not just about individuals falling in love. What's really at stake is the restoration of the heteronormative moral order. If someone is motivated by money, or greed or social ambition, the moral order is disturbed, and that person must not be allowed to find love. Only when everyone's "true self" is revealed can "true love" be found. In the case of *Godaning Ati Tresna*, when her suitors have finally revealed their *true* selves, and Any has accepted her *true* status in her village and her family, she is able to make the right choice and finally find *true* love.[7]

But that's not to say that Romance is without its problems. What of people whose "True Self" might differ from the normative standards of the times? In the 1960s, when *Godaning Ati Tresna* was written, women who aspired to be more than the object of a man's approval, or people who aspired to careers beyond their class and family would be punished if they revealed their true selves, so their chances at *True Love* were slim. LGBT people had almost no visibility in these novels and if they did it was only to be pitied or punished. The message of Romance novels is always that only people whose lives resemble the normative ideals endorsed by the dominant institutional discourses of the times, are deserving of *True Love*.[8]

[7] For an excellent survey of Indonesian Romance novels, see: Ibnu "Benu" Wibi Winarko, *Sinopsis Roman Panglipur Wayang 1* (Yogyakarta: Oemah Oembul, 2014); Ibnu "Benu" Wibi Winarko, *Sinopsis Roman Panglipur Wayang 2* (Yogyakarta: Oemah Oembul, 2016).

[8] As another example, James T. Siegel has looked at how the narrative structure of Indonesian popular novels, including detective stories and romance novels, evolved over the 20th century. He observes how in the 1930s, novels published by Balai Pustaka promoted the idea that an arranged marriage was seen as "traditional" and resulted in "False Love", while marrying for "*Cinta* (love)" was modern and produced "True Love". These novels imply an association between modernity and Dutch culture, and Tradition and Javanese culture. See: James T. Siegel, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).



Image 4: during the New Order, wives of civil servants were required to join organisations called "Dharma Wanita" to support their husbands by providing a harmonious family life. Suryakusuma calls this "State Ibuism".
Image source: Malcolm Le Smith

Julia Suryakusuma notes how during the New Order, the rules of heteronormative relationships became embedded in the state.[9] Wives of civil servants were required to join organisations called "Dharma Wanita" where they were expected to support their husbands by providing a harmonious family life. Suryakusuma calls this "State Ibuism". Soeharto's authoritarian regime reached well beyond public administration, seeking to manage all aspects of Indonesian life, including gender roles romance and family planning. Everyone was expected to set aside their personal desires in favour of the development of the nation. Keluarga Berencana, the state family planning program not only sought to control reproduction but also managed gender roles and ultimately patriarchal power. Women's magazines like Kartini and Femina covered fashion, beauty, family, relationships, and self-development, but rarely challenged the normative gender roles mandated by the Orde Baru

[9] Julia I. Suryakusuma, "The State and Sexuality in New Order Indonesia," in *Fantasizing the Feminine in Indonesia*, ed. Laurie J. Sears (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 92–119.

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Image 5 & 6: In some ways, Dharma Wanita, Keluarga Berencana, Kartini or Femina gave women some kinds of agency, in terms of re-imagining the modern woman, but these forums would only support a very limited vision of what a woman's role could be. Image source: Malcolm Le Smith

Here is where the intersected and conflicted nature of *technics* is apparent. In some ways, Dharma Wanita, Keluarga Berencana, Kartini or Femina gave women some kinds of agency—certainly in terms of the re-imagining and representation of the modern Indonesian woman, and also in terms of establishing forums in which relationships and gender roles could be openly discussed. But Suryakusuma notes that these forums would only support a very limited vision of what a woman's role was. Effectively this disenfranchised anybody who did not seek to uphold the heteronormative standards of the Regime, and often was used as justification for violence against these people.

