

James T. Siegel. *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997. 275 pages.

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In his "Foreword" to the English translation of Friedrich Kittler's monumental book, *Discourse Networks*,<sup>1</sup> David Wellbery chastises a certain tendency in American criticism to dismiss post-structuralist thought as merely out-dated fashion. He notes, rather acerbically, that the effort to render post-structuralism as something of fashion (whether "in" or "out") is part of the attempt to contain and nullify it by suggesting an ephemeral quality. That which can go out of fashion has no historical significance. To say that post-structuralism is no longer fashionable is to say that its first claims to radicalism were excessive. Such dismissals not only repeat a false Simmelian premise, but they are, according to Wellbery, merely "wish-fulfillment fantasy."<sup>2</sup> In contrast, he asserts that the profound radicality of post-structuralism has yet to be actualized within the institutions of American literary criticism.

Such a foreword might well introduce James T. Siegel's book, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution*. This astonishing text has the promise for anthropology that Kittler's *Discourse Networks* has for literary criticism and media studies. And it is similarly rooted in the philosophical project of post-structuralism. Siegel's preface announces to readers that the book is indebted to Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and Martin Heidegger. These are not altogether common intellectual companions in anthropology, and, in many circles, it is de rigeur to dismiss work written under their influence as being precisely too fashionable and, at the same time, as being no longer in fashion. What is so marvelous about *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution*—a book almost as difficult to grasp as *Of Grammatology*<sup>3</sup>—is that it demonstrates, with uncommon precision and consistency, the extent to which post-structuralism demands and facilitates a politically engaged and empirically grounded anthropology. It is, in short, a magnificent rebuff to the spurious axiology that anthropology has chosen to inherit from Georg Simmel: the axiology that would oppose not only history and fashion, but also experience and representation, anthropology and philosophy.

*Fetish, Recognition, Revolution* is a book about the history and force of language in the Indonesian revolution. It concerns the relationships between the emergence of Melayu as a "lingua franca," the formation of a new kind of authorial subject, and the workings of desire in the space between colonizers and colonized individuals. It is about the place of money and commerce, rumor, and the circulation of signs. And it is about the workings of fetishism in the constitution of modernity, a modernity in which the force of nationalism would survive and indeed thwart the more radical possibility of revolution. Given its objects, Siegel's book demands immediate comparison with the other "classics" of the field, most notably George McT. Kahin's *Nationalism and*

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks*, trans. Michael Metteer with Chris Cullens (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> David Wellbery, "Foreword," in *Discourse Networks*, p. vii.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

*Revolution in Indonesia*<sup>4</sup> and Benedict R. O'G. Anderson's *Java in a Time of Revolution*.<sup>5</sup> It may be the case that two decades must pass before a new classic can be added to the canon of so-named texts, and that seems to be the case in the writing of Indonesia's revolutionary history. In any case, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution*, a book which both leans upon, and departs from, these earlier monuments, will quickly become mandatory reading for all scholars of both Indonesian and other (failed) revolutionary movements.

The materials in which Siegel reads the causes, traces, and effects of revolutionary possibility in Indonesia are unusual ones for anthropologists: essays, novels, letters, and other literary productions. This is not because he has abandoned the "real," nor because he wants to find "cultural meaning" in literary production, but, rather, because he believes that the subjects of Indonesian modernity were produced in and through language and, more particularly, in and through the kind of communication-at-a-distance that the commodity form (in both its literary and its economic dimensions) permitted.

Though he does not cite it, one can surmise that the genesis of this argument about the relationships between money, language, and historical transformation lies in Siegel's re-reading of Marx's early treatment of commodity fetishism. The "specter of Marx" that haunts this book is, of course, doubled. Its first source can be found in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, wherein Marx describes money's ability to insert a gap between one's actual capacities and one's appearance: to "transform all my incapacities into their contrary," and to turn "each [of one's own] powers into something which it is not."<sup>6</sup> This magic, a magic of dissemination-turned-dissimulation which Siegel reminds us nonetheless requires the look of another to become felt by the one who possesses it is the magic of the fetish. Siegel is concerned with the form that such magic takes in the colonial milieu of Indonesia, where a process of generalization in both economic and linguistic forms was producing the possibility of a certain kind of freedom for colonial subjects. It is, ironically, a freedom born in the moment that the colonial law comes to bear on individuals who suffer the effects of that dislocation between substance and appearance which is the result of commodification. The recognition produces the fetish of appearances, says Siegel, and risks annulling it at the same time.

