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**Review of Strassler, K. Demanding images:
democracy, mediation, and the image-event in
Indonesia**

Strassler, K.; Kloos, D.; Juliastuti, N.; Samuels, A.

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Debate

Karen Strassler, David Kloos, Nuraini Juliastuti, and Annemarie Samuels

Karen Strassler, (2020). *Demanding images: Democracy, mediation, and the image-event in Indonesia*. Durham: Duke University Press, 368 pp.

1 Eyes on Indonesia's Fragile Democracy

Indonesia has entered an uncertain phase in which democratic institutions and personal freedoms are declining (Power and Warburton 2020). *Demanding images*, Karen Strassler's impressive ethnography of the public sphere in the democratic period—partly text, partly visual essay—draws out the anxieties, contestations, and manipulations underneath the post-authoritarian atmosphere of liberation and transparency. Its publication could not be more timely. Developing the lens of 'image-events', defined as 'political process[es] set in motion when a specific image or set of images erupts onto and intervenes in a social field, becoming a focal point of discursive and affective engagement across diverse publics' (p. 9), the book contributes directly to discussions about the fragility of Indonesia's democracy. At the same time, it reaches well beyond the case of Indonesia, providing inspiration, a guide even, for anthropologists studying today's complexly mediated public domains.

I would like to raise three issues for debate. I was intrigued, firstly, by the ubiquity of self-declared experts, which calls to mind Carla Jones's (2010:270) evocative remark, in an article on gender and self-improvement, that 'post-authoritarian Indonesia is teeming with expertise'. Most of the experts referenced in *Demanding images* are not formally certified, through diplomas or positions of authority, but socially, through particular configurations of mass media and political expediency. A whole chapter is dedicated to Roy Suryo, a self-declared 'authenticity expert', who can tell, through mysterious technological ability, whether broadly circulating photographs or sound recordings are real or not. We see new types of self-declared religious experts, including the celebrity preachers and vigilantes who have come to dominate Indonesia's Muslim public sphere and stake claims in discussions about art. Conversely, we

see artists and curators claiming that the value and legitimacy of artistic images should be judged not by pious Muslims but by experts of art, who in their view should be credited with the ability to understand art's aims. Experts encroach on each other's purported domains.

This is a paradoxical age, then, in which the authority of experts crumbles—partly because of the proliferation of mass media—while at the same time political contests take the form of struggles over the expert voice, amplified by the same media. This raises questions about the relationship between expertise and democracy. Is the collapse of the authority of formally qualified experts a threat to democracy, as for instance Tom Nichols (2017) has suggested in the case of the United States? Or does it make more sense to say that dominant ideas about how democracies work, or should work, are up for serious re-evaluation, alongside a rethinking of mediated knowledge and how expertise is enacted, staged, or contested?

A second issue concerns Strassler's use of 'media ecologies' as denoting the changing configurations of (mass) media, and its preferred use rather than more common metaphors such as 'media landscape' or 'media environment'. The concept is not really unpacked, allowing my imagination to run riot. The term 'media ecology' seems dynamic. A landscape is certainly not static, but it does have an association with changing slowly, at least to the eye. More relevant, perhaps, than the pace of change and its perception is the sense that ecology is precise in a way that landscape is not. Instead of perceptions, vantage points, or an ordering of things, an ecology describes relationships, usually between organisms. The term media ecology implies that different media, like organisms, are interdependent, synergetic, or hostile; that they feed on and off each other; that they procreate, multiply, and evolve; and that mediated objects, like living species, can travel and migrate, generating new configurations along the way (Spyer and Steedly 2013).

The analogy raises the question of what class of organism images belong to. If images are predators, what do they eat? If they are prey, how do they hide or protect themselves? Or does it make more sense to think of images as fungi: rhizomatic structures that pop up simultaneously, like mushrooms from the ground, connected and spreading under the surface? Or should we pay heed to the language of digital culture—the image going viral—and treat them like parasites, unable to contain themselves and surviving or revived only when able to affect or infect a host? Such allusions can be found here and there in the book, for instance when Strassler argues that, after the New Order, in Indonesia 'mass media became more polyphonic and increasingly entered into competitive, parasitic, and symbiotic relations with a range of unregulated, widely accessible consumer media' (p. 62). If this is the case, then what exactly is the

role of images vis-à-vis other media forms, including for instance music or novels? How does the proliferation of one affect the other? How do media forms change because of, or in response to, one another?