In the stifling heteronormativity of mainstream 1970's Indonesian society, the emergence of a vibrant market of locally produced pornography seems anomalous; perhaps it could be understood as "the return of the repressed". Images of nudity and sexual acts have been produced in Indonesia at least since the temple of Borobudur was built, but the cultural framework in which some of these images were "allowed" and others were deemed "adults only" or even banned outright is relatively new. The Dutch Criminal Code in the late 19th Century was the first Indonesian law to regulate pornography. After Independence, this code was translated to Bahasa Indonesia but kept much as it was. Until recently, these laws defined pornography as material that "*melanggar kesusilaan* (offends morality)". Jennifer Lindsay notes: "The criminal law thus defines pornography in terms of its effect on the perceiv-

er/s, not in terms of objective or absolute identifiable acts, things or works."[10] There's two things worth noting here. Firstly, what constitutes "morality" is highly subjective and open to interpretation by different community members. Secondly, what constitutes pornography is not the material itself, but the perceived intention to offend morality.





Image 7 & 8: In the early 70s there was a notable uplift in the quantity of adult materials available in Indonesia. Cheaply produced *Stensilan* by authors like *Enny Arrow* could be easily bought at night markets. In the 1980s the Indonesian film industry increasingly produced "Indosploitation" films that featured graphic sex, nudity, vice and violence.
Image source: Malcolm Le Smith

In the 20th century, "*bacaan liar* (wild literature)" and "*film panas* (hot films)" produced in Indonesia were censored by the Dutch and then later by the Indonesian government.[11] In the early 70s there was a notable uplift in the quantity of these materials available in Indonesia. Cheaply produced *Stensilan* by authors like *Enny Arrow* could be easily bought at night markets, detailing the immoral trysts of "false lovers". In the 1980s the Indonesian film industry increasingly produced "Indosploitation" films that featured graphic sex, nudity, vice and violence. Films like *The Queen of Black Magic* (*Ratu Ilmu Hitam*, Lilik Sudjio, 1981), were initially screened for "lower class" au-

[10] Jennifer Lindsay, "Media and Morality: Pornography Post Suharto," in *Politics and the Media in Twenty-First Century Indonesia*, ed. Krishna Sen and David T. Hill (Oxford: Routledge, 2010), 173.

[11] See: Eka Kurniawan, "Bacaan Liar Era Kolonial," in *PAGAR* (Jakarta International Literary Festival, Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 2019), 100. Also: Ekky Imanjaya, *A to Z about Indonesian Film* (Bandung: DAR! Mizan, 2006), 106.

diences, usually at cheap outdoor cinemas,[12] but they also soon found new audiences.

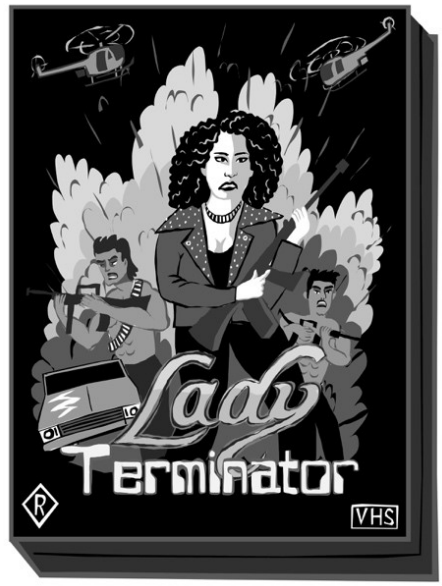


Image 9: Films like *Lady Terminator* (Pembalasan Ratu Laut Selatan, Tjut Djalil, 1988) were banned in Indonesia but were highly profitable in the international VHS market. Image source: Malcolm Le Smith

The Producers of Indonesian Adult films played a cat and mouse game with the government and censors. Films like *Lady Terminator* (Pembalasan Ratu Laut Selatan, Tjut Djalil, 1988) or *Virgins From Hell* (*Perawan di Sarang Sindikat*, Fred Wardy Pilliang, 1986) were banned in Indonesia but were highly profitable in the international VHS market. Indeed, while the Film Censorship Board sought to stop their release, another government body called "Pokjatab Prosar"[13] was promoting them on VHS format because they were the only Indonesian films that could find markets overseas.[14] What was happening in Indonesia was in line with trends happening

[12] Ekky Imanjaya, "The Other Side of Indonesia: New Order's Indonesian Exploitation Cinema as Cult Films," *Colloquy* 18 (2009): 143–59.