Siegel is perhaps less cynical than Marx about the nature of such freedom as it emerges in the context of commodity relations. But he holds fast to Marx's singular insight that it is not in a parallel between money and language that one discovers the magic of the commodity but in the analogy that would link money with "the foreignness of language." For, the other Marxian specter haunting Siegel seems to come from Marx's observation that "Ideas . . . first have to be translated out of their mother tongue into a foreign tongue in order to circulate" and therefore that the analogy between money and language exists only insofar as the latter is understood to mean

<sup>4</sup> George McT. Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1952).

<sup>5</sup> Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Java in a Time of Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972).

<sup>6</sup> Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, ed. Dirk J. Struik (New York: International Publishers, 1964), pp. 167-8.

translation.<sup>7</sup> Both the bourgeois and the structuralist response to this observation has, of course, been one that fantasizes the possibility of total commensurability or translatability. Siegel moves in the opposite direction, while acknowledging that any lingua franca, and Melayu in particular, is precisely born of the aspiration to universal translation. Siegel suggests that this misunderstanding accounts, in large part, for the failure of revolution in Indonesia. In an effort to recover the radicality that was, nonetheless, generated in and by the lingua franca, Siegel extends Marx's own conclusion to make the "foreignness of language" the source of a complex but ultimately unrealized freedom. It is a freedom characterized by the non-identity of subjects and the realization that difference (both the "difference" that Marx posited as the internal contradiction of the commodity between use-value and exchange value, and the temporally deferred dimension identified by Derrida's term of *différance*) is the necessary condition of possibility for revolution.

The first argument of the text concerns the emergence of a modern authorial subjectivity. For Siegel, this kind of subjectivity appears in the moment that the writer of a given text gestures to the reader to produce for them a shared temporal location. Such a "shared linguistic milieu" (p. 25) takes on a particular form, he says, in the case of the "lingua franca," which is imagined to be "language itself," a language that traverses all differences and is therefore supposedly capable of total translation. (p. 26) What is significant about the history of Melayu is, however, not merely that it figures the impossible ideal of a universal language, but that it achieves its status as the medium of communication with the distant world through the workings of money. Authors are not merely the producers of texts, but they are the ones who claim payment for the access they give readers to the world.

Siegel moves from this inaugural argument, via a reading of Mohammed Bakir's prosody, to discuss the corollary of such a universal language, namely the development of a first pronoun, an "I," which is defined by substitutability and a lack of identity on the part of the speaker: "The 'I' of the lingua franca is not fully inhabited by its speaker." (p. 31) The consequences of such an unstable pronominal position is first recognized, he claims, in the translation of Soewardi Soerjaningrat's famous article, "Als ik eens Nederlander was" into Melayu, as "Djika Saya Nederlander." According to Siegel, this article terrified the Dutch because it suggested that they were being "over-heard" and that their words were producing unintended consequences. The imagined secret thoughts of the Dutch were, however, being overheard by people who, as users of the lingua franca, were not fully identified with the subject position of the listener. Indeed, Siegel argues that this structure of "hearing outside of social identity" constitutes the definitive attribute of the mass mediated audience, an attribute that is inseparable from the political moment in which global literatures began to be translated into Melayu. And it is the fact of this structure that constitutes both the historical ground and the legitimating argument for Siegel's attention to literature:

In such an age of translation, when 'I' speak from within the text and embody the communicative power of language, there are political effects. The 'I' of the lingua franca is important not because through it one imagines other identities and can, therefore, mentally replace colonial masters. It is . . . in its power to compel a

<sup>7</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 163.

strange overhearing, its capacity to displace or fissure subjects that its political force resides. (pp. 36-7)

With acidic foreboding, he then remarks that "This is not a success story."

This is not a success story because, according to Siegel, the radical potential of the displaced subject, and of the corollary dissolution of hierarchically organized and unified power, is annulled by the "fetish of modernity," a term that is variously replaced with "fetish of appearances." The central concept of the book, the notion of "the fetish of modernity" is perhaps the most difficult to grasp and it comes to the reader in a process of gradual disclosure. The only approximation of an historical overview of other concepts of fetishism actually occurs in a footnote (note 33) to Chapter Three. Like the improbable assignation of definitions of "language" to footnote 2 in Chapter One, the post-scriptus status of intellectual history surrounding so dense and conflicted a discourse as that on fetishism will perhaps be a bit irksome for those readers trained in the Anglo-American traditions of citational practice. Even the most generous reader may occasionally want to know with whom Siegel is arguing. Indeed, the profundity of his departure from the theses of both Freud and Marx is occasionally obscured by this habit of relegating argumentation to a footnote. In the end, one forgives this because it permits Siegel to engage the literatures and histories of Indonesia much more directly. And the benefits are everywhere palpable.