Third and finally, a question about the public in the public sphere. One of the most intriguing features of today's public sphere is that mediated messages or emotions increasingly seem to deal with the medium itself. Thus, much of the political struggle in the book is not about control of the medium or control of the message, as was the case, arguably, under the purview of the twentieth-century authoritarian state. Instead, politics is focused on controlling or leveraging the very process of mediation and the suggestion that the entire political process plays out within it. A unique feature of *Demanding images* is the sustained attention it pays to this dynamic. The downside of this choice to focus on meta-discourses is that the public remains out of sight. In the chapter on street art and activism in Yogyakarta we meet Antitank, a street artist whose images rally against the lawless actions of the state security apparatus. The broader framework here is the struggle for urban space: the city as a canvas for competing views and political subjectivities. But we learn little about the people, young or old, activist or bystander, who navigate this space on a daily basis, or about the question of how images affect them.

Another example is the discussion about moral angst as a counterpoint to post-authoritarian transparency. Images, we learn, both respond to and stir up moral panic, much of it articulated in religious terms. But the anxious public remains blurry, leaving unresolved the claim—often made, rarely demonstrated—that the end of the authoritarian state brought about widespread anxiety about the loss of a coercive but also comforting moral and social order. Is the anxiety really there, ready to be abused by political actors who are good at using images to maximum emotional effect? Or is it a mirage, resulting from the twenty-first-century media ecology combined with electoral contest? Or is it a bit of both—*asli palsu*—at once authentic and fake?

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2 Lurking Authoritarianism and Reclaiming Image-Making

Karen Strassler's latest book, *Demanding images: Democracy, mediation, and the image-event in Indonesia*, focuses on how to conduct an ethnographic study on the public sphere in post-authoritarian Indonesia. Strassler argues that the 'image-event' is a productive perspective from which to do so. The conceptualization of the image-event revolves around the idea of emphasizing the eventfulness of the image and its position as the catalyst for unfolding events. The image-event approach de-centres the origin and production aspects of an image, its intention, and its meaning, and focuses instead on how an image functions as the productive site for disturbances and new arrangements of power, knowledge, and culture.

Public space and publicness hold privileged positions in this book due to Strassler's argument that the public sphere is the zone that indicates how democracy continues to be a work in progress. During the New Order era, public support played an important role in demonstrating the stance of civil society towards the authorities. Control of the public-communication platforms was vital to the ability to instil the idea of hegemony, the ideas disseminated by propaganda, the sense of fear, and the need for communal security. Strassler insists that it is only by examining the political process resulting from the entanglements between images and events, and how these reverberate with other images and events, that we can see the demands and questions at stake in image production in post-authoritarian communities.

The structure of the book follows the articulation of several important questions in the post-Reformasi era about transparency, authenticity, honesty, and openness. Spanning from the early period of reformation to the presidential election in 2014, each case study discusses the tools and principles used to express thoughts and how these are used to imagine political agency. The book offers an analysis and documentation of how people practised a diverse set of techniques to embrace newly acquired political agency and produce polyphonic voices and a pluralistic vision.

Post-1998, the public sphere has emerged as a new zone in which various visions of how to regulate the relations between the state and the people have

competed with each other. The public sphere offers more space for freedom and has become messy and crowded at the same time. The period has seen the rise of different groups, all driven and informed by particular demands and struggles. The analysis of these competing visions is best illustrated in Chapter 2, 'The gender transparency', in the discussion about the rape of Chinese Indonesian women during the unrest in May 1998, where the competing visions emerge in the debate on truth. The meaning of truth does not lie in the exposure of the rape images, which might spark further discussion about explicit content. Rather, the chapter made clear that the obsession with authenticity had failed to protect the women and capture the complex racial historical dimensions surrounding the event. It hindered attempts to ensure transparency from those in political power and the actors who enabled the unfortunate event. In the discussion about pornographic images and the sex scandals of politicians, celebrities, and visual artists in Chapter 3, 'The scandal of exposure', Strassler complicates the notion of public space by acknowledging that it includes new public figures who have crafted their own ways of engaging in the popular discourse on morality and credibility. The chapter stands out because it also examines a diverse selection of image producers who practise their own style of visibility and weave their way in and out of the public sphere to obtain anonymity and create counter-images.