[13] *Kelompok Kerja Tetap Promosi dan Pemasaran Film Indonesia di Luar Negeri*. The name can be rendered in English as: "The Permanent Working Committee for the Promotion and Marketing of Indonesia Films Abroad of the National Film Council".

[14] Pete Tombs writes that those kinds of movies—specifically the women-in-prison, war, action, and horror movies—were widely exported in 1980s. Indonesia governments film promotion body found that those were the

globally. In the US, Magazines like Playboy, Penthouse and Hustler were attracting huge readerships but also fighting a religious backlash and censorship laws, with mixed results.[15] In many ways, the more these images were censored, the more they attracted attention, which in turn drove the demand for new material. As much as censorship tries to limit the availability of pornography, it also creates the conditions in which it thrives.

It seems counterintuitive that under a regime in which women's roles and their romantic lives were so tightly regulated by the State, that the 1980s is also referred to as the "Golden Age of Exploitation Cinema".[16] Suryakusuma suggests that while the State exercised tight control over women's roles and responsibilities in marriage, those laws did not apply in the same way to men, and that "sexual adventurism among high-ranking government officials was rampant".[17] Whereas magazines like Kartini and Femina represented the "ideal" Indonesian woman, exploitation movies represented other kinds of women as sex-crazed maniacs. Even the state funded *Pengkhianatan G30S PKI* (1984) portrayed the communist women's group Gerwani as chanting she-devils obsessed with revenge on men. These films naturalised the idea that women who did not seek to embody the heteronormative, state-sponsored ideal deserved to be punished.[18]

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only sort of production that foreign buyers were interested in. See: Pete Tombs, *Mondo Macabro: Weird & Wonderful Cinema Around the World* (New York: Macmillan, 1998), 70.

15 The governments of Northern Europe (especially Denmark and Sweden) tried a different approach. Recognising the limited effectiveness of prohibition, the production of pornography between consenting adults was decriminalised. See Berl Kutchinsky, *Law, Pornography and Crime: The Danish Experience* (Oslo: Pax Forlag A/S, 1999).

16 Ekky Imanjaya, "A Note from the Editor: The Significance of Indonesian Cult, Exploitation, and B-Movies," *Plaridel Journal* 11, no. 2 (2014): iv.

17 Suryakusama also notes that and visiting sex workers was seen as a preferable alternative to the messy problem of bringing home a second wife.

18 The popularity of Indosploitation films has been addressed in other ways. Imanjaya observes that while "high quality" films were rigorously vetted to ensure they presented "educative" values, these cheap horror films were considered "low quality" and not worth the censorship board worrying about. Others have suggested the Orde Baru wanted to be seen as "progressive" in contrast to the Sukarno regime, that banned western films and music. Occasionally there were anti-pornography drives (in 1971 1984 and 1994), but production quickly returned to business as usual. See: Thomas Barker, "VCD Pornography of Indonesia," in *Asia Reconstructed: Proceedings of the 16th Biennial Conference of the ASAA,*

The rapid expansion of the Porn Industry reflected changes globally. *Playboy* magazine was first published In the US in the 1953 and in the following decades numerous new porn publishers arrived, each gaining notoriety (and sales) by transgressing heteronormative standards in new ways. *Penthouse* shocked the world by showing pubic hair and a few years later, Hustler shocked by showing labial parts. The adult industry was always locked in a tension with government censors who sought to restrict the availability of porn. As a result, porn producers had to constantly find new, unregulated technologies through which they could distribute their products. Porn producers were early adopters of VHS and home videos, playing a substantial role on the development of that marketplace, and later in Indonesia of the VCD market. Porn also drove innovation in areas like image compression, streaming video, internet security, online credit card payments and online newsgroups.[19] Arguably, porn paid for our internet.