The idea of the fetish is addressed first in a series of discussions about the endlessly recirculating tale of Njai Dasima, a character who is, from the start, associated with exchange and a certain instability in the relationship between surface and appearance. The infamous substitute/simulacrum of a "wife" who is, nonetheless, not one, Njai Dasima is the one "who embodies what passes between." (p. 63) She moves along the vector of the Dutchman's desire for satisfaction and the "Indonesian" woman's desire for money. Just as value realizes itself in the commodity only in the moment of its exchange (and is annihilated with desire-in use), so the figure of Njai Dasima is associated for Siegel with a logic of "supplementarity." She figures a crisis of representation, and becomes the object around whom there swirls distrust and an anxiety concerning the relationships between surface appearance and the authenticity of the original. But if he reads the category of the author in terms of both textual and extra/inter-textual relations, so the supplement operates for Siegel both within the book and in its relationships to the social context of its inscription.

In a stunning argument about the use of the photograph in an early publication of *The Story of Njai Dasima*, Siegel tells us that the photograph was intended to "ornament" the book. This ornamentation is, for him, a completion, in the sense that it makes visible a quality of the original which was not visible until it had been supplemented, or, one might say, translated. (p. 73) This observation both draws on, and overturns, Christian Metz's understanding of photography as an inherently fetishistic device which incites viewers to imagine a space beyond the frame of the photograph, and to then make the photograph serve as an inadequate substitution for that "beyond."<sup>8</sup> For Siegel, the photograph is attached to the book as an index of that which lies "outside." (p. 71) He does not, like Metz, believe that photography is

<sup>8</sup> Christian Metz, "Photography and Fetish," in *The Critical Image*, ed. Carol Squiers (San Francisco: Bay Press, 1990), pp. 155-64.

relatively more fetishistic than film, but sees in both technologies a capacity to manufacture appearances. And he attributes to that capacity a politically and epistemologically transformative force. That force emerges in the moment that appearances cannot be trusted to reveal an original identity, when for example, the appearance of silk can hide the fact that it is merely cotton that one sees in a film, and more, that cotton can appear to be more silk than silk itself. In Siegel's analysis, the force becomes repressive when it is accompanied by the demand for an agency that can claim knowledge of what is hidden.

We can observe here the degree to which Siegel's invocation of technology serves as a foil for a more ontologically oriented project. A considerable body of theory has, of course, been devoted to understanding the differences between film and photography. For Siegel, these two collapse into the unity of "the camera," which permits him to engage the false idealization of a "photographic" seeing which is blind precisely because it is incapable of seeing beyond the surfaces of things. Thus, in discussing Tirtho's journalistic articles about photography, Siegel posits a parallel between the camera and the lingua franca. (p. 85) Tirtho, it seems, was worried about the juxtaposition of photographic images in newspaper settings because they permitted Javanese nobles and soup cans to sit next to each other. Because the photograph was presumed to contain the truth of its original, the juxtaposition could be deemed an offense. Siegel discerns here a use of the photograph as image, that is to say, as a condensation of essences. In this context, it may be helpful to recall that, in the same year that Tirtho ran his stories about photography (1927), on the other side of the world, Siegfried Kracauer was positing his much more famous opposition between photographic history and imagistic history, between the aspiration to a total mimesis—what he called the "*general inventory* of a nature that cannot be further reduced"<sup>9</sup>—and the possibility of a critical assessment of truth. Siegel's claim that Tirtho's writings rest on an understanding of the photograph as being both a reproduction of appearances and a "condensation of what is known and said" (p. 86) seems, therefore, to rest less on Frankfurt school analyses than on the Barthesian belief that a successful photograph is precisely not a resemblance of its referent but rather a "disincarnation which reveals a genetic essence."<sup>10</sup> This despite the fact that his sense of the strange proximity that the mass media makes possible even at a distance shares much with other Frankfurt School writers, and especially Walter Benjamin. It is, however, the felicitous convergence that Siegel finds between Tirtho's anxious efforts to contain photography's power and Barthes' desire to exploit its magic that comes to the fore here. Thus does Siegel conclude, "Tirtho's photographic image is condensed language." (p. 86)

The claim is thrilling. But the reader may be legitimately discomfited here. Indeed, one feels compelled to ask whether it is precisely the camera, even if only as a figure, that permits the mobility from which the photograph derives its magic or the newspaper. Though he suggests as much, the book does not, to my mind, adequately

<sup>9</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, "Photography" in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed., trans., Thomas Y. Levin and with introduction by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995 [1927]), pp. 47-61, 61.

<sup>10</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Noonday, 1991 [1990]), pp. 102-3.

state what it reveals, namely that it is the relationships between photography and mass publication, between the photograph and the newspaper, that account for the particular convergence between language and image. It is not, in the end, the camera that "has the capacity to recontextualize." (p. 85) It is, rather, the newspaper. Siegel might respond that the newspaper merely comes as a supplement to mobilize a possibility that was born with the camera but not actualized there. However, this argument would need fuller articulation to be convincing, and it is still wanting in the text.

