

*The Appearances of Memory: Mnemonic Practices of Architecture and Urban Form in Indonesia.* By Abidin Kusno. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010. 332 pp.

In 2000 Abidin Kusno published *Behind the Postcolonial*. In the earlier book he had explored how colonial representations in architecture and urban space had been re-invented in postcolonial Indonesia, the political and cultural substrata to such an enterprise and the place of memory in the context of such representations. At one level the present book does the same, except that this is now 2010 and, in the life of Indonesia, an entirely different age. The memories are different.

The completion of such a major project as the earlier book inevitably leaves something of a vacuum in an author's mind, especially when the scholarly focus remains relatively unchanged — what do I write next? Kusno's answer was a sequence of illuminating essays, in journals and edited volumes, to push the previous methodological and theoretical themes further. Instead of the earlier grand scale of great cities (most notably Jakarta), their great monuments and spaces, and their great leaders, the essays took more to the minutiae of architecture and the spaces and lives of the city — Jakarta, Governor Sutyo and cleaning up the city, a “retro” university building, memories of colonial orderliness, a mosque, a guardhouse. The present book, a decade after the first, brings a number of these essays together. So, in that sense, it is a collection.

To attempt a coherent collection of one's earlier work, however, presents a challenge: what, precisely, was it all about? What did it amount to?

Kusno attempts to address this question in a long Introduction where he proposes four themes which, in turn, are used as labels to the four groupings of the chapters. So there are: (1) “Governmentality”, concerned with the official use of architecture and urban management in the post-Soeharto era to reinforce some new sense of social and political behaviour (new “democratic” manipulation); (2) “Remembering and forgetting”, on architecture's ability or

otherwise to trigger memory, most notably of one's own historical violence against others as one small step towards reconciliation; then (3) "Reminiscences", re-thinking the colonial past, its destruction of old hierarchies and imaginings, and the violent construction of images of non-violence and normalcy; finally (4) "Mental nebulae" which, despite the somewhat opaque title, deals with colonial and postcolonial hang-overs to institutions of the everyday — the mosque and the guardhouse.

At an intellectual level this Introduction is useful. It is able to articulate links between architecture and urban space, power, the myth of order, and memory. It also brings in the idea of different "times" — an "age in motion", "age of normalcy", revolution, then successive regimes. Most useful of all, it exposes the author's difficulty in articulating his guiding hypothesis; the nearest we get might be on page 10: "It is memory's demand for representation from buildings ... coupled with the impossibility of memory being adequately represented that makes the interplay between memory and architecture both beneficial and problematic." At the level of its writing, however, this Introduction is not a happy read: Kusno is too preoccupied with writing about his intentions and concerns; there are too many words, it seems self-indulgent and Kusno really fails to engage the reader. To repeat, the Introduction is useful and important to the book; it is not, however, an easy read.

Nine chapters follow the Introduction. While opacity of writing also occasionally afflicts the essays, here there are good stories to elevate them. They provide new information and, for readers on Indonesia and especially on Jakarta, they have real value. Of the nine chapters, six are based on the earlier essays. The three new chapters are in part to plug gaps and in part to "round out" the account.

A difficulty always besets such reprises of earlier writings. Chapter 1, for example, returns in 2010 to an essay, seemingly unamended, from 2004. It deals with Jakarta Governor Sutiyoso's faltering endeavours at bringing order to a city falling apart, from 1997 to 2002, told around diverse observations of Jakarta's "looseness in the centre" and anxieties following the Soeharto regime's fall in 1998

and the end of its new “age of normalcy” and Soeharto certainties. Sutiyoso, however, went on to a second term, 2002 to 2007. So a new Chapter 2 clearly became necessary, to explore what he (and Jakarta) had learnt from the first traumatic term. This, in turn, is told around the story of the Jakarta Busway project, a second-best display of political achievement after the city had failed to secure funding for a subway system. Kusno, however, prefers to present the Busway as an exercise in urban design to hand the city, via its public transport, back to the (upper) middle class — part of what he refers to as a discourse of “back to the city”. Then comes Chapter 3 where this theme of middle-class return is explored through the “superblocks” — immense expressions of international finance that incorporate condominium living, commercial space, shopping mall, recreation, and the fine restaurants of good living — the Sutiyoso vision triumphant. The post-1998 superblocks have tended to encroach the public spaces that first-President Sukarno had planned as defining the identity of the new nation and as “gifts” to *all* its people. The encroachments privatize the Sukarno endowment. Earlier superblocks more commonly replaced bulldozed kampongs, the indigenous informal villages of the urban poor, with the removal of the kampongs being the other side of Sutiyoso’s achievement. So, likewise, the other side of Chapter 3 is an account of the architectural work of Adi “Mamo” Purnomo who designs houses for the middle class drawing ideas from the kampong and its dwelling methods. Also from Mamo are schemes (unimplemented) for pedagogic housing for the urban poor, again based on kampong culture and practices. In this chapter Kusno is on his own (architectural) grounds and accordingly the account is assured and well written.

These first three chapters comprise the “Governmentality” section of the book. So, does it work? Certainly Kusno depicts the task of “stabilising” a traumatized city post-1998, mostly by the Sutiyoso strategy of handing the city over to the middle class. The political economy of this handover, however, is not approached.

The 1998 uprising is officially to be remembered as a glorious event, dethroning a dictator and marking the new power of “the

people". Yet, Kusno reminds us, the remembered glory rides on the necessity to forget the racist fury of the murders, rapes, burnings, and pillaging of Jakarta's Glodok — Chinatown — as collateral damage from that noble achievement. The rebuilding of the destroyed Glodok is discussed in Chapter 4; it is the most poignant of the chapters. Architecture has been used to obliterate rather than trigger memory; the trauma of the raped and the gnawing guilt of the rapists remains, unable to be forgotten; society is left to imagine it all away and there is no justice. What hope is there for an Indonesia unable to confront its own demons?

This is the first of two chapters under the banner "Remembering and forgetting"; the second, Chapter 5, is about the Dutch "Empire Style" architecture from the early nineteenth century and its revival (remembering) in the 1970s, during the backward-looking Soeharto era, and it marks a major division in the book. From this point the chapters are part of Kusno's work in architectural history and history of popular culture. So, Chapters 6 and 7 ("Reminiscences") look at aspects of colonial Java in the early twentieth century and at their traces persisting into the present. The final chapters ("Mental nebulae") deal respectively with the hybridizing passage of Islam through Javanese culture and the consequent contradictions and unease confronting modern Islamic architectural debate (Chapter 8), then that quintessential Indonesian institution of the *kampung gardu* or guardhouse and also its persistence into the present in the myopia of the upper-class gated community.

While these final five chapters lack the sequential coherence of the earlier four, they do contribute to the overriding argument of the book. This argument seems to be that each era in Indonesia has both its officially mandated and officially suppressed memories (of terror, atrocities, injustice), that each era has had its corresponding (and consequent) forms of anxiety and instability, that the objects of those memories and of the anxieties have left their architectural detritus in urban space, and that architecture is similarly implicated in their management — whether beneficially or otherwise. The first four chapters focus on the most recent of these eras of change and

angst (the post-1998 “looseness in the centre”); the latter five, while seeming to address earlier such eras, would suggest that those earlier instabilities, uncertainties, and anxieties also leave their traces in the architectural debates and practices of the present.

Abidin Kusno is at his best when he leaves the grand themes (“discourses”) and is content to tell a good story. The book is resplendent with such stories.