Just as porn paid for the development of these technologies, it also became embedded into these technologies. By the turn of the century, we had mobile phones, affordable handycams, VCD players, hard drives, internet cafes, chatrooms and newsgroups, creating ideal conditions for the distribution of erotic images. In the early 2000s a series of porn scandals broke across Indonesia involving people who had videotaped themselves, or had unknowingly been videotaped, performing sexual acts.[20] These videos were mostly intended for personal viewing but in the new millennium, as new digital technologies rapidly became accessible across the archipelago, so too did these films.

Strassler has examined the public reaction to these porn scandals from different perspectives. On the one hand she argues that mainstream media outlets capitalised on these scandals because they knew they sold more papers. Their readers took a salacious delight in "condemning" these lewd acts.[21] But Strassler also explores how the During the Orde Baru, the regime had

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2006, Wollongong, Australia (Canberra: Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) and Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies (RSPAS), The Australian National University, 2006).

19 Patchen Barss, *The Erotic Engine: How Pornography Has Powered Mass Communication, from Gutenberg to Google* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2010), 10.

20 Barker, "VCD Pornography of Indonesia."

21 Karen Strassler, *Demanding Images: Democracy, Mediation, and the Image-Event in Indonesia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), chap. 3.

controlled all aspects of public life, and after the reformasi many people felt disoriented about how public space should be managed. The FPI (Front Pembela Islam) saw the opportunity to position themselves as the moral authority to fill this void.[22]

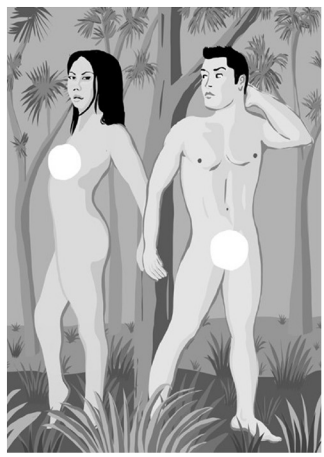




Image 10 & 11: *Pink Swing*, an installation by Agus Sawage at the CP Biennale, featured semi-naked images of two TV celebrities was shut down by the FPI A few months later, the attempted launch of Indonesian Playboy magazine caused major public demonstrations, with the FPI again positioning themselves as defenders of moral order.
Image source: Malcolm Le Smith

A number of high-profile porn scandals erupted from the mid-2000s. Pink Swing, an installation by Agus Sawage at the CP Biennale, featured semi-naked images of two TV celebrities was shut down by the FPI a few days after the opening. A few months later, the attempted launch of an Indonesian franchise of Playboy magazine caused major public demonstrations, with the FPI again positioning themselves as defenders of moral order. By 2008 anti-pornography laws were being passed in parliament to not only punish the makers and distributors of pornography, but also those who committed "pornoaksi"; acts that could be considered pornographic, regardless of whether were being recorded—including kissing in public, erotic dancing, or revealing "sensual" parts of the body.

In 2010 a 6-minute home video of a sexual tryst between two Indonesian celebrities, Nazril "Ariel" Irham and Luna Maya, became the most talked

[22] They were also known to bribe people to back off from pursuing them. See: Strassler, chap. 4.

about video in Indonesia for that year. While Ariel's computer hard-drive was in a repair shop, the technician found the video and shared with a friend…[23] What stands out to me in this case were the new technologies that around that time were just thresholding in the Indonesian marketplace: phones that could record video, social networks that could replicate and distribute videos at lightning speed, and an eager audience of tens of millions of young Indonesians who had just purchased their first smartphone. These technologies gave their subjects new kinds of agency, like home video production, distribution networks, and the chance to be "famous", but disabled other kinds of agency—like privacy.