The image-event is the circumstance through which authority is constantly made and unmade. The people featured in the book shared the cracked public space of the New Order regime, in which they honed their skills to interrogate the past and survive certain memories. Strassler argues that image-making is a method of worlding, allowing them to remake their lives and elaborate a certain vision. Does this mean that each engagement in image-making leads to specific modes of political agency? My view is that in the spaces where the image-event takes place, fear, intensity, and uncertainty collide. This enables a certain imagination with regard to thoughts about the state. This leads me to another question: do the questions posed when analysing a media-event have to be connected to ideas about the state? Strassler's point about image-making as being a worlding activity is important, because it serves as the link between vision and social justice. What kinds of ethics guide the principles of social justice in this regard?

In Chapter 5, 'Street signs', the analysis of the street artists shows that to work with images means to reflect on a city that is constantly changing and illustrates how the artists contextualize their practices within their immediate social environment using a set of ethical questions. In the case of Yogyakarta, 'change' means that the city is increasingly for sale. The politics of the city are increasingly heated and polarized. The city is becoming unbearable. One only needs to glance at the city walls to see this: stickers and silk-screen posters

protesting against the changes in the city are pasted on the walls alongside contrasting signs produced by right-wing religious groups. This proximity epitomizes the growing friction and tension. To inhabit the city means to express solidarity with certain marginalized views.

The people in the chapter reflected on the same issues—the killing of human rights activist Munir and the existence of vigilantes—through the same means, such as making murals and graffiti artwork, in the spirit of developing a collective mind. Their knowledge of the systemic abuse and the repressive histories of the state has equipped them with the intellectual tools necessary to articulate unresolved issues and guided them to formulate the necessary action. But how does this process happen? What kind of ability does one need to have to assess the lurking authoritarian vision? How do people from different generations reclaim image-making as a site to learn and unlearn histories while addressing their intergenerational social and political trauma at the same time? This chapter seems to suggest that image-making is directed to realize collective action. I think further analysis of this would strengthen the theorization of the image-event concept. The book provides a valuable contribution to the link between media consumption, participatory culture, and the outward appearances of social-political commentary.

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3 Predicaments of In/Unvisibility

In *Demanding images* Karen Strassler observes and analyses ‘image-events’ in the Indonesian post-authoritarian public sphere. Image-events, she argues, are political processes, unfolding when a particular image, or a set of images, comes into the focus of public attention, bringing together (temporarily and often in contestation) different publics as they affectively engage with the image. Tracing their context, history, chronology, circulation, and potentially volatile coming into being, Strassler convincingly details the increasing role of the visual in shaping Indonesian politics. In conversation with the scholarship of Abidin Kusno, Patricia Spyer, and Mary Steedly, among others, the book teases out how image-events as political processes both signal and shape the ways in which the breakdown of central authority post-1998 sparked the desire to—as Steedly has put it (2013:265)—‘see through the processes of power’ and ‘see out’

of them, with the latter denoting the process of making visible those who had been marginalized by the powers that be. This desire for seeing, for an open politics without secrets, and for visible and authentic evidence without falsification, culminates in an ideology that Strassler fittingly calls the ‘dream of transparency’.

One of the most impressive contributions of *Demanding images*, to me, is that it illuminates the high cost of the seemingly endless public quest for visual evidence. In this public sphere, where the ideological dream of transparency has become an unstable ground of democracy, the public becomes increasingly anxious about the invisible side of politics; perhaps more insidiously, political recognition itself becomes premised on public visibility. For those who do not want to, or cannot, make themselves publicly visible, political exclusion looms—while the wrong kind of visibility may have detrimental effects. The fate of non-recognition in the absence of visual evidence is most clearly articulated in Chapter 2, where Strassler follows the ‘negative image-event’ of the fixation on ‘authentic evidence’ in the debates about the rapes of ethnic Chinese women in May 1998. In the absence of images, including photographs but also public testimony, the victims remained politically invisible. Political actors who wanted to call the existence of the rapes into doubt deployed the ‘dream of transparency’ to argue that the lack of public appearance equalled a lack of ‘evidence’. Closely tracing the public debates, which centred on the absence of images and the circulation of false images, allows Strassler to bring into focus the political predicament of ‘unvisibility’ (p. 91) that for the victims paradoxically conjoined protection (from the moralizing public gaze) and exclusion (from political recognition).