To focus too narrowly on the camera and the problem of juxtaposition is, nonetheless, to defer Siegel's broader argument about the demand for recognition that comes with photography. In stories about swindlers and thieves, like *Soenda Berita*, the increasing power and function of the colonial police force is to be understood in terms of the demand for them to secure the relationship between appearance and identity in a context where a lingua franca has made it possible for people to cross the otherwise sacrosanct lines of national identification. Individuals who dressed like Dutch people were, in Tirtho's stories and in actuality, suspected of dissimulation. But, as Adorno once said, the demand of the mass culture industry was, and is, to "Become what you are." Siegel is able to demonstrate that the attempt to actualize this commandment—in, for example, the imitation of commoditized forms that appeared in magazines—and the response to that effort on the part of the police, led to a new understanding of appearances, a fetishization of appearances. By this, he means that people discovered the possibility that they could signify more and differently than they intended to and thereby achieve the transformation of their selves in the eyes of others. This constitutes for Siegel, the "welding of appearance to language." "I," who could move between languages and positions, can call others' attention to myself through both appearance and utterance. He then explains that, because the law responds negatively, "I" learns that this transformative play is actually a power. It needs the recognition of others, however, and the subject of recognition constitutes the second section of Siegel's book.

The arguments and substantiation of arguments in Section Two, "Recognition," are relatively more easily apprehended than those of the "Fetish" section. Here, in discussing the literature centered on inter-ethnic relations (those between Indonesian students and Dutch people in Holland and those between differently ethnicized subjects in Java), Siegel extends his premise that a third person is the source of one's own fetishistic power and gives to it its full political significance. In *Student Hidjau*, by Mas Marco Kartodikromo, Siegel finds the story of a young man who overcomes the "fetish of modernity" and learns the pleasure and possibility of believing that he can become anything at all. It is a possibility that emerges in the relationships between subjects of different cultural backgrounds, a possibility that somehow escapes the prohibitions of the colonial law which would have forbidden one to become what one appeared to be if that appearance was scandalously transgressive of one's putatively proper place. (p. 102) Much has been written about the extreme measures taken in Indonesia to prevent the crossing of cultural and national boundaries, especially when that crossing entailed sexual relations. Siegel pays respect to these analyses, but he is interested less in the prohibitions of the colonial order than in the imaginary possibilities that were actually facilitated by colonial encounter, possibilities that, nonetheless, "closed down" the revolutionary potential of literature by linking "desire and imagination to identity" and particularly, national identity. (p. 104)

Much of the rest of the book maps the history in which Student Hidjau's encounter with an imaginary freedom is converted into the repressive pursuit of a national identity that would merely substitute for Dutch hegemony by containing and reproducing the latter's logic of hierarchy and unity. Siegel finds much pathos in this process, a process which he suggests is born in the existential homesickness that accompanies the realization that one has a foreign element within oneself. By the time of H. M. Zainuddin's novel, *Flower of Atjeh* (Djeumpa Atjeh, 1928), he says, there is no difference between image and appearance, save that the qualities of the original are made manifest in the image. This "victory of the fetish of appearance" is, for Siegel, the death-knell of revolution. (p. 143) It is associated with an understanding of modernity as, quite simply, the domestication of the foreign (p. 158), rather than the eruption of the new and the different. This reactionary understanding manifests itself in the erroneous assumption that characters in the eminently popular Sino-Malay novels make, namely that total translation is possible. Only bad translation, especially of the concept of "love" and "*cinta*," is seen to cause death or other catastrophe. Siegel provides us with great insight into the novels about broken desire and eros at the boundaries of ethnic community, permitting readers to understand how it was that petty romance became the idiom in which nationalist sentiment found its most deeply felt narratives. Feminist narratological critics will want Siegel to be more categorical in identifying women as the mere instruments of masculine national subject formation and in stating that it is female characters, like Sitti Saniah, who must die to make the point. But these facts are not disguised in *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution*. They are simply not the object of a thematized ideological critique. Indeed, it is in his resistance to such thematizations that Siegel can permit the stories to work for us as they might have for their readers.

Whatever else one may have wanted of the discussion of romance novels, it becomes possible to anticipate, at this point in the book, the path that Siegel will follow, that he will have to follow. After all, we know that the Indonesian revolution became a mere War of Independence, and that youths and communists were to become the victims of an authoritarian state whose violences have known few limits. Yet, it is testimony to the success of Siegel's argument that the rest of the book is not simply a narration of that denouement but that it continues to explore and to illuminate how the course of history in Indonesia was determined by the forms of representation that dominated subsequent moments: by the workings of language and its relationships to other technologies of transmission. This is what makes the book so valuable for other scholars, like myself, who are not Indonesianists. This is also why other scholars, like myself, are probably going to read the book as literature, and to scrutinize its operations on the level of textual practice. They will not be disappointed, although there are many occasions, when reading *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution*, that one feels like a diviner in search of the ghostly interlocutors whom Siegel is engaging. It is as though Siegel wishes for his reader to experience something of his own writing practice—an experience of being haunted by the traces of other theorists—in order that she comprehend how radical a notion the "trace" might be, how different it would be from the fetishism that would identify image and origin.