Just as Romance technologies produced the Romantic as its subject, Porn technologies also produced certain kinds of subjectivity. In Porn there is always one who looks (the voyeur) and one who is looked at (the narcissist). Think of the classic scenario of a striptease; the stripper/narcissist gains attention by removing an article of clothing, and in doing so, transgressing the moral order. This attracts the attention of the voyeur: who knows they shouldn't look but also wants to look. This conflicted gaze only encourages the narcissist to transgress even more, taking another item of clothing off, which increases the stakes; the more the voyeur becomes conflicted, the more the narcissist gains pleasure from transgressing.[24]

By the end of the 20th century a new form of image consumption had become commonplace—a strip tease mediated through technology, in which we were caught in feedback loops of desire that encouraged and empowered *narcissists* and sold content to an insatiable audience of *voyeurs.* Today in the 2020's, there's a smorgasbord of porn options to cater to the tastes of every consumer. Not just sexual porn but also *food porn, car porn, war porn* and more. Even when they don't include images of graphic sex, they still produce

[23] After a well-publicised court case and a vigorous public debate, Nazril "Ariel" Irham was jailed for three years, for the offence of "pornoaksi".

[24] Foucault describes this process as the "perverse implantation". Firstly, it required *lines of penetration* by which the boundaries were drawn between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. Secondly it involved the categorization and *specification of the individual*: for example, "the narcissist" and "the voyeur". Thirdly came the *sensualisation of power*: the pleasure that comes through the exercise of power over another, and the pleasure that comes from evading this power. In becoming the desired *other* (the *fetish*) of the citizen, the relationship between the narcissist and the voyeur shifts from one based on the exchange of productive labour for security, to one in which pleasure was exchanged for power. See: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

the same kind of voyeuristic subjectivity. The dynamic between transgressive, narcissistic content and voyeurism has become the fuel that fires digital media today.[25]

My argument is that the structural dynamic of Porn became embedded into early digital technologies, like chatrooms, VCD players, the internet and our mobile phones. These technologies produced the subjects of porn: narcissists and voyeurs. In the early 2010s, digital technologies played a significant role in the Arab Spring by enabling a young generation of protesters to utilise apps like Facebook to organise mass protests, document and distribute their actions, circumvent government censorship and arouse global support. What we know in retrospect about social media and the Arab Spring was that it was very effective for tearing down an old regime, but not so great at building a new one. The Arab Spring created power vacuums in the Middle East that were mostly filled with problematic new administrations. This illustrates a key difference between social media and "legacy media" (the vast media conglomerates that controlled information in the 20th century). Legacy Media tends evaluate current events and news stories in relation to a "common good" (defined by the editor). In digital media however, it is divisiveness and transgressive behaviour that increases traffic. Whereas Legacy Media is good at building consensus, Social Media is good at disruption.

Indonesia's rapid embrace of social media technologies has had mixed results in this respect. For countless communities these technologies have provided a platform for collective discussion, advocacy, and mobilization; women's movements, LGBT communities, environmental groups, ethnic minorities and more. But ultraconservative religious organisations like the FPI have also successfully embraced social media to generate moral panics around "morality" issues leading to mass protests around the country.[26] Despite their relatively low representation in the DPR, right-wing Islamic parties have leveraged incidents like these to position themselves as the moral gatekeepers of the country, securing political gains including the passage of new pornography laws and the new criminal code.

[25] As Donald Trump knows so well.

[26] Kyle Knight, "Fresh Wave of Anti-LGBT+ Moral Panic Hits Indonesia," *Human Rights Watch*, November 6, 2018, https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/11/06/fresh-wave-anti-lgbt-moral-panic-hits-indonesia.

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Image 12: In a raid of a Gay sauna in Jakarta in 2017, more than a hundred men were detained under the "pornoaksi" laws and then photographed naked by police. Somewhat ironically, the police then shared these images online, where they were quickly reposted by news outlets around the country.
Image source: Malcolm Le Smith

In 2017 over 300 people were arrested in raids of LGBT venues and homes in Java and Aceh. Militant Islamists often tipped off police or accompanied them during these raids.[27] In a raid of a Gay sauna in Jakarta in 2017, more than a hundred men were detained for indecency and then photographed naked by police. Somewhat ironically, the police then shared these images online, where they were quickly reposted by news outlets around the country.[28] There is a parallel here between these representations of LGBT people as sexually depraved hedonists and how, during the Orde Baru, unconventional women were represented as insane she-devils in exploitation films.[29] Benjamin Hegarty suggests this is a deliberate strategy

[27] Knight.