A question that arises is if and how we might extend this methodology to include in our understanding of the public sphere those forms of marginalization and public invisibility that, generally, remain thoroughly uneventful. What does the ‘negative image non-event’—including those images that do not raise attention and those processes of exclusion in daily life that are beyond visual representation but (unlike the rape debates) do not stir controversy—mean to the public sphere? What traces might the invisible and unspeakable leave on the public sphere other than the public quest for visual evidence in highly ‘eventful’ cases? In Chapter 5, Strassler vividly describes how, in 2013, Yogyakarta-based activists staged the event of the reclaiming of the Kewek Bridge, therein referencing the Indonesian guerrilla fighters who came down to reclaim the city from the Dutch in 1949. If in such instances a colonial and ‘postcolonial disorder’ (Good et al., 2008) is temporarily evoked in a highly visual way, then how do generally non-visualized (or ‘invisible’) haunting pasts and present processes of marginalization affectively shape a public sphere so obsessed by images?

A second set of questions the book raises for me concerns the potential of two different modes in which images operate and that Strassler helpfully distinguishes as 'evidentiary' and 'ludic'. The book shows how in the never-abating post-New Order public quest for authentic evidence, the detection of which is always followed by new revelations of fraud, the spectacle and scandal of exposure has become a banality. While the evidentiary mode of images as capable of mirroring truths has become exhausted, the ludic mode of production and reception may offer another way of visually representing reality. The ludic is playful, not relying on authenticity but gesturing to truth in a way that does not build on the logic of transparency—for example, in the obviously fake money stickers handed out by Megawati supporters in 1999 (analysed in Chapter 1). Yet with the Prabowo campaign's use of ludic images (Chapter 6) we see that while 'ludic images call into question the visual logic of transparency that underwrites hegemonic ideologies of democratic visibility' (pp. 223–4), their presence as such is not necessarily promising for the Indonesian 'experiment with democracy' that, Strassler notes, 'seemed to hang in the balance' at the time of the presidential election in 2014 (p. 221). For the affective resonance and interpretation of the 'truth' that the ludic image gestures to, the audience needs to rely on (evidentiary) narratives outside of the image itself or remain uncertain—as the term 'visual forms of rumor' (p. 225) well captures. Is, in present-day Indonesia, the ludic mode the only visual political 'outside' of the ideology of transparency? Are there other modes of renegotiating visual truth? And if so (or not), what lessons might Indonesia's obsession with 'fake (news)' *avant la lettre* teach a world now waking up to the question of the increasing difficulty of distinguishing reality from fabrication?

These questions testify, I hope, to what I find to be the book's tremendously productive theoretical and ethnographic reach as well as its intricate and convincing analysis of the crucial place of the visual in the contestation of Indonesia's public sphere.

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4 Reply by Karen Strassler

It is a great pleasure and satisfaction to have one's work thoughtfully engaged in ways that open and extend it beyond one's own limitations; for this, I am deeply grateful to David Kloos, Nuraini Juliastuti, and Annemarie Samuels. In this brief response, I will only be able to address some of the many thought-provoking questions raised in their insightful commentaries.

Demanding images developed out of an attempt to understand the political work that publicly circulating images were doing in the turbulent period immediately following the end of authoritarian rule in Indonesia. Living in Indonesia from 1998 to 2000 while conducting research for my first book, *Refracted visions* (2010), I absorbed the atmosphere of a moment characterized by tremendous hope and promise, in which the ideal of transparency and the attendant democratic values of accountability, credibility, access, and participation were ascendent. But it was also a time of uncertainty and disorientation, during which the threat of national disintegration or a return to authoritarianism loomed. I became fascinated by the emergence of an unruly and vibrant public sphere, shaped not only by the post-1998 political opening but also by new technologies and media platforms. This newly diversified and relatively unregulated media ecology enabled a wider range of claims and ideas to circulate publicly, but it also yielded greater doubt as to their authors, authority, and authenticity. The observation that images were doing new and more significant kinds of political work in this emerging public sphere led me to a research project that ended up spanning the period 1998–2014, thus extending beyond the immediate post-authoritarian moment and into the ongoing, uneven struggle to realize the democratic aims of the Reformasi movement and to grapple with their limits.