What of these interlocutors? One hears Derrida's discourse on "supplementarity" throughout the book. Freud's notion of the uncanny and Lacan's understanding of subject formation can be felt between and behind the lines. But in his prose style, it is

Kierkegaard and Kafka who seem to be the most naughtily and obtusely persistent specters. Indeed, Kierkegaard's notion of repetition, as a jest to be enjoyed but not taken too earnestly except in its observation, seems to inform Siegel's approach to the practice of reading itself.<sup>11</sup> The accounts of the stories and novels from which he derives his notion of modernity's "fetish of appearance" unfold in the text as a strange kind of re-writing, a "copying" as it were, in which a space inscribes itself with each effort to specify the content of the referent. This is both appropriate and performative of the notion of authorship that Siegel develops at the beginning of the book, where he states that the moment in which a copyist copies himself into the text in the very act of copying, he achieves the status of authorship. A certain alienation, as well as a certain spacing, is here understood to be the condition of possibility of literature. Independent of his own authorial ambition and achievement, the citational logic and the repetitive specifications of texts perform an important labor, marking this book as the enactment rather than the reflection of deconstructionist reading.

There are many such gestures of specification in *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution*. The numerous quotations, most translated by Siegel, are generally followed by summary statements, which reiterate without reducing the content of the citation. The citation is treated on its surface, literally, but not superficially. Thus does Siegel perform a classic gesture of Freudian (dream) interpretation. He resists the hermeneutic gesture that would seek a correspondingly single and originary meaning for any utterance and assumes, instead, that unconscious logics will manifest themselves in the transformed surfaces of speech through associative linkages that will have to be pursued retrospectively and without guarantee.

A brief example of this tactic comes from Chapter Eight, "Collaboration and Cautious Rebellion," in which Siegel interrogates the writings that various individuals submitted to a contest marking the thirtieth anniversary of the proclamation of independence. One submission comes from a woman who, in writing, describes the role her husband, a physician, played in "educating" the masses (*rakyat*) for independence. She describes the miraculousness of the fact that, although he was tricking the Dutch while appearing to be their collaborator, he was not turned in by the inhabitants of his district, Kadungora. She finds proof of their solidarity in the fact that not one of the 31,000 co-residents betrayed this man, her husband. Siegel describes her writing as an explanation of the fear that people experience when they believe their names to be circulating beyond their control, and he understands this explanatory gesture as the very apotheosis of the process that Soewardi inaugurated. (p. 190) And he focuses on the woman's remarks regarding the relationship between money, the people, and the question of purity, citing the following enigmatic passage, in which the woman marvels at her husband's doubled existence and the trust he elicits from both the *rakyat* and the Dutch:

Humanity is still pure. Think of the wages which the *rakyat* paid directly! The appreciation of the Dutch toward Father's [the husband's] influence on the people of Kadungora; they had full confidence in father. (p. 191)

<sup>11</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, "Repetition" in *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, ed., trans., Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983 [1843]).

Siegel follows: “‘The people’ pay wages and it indicates their purity. It indicates, that is, their respect. They pay; they do not talk.” He then probes the remark more deeply: “Without their wages, the functionaries would have had difficulty in continuing their work. They would have ceased to be functionaries. It is, finally, the payment of wages that ensures a difference between *rakyat*, the ‘people,’ and ‘functionary.’” Yet, Siegel’s subsequent statement seems to overturn the previous one and it announces its own differentiating role with the word, “But.”

*But* ‘the people’ pay as a sign of their respect. Precisely, one is led to believe, for the same reason they do not report the *camat* to the Dutch. Those who do not appreciate him, who wish to be his enemy, had an opportunity. But they did not take it. Here, one sees the solidarity of the *rakyat*. They appreciate, they pay wages to mark that appreciation or they do not appreciate, and they talk, spreading the word of who one really is. (p. 191, my emphasis)

Siegel will go even further than this in extracting from the strange juxtaposition of purity and money in the woman’s writing, a conclusion that, in this context, money “does not function as payment.” It is, rather, “a gift, a token of their esteem. Her money as gift, circulating only in defined circumstances, is opposed to talk, which circulates without limit.” (p. 191). One might say, then, that money has lost its linguistic dimension, can no longer stand as a substitute for the lingua franca. Siegel goes still further, remarking that, for people of this class, the threat of the revolution resided in the feeling of proximity that one experienced through communicating at a distance. Again and again, it is this force, the force of language and of communication, transmitting itself across the space of mass-mediation, that Siegel identifies at the heart of revolution. And again and again, he finds people resisting such mediated relationships as a source of contamination. This is, as he says, “not a success story.”