[28] "Dozens Arrested in Raid on Jakarta Gay Sauna," *ABC News*, October 8, 2017, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-08/indonesia-police-arrest-58-in-raid-on-jakarta-gay-sauna/9028282.

[29] Hendri Yulius Wijaya has noted that it was through "voyeuristic media reports of these 'dramatic' incidents … [that] the category LGBT was increasingly associated and framed as insatiable sexuality, sex parties, and immorality". Wijaya, as quoted in: Benjamin Hegarty, "Sex, Crime

to delegitimise anyone who differs from the State's definition of *normality*:

> the ongoing vitality of images of LGBT within Indonesian politics suggests that concerns about sexuality must be understood in terms that go beyond a moral panic. Rather, these images of LGBT—and a narrowing of how LGBT can be seen—form part of a broader battle waged over who has the right to be seen and on what basis and hence speak for an Indonesian public.[30]

Many of the articles and books I read as background for this article talked about the tendency of the Orde Baru to structure the whole of Indonesian life towards the productive development of the state, including sexuality and gender. Writers argued that even post-reformasi, those who uphold the heteronormative order are still viewed as "legitimate" citizens, whereas those who are unable, or choose not to live to these standards are pitied or punished. I've explored in this essay the ongoing tension between the heteronormative demands of the Indonesian state, as opposed to the disruption and disorientation caused by the technologies of porn, and more broadly of social media. The image of Prabowo with his cat Bobby seemed so incongruous and unpresidential to me at first, but I can now see how for some, in the disorientation of contemporary Indonesian life and particularly in social media, this photograph made Prabowo seem reassuring, simple and uncomplicated—a safe bet.

In order to resolve the anxieties brought on by the conflicting demands of technologies, we face the task of constructing a sense of *Self* that remains consistent across the many systems into which we are subjected. Each individual must find their individual *objet a*—the objective to which their life is ultimately oriented. This could be a lover, a god, a material goal, a mission, or a belief. Steigler calls this process "individuation". [31]

Stiegler examines how social media has commodified the process of individuation. Rather than finding unique and individual ways to navigate the diverse people, communities, environments and tasks that confront us daily, these technologies provide us with pre-packaged identities in which these challenges have been pre-solved for us. Furthermore, we escape the need to even navigate diversity and conflict because digital media algorithmically

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and Entertainment: Images of LGBT in the Indonesian News Media," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 50, no. 146 (2022): 33–51, https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2022.2035074.

[30] Hegarty, 47.

[31] Another way of thinking about it is that *Self* is the story we tell others about ourselves.

sorts us into echo-chambers where everyone else agrees with us anyway. We no longer have to think critically, solve problems, or even care for anybody else. It's enough to just make narcissistic content, upload it, and be paid in "likes". In this sense we've become the *digital proletariat.*

Ultimately, I side with Stiegler's argument that technologies have commodified the process of social and personal "individuation" in ways that suit capitalism but don't always ensure positive outcomes for individuals or our communities. By this I mean that divisiveness and narcissism drive traffic and therefore are rewarded in these platforms. Rather than being distracted by horizontal conflict, I think we need to start addressing the core issue, by building critical frameworks around the technologies that increasingly determine our lives.

I don't think the shift from legacy to social media has been absolute, I think popular discourse surrounding politics in Indonesia still is mostly driven by state and media technologies that seek to impose a moral order, while other forms of media that seek to disrupt and polarise are still growing. Whereas legacy media in Indonesia tends to be controlled by a handful of oligarchs who are mostly driven by self-interest, it's important to remember that digital media technologies are owned by companies so large they are beyond the regulatory reach of Indonesia or most other countries. This is no longer about individual greed, this is technology serving technology's ends. As we move into a new era where AI technologies are likely to transform the way we communicate, share information and do business, we need to consider carefully the implications of these changes. We cannot continue to consider technics and humanity as separate; they are constitutive of each other.

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