My argument in the book is that entering the public 'space of appearance' (Arendt 1958)—coming into view—has become an essential struggle for those seeking political recognition, not only in Indonesia but globally. I suggest that public visibility is not merely metaphorical; it often rests literally on forms of visibility secured through the mediation of images. As Kloos suggests in his commentary, the political projects that interest me in the book

are those aimed at 'leveraging the very process of mediation itself'. I would not argue that this encompasses 'the entire political process', however, only that managing appearances and harnessing the power of images is more central to politics than ever before. Drawing public attention (garnering 'publicity') has become at once more possible as a result of the proliferation of new media and image technologies and more difficult to sustain and control in the cacophonous and fast-paced, image-saturated arena of public communications.

Yet Kloos astutely observes that the actual people who putatively form the public, while constantly invoked, remain 'out of sight'. Here he puts his finger on a problem central to the concept of publics and to public images as ethnographic objects. Who is the public that public images ostensibly speak to and for? This elusiveness is foundational to the concept of 'publics' as products of mediation formed in the circulation of texts and images. A public is never reducible to a particular group of people because, by its very nature, public address is open-ended and indeterminate, and therefore ungrounded in a bounded community, group, or institution. I draw here on Michael Warner's (2002) formulation of a public as formed through attention; it is the nature of public communication that it is available to be heard and appropriated by anyone. This open-ended potential is part of the slipperiness of public images; they slide from one arena into another, picking up unintended addressees and forming unlikely encounters and unpredictable responses.

Moreover, 'the public' is a figment, 'a potent ideological figure of the democratic imagination' (Strassler 2020:16) that only exists in its invocation. Because it conjures the ideal of an authorizing and monitoring agency that checks state power and represents the collective will of the people, it is constantly being spoken of and spoken for, but it can never be pinned down. Thus, a claim that 'the public' is 'anxious' is always suspect if we are asking whether that means that particular people felt anxious prior to this assertion. But we can say that 'the public is anxious' to the extent that public discourses and images register discernible unease through a fixation on certain questions and doubts (about authenticity, credibility, the 'real' or hidden locations of power, and so on). To the extent that these texts and images are taken up, circulated, altered, debated, and generative of more texts and images, we can say that these questions and doubts resonate for people, although this may be an effect of those images rather than a pre-existing condition. In other words, public images and texts are performative and world-making rather than merely expressive or representational.

The absence of a sociologically grounded referent or recipient of the public image is frustrating, particularly for those of us trained to attend ethnographic-

ally to actual people and their practices and material conditions. One could, of course, undertake an ethnographic study that examines how a particular group of people makes, circulates, and responds to images—this is very much along the lines of what I did in my first book, *Refracted visions*, for example—but to make that kind of deeply situating move with public images is to distort or disregard something crucial about their volatility and eventfulness, which rests precisely in their unrooted and restless quality and in the uncertainty of their claims about whom they speak for and to. Certainly, in my research for this book I did a lot of talking to, and hanging out with, image makers and ‘image brokers’ (Gürsel 2016) of various kinds. I spent time in places where images were being looked at and talked about. This kind of fieldwork remains essential. But I also tried to develop an ethnographic approach attuned to the fact that public images do not, finally, belong to anyone or speak definitively for anyone. This is why, as Nuraini Juliastuti notes in her comments, I shifted my focus to processes of circulation and to moments when images serve as ‘productive site[s] for disturbances’. I turned to ‘image-events’ as both a method and a subject of enquiry.