The progression of Siegel’s reading in the passage just cited is rather breath-taking, both in its reach and its rapidity. He goes beyond the seeming “semantic content” of the statement (and its broader context) to find evidence of a complex logic of signification in which money, language, and social relations all precede the subjects of the revolution. The point, however, is not that he discerns an isomorphic relationship between the sign and money. He does not repeat the truisms of structuralist (Levi-Straussian or Foucaultian) analysis and find absolute contingency, nor read the dislocation of value from substance to be an irreversible fact. This would be the reflex gesture of less accomplished readers, ones who imagine gift economies to be the mere antecedents of those organized by monetary exchange. Instead, Siegel understands that money can be contained by fetishism, can be used to prohibit communication. It is as likely to be associated with gifting as exchange, cancellation as deferral, vengeance as continued communication. He understands, in short, that it must be understood in historically and ethnographically particular ways. In the context of the Indonesian revolution, he says, currency could prevent communication even as it held open the possibility of traversing distance. It could become the instrument of the revolution’s conversion into something unitary, repressive, and hierarchical. It could and it did. As far as the theorization of money goes, then, the point is history. One cannot understand, one cannot know in advance if revolutions will succeed, nor of money will be the currency of their cancellation. This is the most historically oriented of Siegel’s works to date (excluding the even more recent *A New Criminal Type in Indonesia* [Duke

University Press, 1998]) and its insistence upon historicization is nowhere more visible than in this treatment of money.

Siegel achieves this analysis with a repetition of the text. So, repetition leads to a difference, and thereby achieves its purpose—in Kierkegaard's sense. A summary of a text estranges some elements and gives them up for more careful, and more exciting, scrutiny. But there are other repetitions, and other differences. Indeed, differences often become visible because of a failed repetition. Take, for example, the movement between paragraphs toward the book's end where Siegel finally moves between "modernity" and "modernism." This time, Siegel is describing another contestant, a man who recounts his submission to slogans and his killing of Dutch soldiers. The name of this man is withheld, "for reasons that will become clear," remarks Siegel in a footnote.<sup>12</sup> The reasons are at least two-fold. The first reason concerns the contents of the story: he confesses to killing. But beyond this, the writings reflect upon the use of "passwords." Siegel uses this notion of password in a complex kind of jest, citing the writer's own self-representation with a single letter while invoking the idea of the cryptogram and using it to slide between what he describes as the failure of literature in Indonesia and the high modernist literature of Franz Kafka. The name of the writer who confesses to hurling grenades at the Dutch is "K." One might by-pass—as mere coincidence—the resonance between the narrator of the confession, who carries out his role in the Indonesian struggle for independence without ever understanding the larger scenario within which he works, and "K" or "Joseph K" of *The Trial* and *The Castle*. These "K"s remain similarly blind to the logic of that system to which they are nonetheless on call. But one surmises that Siegel is too knowing a writer to have by-passed this resonance himself, and so one wants to pursue it further. Indeed, the preface makes clear his affection for the play of initials as a means of engaging the problem of alphabetization, and thence, of writing itself.

It is in the discussion of K (on page 216) that Siegel slips between the "fetish of modernity" and the "fetish of modernism." One wonders, initially, if it is a typographical error and, as there are so many in the latter section of the book (for which fact Princeton University Press ought to apologize), the doubt is not without merit. But the movement finds its reason later in the text and turns out (it seems) to have been more than accidental. The passage begins, "With K, the fetish of modernity has been set aside. He is not the outcome of the path of nationalism we have traced." Instead he is aligned with Soewardi, the writer who imagined himself as a Dutchman only to disavow identification as a Dutchman and, thus, to achieve the power of imagining what a Dutchman might be thinking. The passage continues, "K shows that the fetish of modernism was not the only way to independence." Modernism would have defeated modernity if it could have recognized the power of language as the power of non-identity. K "won no prize" but he "represents another possibility inherent in the lingua franca as it became a national language." (p. 216)

In Siegel's text, the "fetish of modernity . . . formed when a certain linguistic power became evident when it seemed to summon authority against it." (p. 216) And he remarks that the "full appropriation of the force of language perhaps could only take place after such recognition awakened awareness of linguistic power." (p. 216) K does

<sup>12</sup> Footnote 1, p. 274.

not have such awareness, though such awareness would have made him a properly modernist, and not just a modern, subject. He might perhaps have become a writer. Either that or a madman. Siegel does not offer for comparison anyone like Artaud, in whom the twin possibilities of literature and madness would be united. Instead, he gives us the two possibilities as separate lives. On the one hand, we have K, a man beholden to slogans and the power of the foreign: a revolutionary utterly subject to the power of language. On the other hand, we have a man mourning the end of a time when he could find satisfaction in killing. Ironically enough it is this latter figure, a man called MNT, rather than K, who exhibits the mark of Kafka's epistolary and autobiographical writing, namely a use of the first-person pronoun in the third person. The lunacy of this man's inexhaustible violence is then paired with the freedom that was suggested by the birth of an "I" forever dissociated from, and in excess of, a speaker.

