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*Demanding Images: Democracy, Mediation, and the Image-Event in Indonesia.* By Karen Strassler. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2020. ix+329 pp.

“Indonesian democracy remains eventful and unfinished” (p. 243). Strassler’s concluding statement marks the end of a richly detailed and theoretically perspicacious journey through the role of images in driving responses to particular events and ideas in Indonesia from the *Reformasi* of 1998 to the election of Joko Widodo (Jokowi) in 2014. This book follows on from Strassler’s exemplary account of photography in Indonesia, *Refracted Visions* (Strassler 2010), based on research that took place during and after a political revolution, but before the digital revolution, and explores the conjunction of these two revolutions. As before, photographs play a major role, but in a diversified digital context and with less emphasis on their materiality. Here “images are not epiphenomena but political events” (p. 222); they are “image-events”, not objects, which galvanize and participate in political processes in a “complexly mediated public sphere” (p. 11). Complexity arises from the “unprecedented corporate consolidation of mass media” (p. 22) by 2012, at a time of decentralization and liberalization, and the ensuing sense of scepticism about political transparency after the initial euphoria of *Reformasi* and the freedoms it promised. Image-events are defined as ‘authoritative’ and ‘evidentiary’ or ‘ludic’ as they play out in processes of reception and reinvention that blur or transform their status in relation to ‘truth’.

Intriguingly, the first chapter was drafted immediately after Strassler had conducted her first fieldwork, and this book draws on that and further fieldwork in 2013. A photo essay of colour images sets the scene, and some of these are reprised in black and white to open chapters or among the smaller images that run along the tops of pages, and which are offered as an alternative way to read. After the introduction, the work is structured in three chronological sections of paired chapters, each with its own particular storyline.

Chapters 1 and 2 refer to the years 1998 to 2000. In chapter 1, Yuswanto Adi's artwork of 50,000 rupiah bills with a hole where Suharto's head once was—a literal “loss of face” (p. 45)—motivates an account of how images ludically remediate and refashion during a period where values of all kinds (economic, ideological) are in question, sharpening into concerns of fakery and authenticity; concerns that begin in the ‘currency of money’ but extend to the circulation of images. Chapter 2 develops the theme of transparency and manipulation as it plays out in the process of invisibility and silencing in relation to the 168 Chinese women who were raped during the unrest before Suharto stepped down. This is a difficult and painful subject, and Strassler intentionally excludes photographic images from this chapter out of respect for the victims, who to this day remain unrecognized. Chapters 3 and 4 concern “several years later” (p. 29). Chapter 3 tells the story of Roy Suryo, who “indexes key preoccupations and dynamics of the post-Suharto public sphere” (p. 99), and the developing tensions between fakery and authenticity in the wider media ecology. Suryo is a media lecturer from Yogyakarta who becomes a national ‘authenticity expert’ by determining the truth of images of different kinds, including a compromising photograph of Gus Dur, until his expertise itself becomes the object of ludic image-events that use scepticism and ridicule to call his authoritative judgements into question. He appears, Zelig-like, in later episodes, and his story is a strong example of how Strassler has moved away from a material study of photographs to the social processes and events in which images play a decisive role. The topic of ‘exposure scandals’ is developed in chapter 4, theorizing Agus Suwage and Davy Lingar's installation ‘Pinkswing Park’ (2005), with its almost-nude figures, as an image-event to explore controversies about the limits of acceptability in images during the discussions running up to the passing of the controversial anti-pornography laws in 2008. The newly formed FPI (Front Pembela Islam: Islamic Defenders' Front) is active in this debate, but Strassler carefully defuses polarization by emphasizing the diversity of Islam in Indonesia at this time while arguing that these image-events caused the very debates that created

unity within Islam later on. The last two chapters present material from field research conducted between 2013 and 2014. Chapter 5 is about street art (graffiti and banners), “urban inscriptions as iconic indexes of healthy ... or ‘out of control’ democracy” (p. 217), which started as an expression of freedom and gradually came to be seen as ‘dirty’. The concluding chapter concentrates on the election campaign of 2014, with a focus on Jay Subyacto’s photograph of Jokowi’s concert. Mass gatherings were forbidden during the New Order, but photos of Jokowi’s crowds are now evidentiary image-events, and proof of the new mental revolution in the mindsets of Indonesian citizens. Nothing stays still, however. In a coda, subsequent image-events in 2016–17 are shown to produce new alignments, including a renewal of the FPI.

Strassler’s writing is wonderfully entertaining and detailed in its energetic investigative storytelling, even as she develops and elaborates complex and multivalent theoretical arguments. I occasionally missed the visual clarity of her first book and regretted her decision not to number the plates in the opening photo essay. As a member of the editorial board of the online journal *AnthroVision*, I also take issue with her claim that anthropologists still treat the visual as illustrative. And her preface, invoking the relevance of Leila Chudori’s novel *Pulang* to her own trajectory, sets up expectations when she describes documentary film as “emblematic of Reformasi ideals of transparency, authenticity, the free circulation of information, and popular participation” (p. ix) because, while her stories may well be documentaries, films are not overtly part of her overall narrative. A final quibble is that, although her theoretical elaboration is subtle and complex, in her account of “the public sphere” I was hoping for a further layer of complexity afforded by the concept of ‘split public’, so well-examined by Rajagopal (2001) in relation to the television series the *Ramayana*, itself an image-event in Strassler’s terms. This is not a criticism but an indication of the general relevance of Strassler’s analysis, and I would go as far as to say that she is doing for Indonesian photography and society what Christopher Pinney has done for the same field in India. While firmly rooted in

Indonesian events, she speaks to analyses of media and politics in other regions. And more, besides. Her account of 2014 presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto employing Rob Allyn, a former advisor to George W. Bush, to run a smear campaign against Jokowi and threatening to bring his masses on to the streets if he lost was disconcertingly prescient; I read it only days after the storming of the Capitol in Washington DC on 6 January 2021, an event arguably incited by President Trump and his refusal to concede he had lost the election to Joe Biden, and characterized by the same kind of crowd-selfies as Jokowi's campaign rallies. At the time of writing this review, uncannily, these elements of Indonesia's emergent and fallible democratic infancy are to some extent being replicated in the United States, and I would certainly encourage Strassler to apply her analytical insights and narrative skills to the United States' freshly fragile democratic processes. I would also encourage any student or scholar of Indonesia or of images—anthropologist or otherwise—to read her work.

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*Sonic City: Making Rock Music and Urban Life in Singapore.* By Steve Ferzacca. NUS Press, 2021. 166 pages.

Steve Ferzacca's *Sonic City* is an intimate portrayal of Singapore's blues scene from 2011 to 2016. The book focuses on Lim Kiang and James Tan, founders of the legendary 1960s band the Straydogs. Ferzacca met Kiang in a guitar shop shortly after arriving in Singapore for a year spent as a research fellow at the Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore. The two started a band, Blues77, for which they recruited Tan on drums and some "young gun" Singaporean guitarists (p. 3). Ferzacca deftly explores the network of spaces within the scene and its "cosmopolitan