This brings me to Nuraini Juliastuti and Annemarie Samuels’ comments on the political significance of ‘image-events’. Image-events are moments of coming into public appearance that can be of fleeting or sustained duration, of minor or consequential impact. Juliastuti draws our attention to the relation between image-events and political agency, to the possibilities that they offer for galvanizing collective action. She rightly points out that the book treats images as occasions for ‘demands and struggles’ in which ‘new arrangements of power, knowledge, and culture’ and (re)imaginings of the state are at stake. Juliastuti’s comments draw out the transformative potentials of image-events and the ways in which groups can strategically manufacture or opportunistically amplify image-events in efforts to convene publics and further political projects. People as differently positioned as members of the Front Pembela Islam (FPI, Islamic Defenders Front), street artists, and urban activists are experts in the art of launching and capitalizing on image-events. Indeed, the term ‘image-event’ was first coined to describe image-ready spectacles designed explicitly to draw attention and be circulated, such as those undertaken by environmentalist NGO Greenpeace (Delicath and Deluca 2003) or the Al Qaeda attack on the World Trade Center. In *Demanding images*, I try to expand the term’s scope beyond the intentionally staged image-event to include the more spontaneous ways in which images become focal points of debate and affective response. More broadly, I advocate a way of conceptualizing all images as happenings that unfold in unpredictable and emergent ways across time and space. But the sense of political potential remains central. As Juliastuti’s comments suggest,

I see acts of making, reworking, circulating, commenting on, and scrutinizing images as increasingly important ways ordinary people practise citizenship and enact political agency.

If Juliastuti picks up on the potentials of the image-event as a means by which people might confront and rework violent histories and political trauma, Samuels importantly asks about the limits of the image-event, about what remains excluded or marginalized in a context where visibility is a prerequisite of political recognition. This is the central concern of the second chapter of the book, 'The gender of transparency', which argues that certain forms of violence against certain categories of people (in this instance, sexual violence against Chinese Indonesian women) cannot be brought into view, or rather, the demand for visibility in such cases can only be experienced as another form of violence. Chapter 3, 'The scandal of exposure', is also about the limits of transparency and the failure of 'exposure' to deliver the accountability and justice it promises. We could say that in Chapter 2 transparency reveals itself as tragedy and in Chapter 3 it reappears as farce. Thus, Samuels is absolutely right to observe that the demand for visibility comes at a 'high cost'. I particularly like her question about the haunting and affective shaping of the public by that which stubbornly remains out of view, as it suggests that to be placed outside of the public realm of appearance is not necessarily to have no presence or efficacy therein; rather, it suggests that that which is excluded from public visibility may register obliquely as absences, inchoate pressures, or zones of blindness: holes or blurs in the visual field. The challenge, politically, is to find ways to make the unseen appear by finding new modes of visibility or perhaps by challenging the demand for visibility itself.

To this end, Samuels asks what alternatives there might be to the logic of transparency so regnant in the public sphere that emerged after 1998. The book argues that the political ideal of transparency places limits on what might gain traction in public. At the same time, however, it charts the decentring of the documentary, evidentiary image as other kinds of images increasingly ricochet within an ever more visually crowded public sphere. In the book, I focus on what I call the 'ludic' as an alternative form of image characterized by an aesthetic of overt artifice and play at the surface of the image. In the book's conclusion, the sentimental, personalized image—the selfie—offers yet another mode of visibility, infused with authorial presence and intimacy. Elsewhere, I have explored forms of occult, auratic imaging through which the unseen makes a bid for visibility while refusing the logic of transparency (Strassler 2014). The voracious hunger for images thus proves itself to be omnivorous; visibility can take many forms, and perhaps the challenge is for artists, activists, and ordinary people to generate new modes of visualizing—or perhaps, mov-

ing beyond the visual, new modes of rendering sensible (Ranciere 2004)—that might shift the terms of inclusion and recognition, allowing a broader spectrum of events and experiences to come into public appearance.