In the end, though, Siegel gives us more than violence. He also gives us the work of one man in whom he finds the thwarted possibility of both revolution and literature, a man who, despite the insistent madness that has kept him a prisoner in his own home, has remained lucid: Pramoedya Ananta Toer.

In the last section of the book, Siegel provides a full translation and analysis of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's short story, "Flunky + Maid," which was written in 1948 while Pramoedya was in prison as a counter-revolutionary. It is a tale of genealogical degeneration and abjection in the colonial context, and it exemplifies, for Siegel, all that he has been attempting to theorize in *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution*. It is also here, in the "Epilogue," that Siegel concludes his discussion of K and remarks that K's fetishism, in attempting to avert recognition, produced violence instead. A violence sublimated and transposed might, in a Freudian reading, produce art or literature. And this is what Siegel finds in Pramoedya's work. Because he did not succumb to the nationalist program, which merely replaced Dutch hierarchy with Indonesian hierarchy, says Siegel, Pramoedya is both a revolutionary and a writer.

In writing about a brother and sister named Sobi and Inah, Pramoedya tells of people who invest foreignness—in this case both Japaneseness and Dutchness—with fetishistic power by attributing to national categories "a signification in excess of what they would mean to Dutch or Japanese." They therefore posit "the foreign as foreign and yet with the promise of possession of it." (p. 244-5) In this story, foreignness attaches itself to the men, to the colonial masters to whom the slavish servants submit themselves. It is also thematized in the objects of desire and the signs of power that the typified "flunky + maid" seek: namely "two radios and a phonograph." Sobi's mother, Rodinah, who is re-Christened "Dolly" (Poppi in the original) by one of her *tuans*, persuades six men that they might be fathers when she becomes pregnant and extracts from them support for the child who is "50 percent" hers. The profits obtained in this manner permit Dolly to "build a masonry house inside of which were: two radios and a gramophone." The story continues, "Night and day these three objects sounded off one after the other!" And Dolly, believing that she has become the dolly of her name, asks herself, "Who can compete?" (p. 235). Dolly gives birth to another child, this one named Inah, and acts out the same strategy. Gradually, however, she becomes disenchanted, and when she dies, "Not even the two radios and the gramophone understood" the cause of her illness (p. 235).

Siegel discovers Pramoedya's own philosophy of the foreign in an authorial jest, in the irony with which he narrates the story. The characters confuse names for things. Dolly becomes like a "real doll." She hears "divide and surrender" instead of "*divide et impera*." And the effort to write a genealogy becomes a narrative of corruption and dissimulation rather than reproduction.

Although the origins of the genealogy are lost, there being only a rank ("native sergeant") at the beginning of the account of origins and not a person's identity, Pramoedya tells the story. And it is his telling of the story, says Siegel, that makes him the spokesperson of a position for something which exceeds the individual and putatively unitary voice of speakers. "What has been effaced comes back. And it comes back at best only ambiguously in the voice of the narrator. It comes back, rather, as something added, something that cannot be held back." (p. 251) The real irony of the story, however, lies in its unsettling of the title. Siegel remarks that in the title, "Flunky + Maid," the use of the "+" sign both evokes and ridicules the fantasy of total commensurability between languages. The story does nothing if not demonstrate the absolute incommensurability between languages. In writing a story of inevitable degeneration, says Siegel, Pramoedya overcomes the fetish, which would have attempted to contain foreignness by recognizing it. Pramoedya "hears the foreign" as such, without attempting to domesticate it, and thereby "upset[s] the very possibility of recognition." His text repeats the recurring words of Sobi, words in which the imperfectly apprehended content of a foreign language become mere sounds: "yua alwees in mai haat." And in so doing, says Siegel, Pramoedya insinuates that something foreign is to be found at home. Thus does he escape nationalism and the substitution of Indonesian inequality for Dutch inequity.