All three commentaries address the agonistic and heterogeneous nature of public communication, albeit at different levels. Kloos homes in on the term ‘media ecology’, which, as he suggests, is a way of conceptualizing the public sphere as an arena of communication underpinned by diverse media technologies that articulate together as an emergent system. The introduction of a new media platform—say, the mobile phone—changes the whole system by altering the relations among media, thereby transforming the environment within which perception and communication occurs. If the term media ecology points to dynamic relations among the distinct but interconnected media channels by which images circulate, Samuels, as already noted, points to the different kinds of images travelling through the media ecology’s complex circuitry. To some degree, certain types of images map onto particular habitats—the evidentiary image finds its most comfortable home, for example, in the institutions of the press and human rights NGOs, while the ludic image, in the form of memes and spoofs, flourishes on the Internet. But this relation between image type and medium is never secure or stable. Because images, like organisms or viruses, proliferate and mutate, they do not stay neatly within those niches, nor do they necessarily remain the same kind of image as they move (an evidentiary image can be reframed as a ludic image, a personal image can morph into an evidentiary image, and so on). Juliastuti’s remarks focus on the public sphere as an arena of contestation where authority is ‘made and unmade’. She thus reminds us that however underdetermined and attenuated that link between public images and particular actors may be, it is ultimately people who struggle to manage the flow of images and to harness their power in order to advance their projects. This is also where the question of expertise comes in: the ‘competing visions’ embodied in images, the images themselves, and the media by which they travel, are all subject to testing and authorization by various kinds of experts—religious, technological, artistic, and so on. These experts work as gatekeepers, seeking to contain images and tame their effects. Increasingly, however, the ordinary person approaches the image as a critic rather than a passive consumer or an enthralled spectator. Everyone is an expert!

I want to end with Samuels’s question about what the Indonesian case might tell us about the present crisis of truth. Because Indonesia’s emergence from a thirty-two-year authoritarian regime converged temporally with a seismic technological shift towards more decentralized and participant-driven digital-media platforms, the fracturing and volatility of the complexly mediated public sphere, and the accompanying crises of authority and authenticity, came into

sharp relief there earlier than elsewhere. *Demanding images* was substantially written before the Trump presidency began. As debates about the size of inaugural crowds and accusations of ‘fake news’ took hold in my own country, I experienced an alarming sense of déjà vu. I am wary of big pronouncements about the fate of democracy, but I think what *Demanding images* suggests is that we are not, as some have proclaimed, in a post-truth era. Rather, we are in a time of tremendous uncertainty about how we know a truth, how we secure a truth, and how we draw others into shared truths. This is not merely the old constructivist argument that truths are multiple; it is a question of a profusion of ways of making compelling public claims. Diverse ways of making truths visible can compete and work at cross-purposes, but they can also converge and align in powerfully cumulative ways.

Take the George Floyd case as an image-event. Floyd’s killing might not have registered beyond a small, deeply pained, and relatively disenfranchised community of people connected directly to him, but it was recorded by a bystander, and that recording circulated virally via social media, creating an expanding public around the image. The effect of that and similar videos reminds us that the evidentiary image remains politically vital. Yet the force of the video of Floyd’s murder rested not only in its status as credible evidence but also in its searing affective charge. As it travelled, leaving anger, pain, and horror in its wake, it spawned ludic iterations that drew out the iconic resonance and symbolic power of Chauvin’s knee on Floyd’s neck, making a singular event stand for, and resonate with, other similar murders and a whole history of racial violence. Amateur viral video and political cartoons, memes, handmade placards, and murals worked in concert to convene publics, moving a significant portion of them to take to the streets. Within the protesting crowds, individuals took selfies that they circulated on social media, at once asserting a personal stake in Floyd’s death and generating a sense of simultaneity and collectivity that spanned the country and reached around the world as others marked their participation in similar ways. As people filled the streets in protest on each weekend of a difficult summer, the crowds in turn were rendered in mass media images that cast them as—depending on the political slant of the media outlet—anarchic, destructive mobs or a collective uprising in the name of racial justice. Some will say that the George Floyd image-event has not changed anything materially or structurally. Derek Chauvin was convicted, but Black people are still dying at the hands of police, even when bodycams and bystanders are there to record it. I would prefer to say that this image-event is ongoing and unfinished. As with the image-events traced in *Demanding images*, we cannot yet know the full extent of its reverberations and ramifications.

What I can say with some confidence is that image-events will continue to contour and convulse the public realm, whether in Indonesia, the US, or elsewhere. If what we need politically are ever more creative and generative ways to draw what has remained unseen into the public space of appearance, thereby to reshape the political field, we also need to develop new kinds of literacies and curatorial skills to critically engage with the myriad ways visual claims are grounded and propelled forward.

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