One can therefore persist with a certain curiosity about Siegel's movement, his slip between repetitions, from "modernity" to "modernism." And one can wish that he would have pursued more completely the other ironized fetish of Pramoedya's text: technology itself. In my opinion, Siegel passes too quickly by the instruments through which Pramoedya's characters "hear the foreign." One wants him to pause and consider the moment in which the radios and the gramophones "sounded off one after the other!" And the moment in which Dolly's heart "reverberated" with them. Just before she dies, Dolly experiences the dislocation of her body and mind, the former no longer obeying the latter's "mental commands." (p. 235) The "world keeps turning," like any automaton (and any long-playing record), but she does not. She dies and the radios and gramophone are dumbfounded. Here a technology stands as cause and survivor of a human death. Pramoedya grants technology the status of the *lingua franca*, as Siegel describes it; it is that through which one hears old sounds from far away, again and again. The radios and the gramophone are like the telephone, that instrument which makes K of *The Castle* a man who is always "on call," even before he knows what summons him. It is foreign technology, the technology of the foreign (dare one say the mass media) which seduces Dolly, and which renders her ethically and politically impotent.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> I am indebted here to Avital Ronell's essay, "The Worst Neighborhoods of the Real: Philosophy-Telephone-Contamination," *Diacritics* 1.1, 1989.

Modernist writers of the European *fin de siècle* might have attempted to inscribe the sound of that transmission and themselves into writing machines, thereby achieving what Pramoedya only describes, namely the autonomization and even the technologization (in Heidegger's sense) of the body vis-à-vis language. Friedrich Kittler has indeed identified such an impulse in Kafka, as well as Artaud and the surrealists. And, as Siegel suggests, the loss of proper names in "Flunky + Maid" shares much with Kafka's stories of K and Joseph K. Though the quote comes from Kittler, it might well have been Siegel writing, "Bare and dismembered names cannot support a continuous history of *Bildung*."<sup>14</sup> Difference erupts here as surely as a scratch on the surface of vinyl enters the sound of the music being played. Pramoedya's characters are overtaken by the instruments through which foreign voices speak and offer their seductions. And one can surmise, though Siegel does not, that this is how one repays his debt and takes his revenge on Conrad's "Karain,"<sup>15</sup> the exile's colonial story in which a gramophone also stands as figure of modernity's fetish, of the desire to possess and contain that which comes from outside. Had he pursued this secret lineage (which is also one of corruption), Siegel might have wanted to draw out the differences between modernity and modernism more than his movement between terms permits. What began with the camera should perhaps have ended with the gramophone. For in the end, the gramophone is a far better metaphor for the transmission which conveys the fact of transmission than the camera, which, in its assimilation to naturalism, exalts the illusion of flawless transparency. The sound of the gramophone itself is never absolutely repressible and certainly not as repressible as is the lens. This residue is, as Siegel himself notes, central to Pramoedya's story.

When Pramoedya ends "Flunky + Maid" by describing it as a simple story, reducing everything to eating and defecation, and when he remarks that those who perceive the tediousness of this process must surely kill themselves, he articulates for Siegel the primary principle that all assimilation leaves a remainder and that the acknowledgment of that remainder is the prerequisite of literature. The suicides are those people who still operate according to the dualism of meaning and meaninglessness. The modernists, at least in Kittler's analysis, are those who have abandoned such oppositions for another, that between communication and, as Pramoedya puts it, "din." But these two categories do not exhaust all possibilities. Both revolution and madness stand as the other, recurrent possibilities. Under the latter rubric, Siegel also describes those who, like MNT, have fused with their rifles, becoming one with their instruments. It is difficult to want this, to want it to have happened more than it did (and it happened a lot). But when Siegel concludes his book by suggesting that the desire for unity which underlines the fetish of modernity explains the failure of the Indonesian revolution, it is difficult to disagree. For, as so many other fine Indonesianists (many of them influenced by Siegel) have demonstrated, the fantasy of a unified Indonesian culture (a fantasy with which cultural anthropology has been all too complicit) performed a much greater violence. The deaths (intellectual, material, and social) that resulted from that violence, a violence utterly repressed in the theme park with which Siegel opens his book, have

<sup>14</sup> Kittler, *Discourse Networks*, p. 341.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Conrad, "Karain: A Memory," in *Eastern Skies, Western Skies* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1990), pp. 129-60.

also been effaced.<sup>16</sup> In *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution*, they are allowed to haunt once again. For this, not only Indonesianists, but other Southeast Asianists and social anthropologists—to say nothing of historians and theorists of modernism—must be grateful. And in the wake of this book, it will be impossible to dismiss post-structuralist anthropology as apolitical fashion. Those who fear its radicality will, however, probably want to dust off some older fetishes.

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<sup>16</sup> Siegel cites John Pemberton's account of the theme park. See "Recollections from 'Beautiful Indonesia,' (Somewhere Beyond the Postmodern)," *Public Culture* 6,2 (1994): 241-262.