

Squeezed by Land, Pressured by Sky

a speculative curatorial by Ethnosonic

As planes flew over us, once more, silence occurred, as if making way to the otherwise engulfing sound of the engines encompassing the conversation we were having. After each, our interlocutors would turn heads before abruptly shifting the topic towards the airport not 5 km away (and the changes it has brought them). What was previously a talk about the waning strength of the aged body, changed into the land whence it used to work within —the sky has become a constant reminder of the land no longer there.

Three years after its full operation, the omnipresence of the Yogyakarta International Airport (YIA) posed a continuing bodily affect on the people of Kapanewon Temon, Kulon Progo Regency. From the more obvious loud plane engine sounds to the *pe-nderes'* (palm sugar tappers) fear of climbing trees right underneath its flight path— these stories, as we experienced and listened to, informed the corporeality of YIA, the very corporeality our interlocutors cannot seem to escape. This dominating ubiquity shaped the discourse around the topic of land displacement and the socio-cultural-ecological change that follows in the *kapanewon* (kecamatan); out-migration, younger generation's declining interest in dry land cultivation, but also to the loss of providence from the land itself.

Merti desa is a periodical celebration of harvest familiar to Javanese farming communities as a way to give thanks for the harvest of the season. Within, the variety of the yield would be picked out, arranged, and then built up resembling a mountain (hence, *gunungan*) which people would carry in a march of festivity known as *grebeg*. However, this is no longer the case for kelurahan Palawija sharing an administrative border with the airport. Today, *merti desa* is under the Cultural Affairs grant program otherwise known as Dana Keistimewaan, receiving around the ballpark of 9-10

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million rupiah as incentives for the participation of *kelurahan* (village) and *padukuhan* (hamlet). To the loss of land, hence, the lack of crops (the very constituent to *gunungan*) *merti desa* has rather turned into mere festivity uprooted from practice. Crops are instead bought and brought from neighboring kapanewon, even the adjacent Purworejo, and as far as Magelang and Wonosobo.

The paradox wrapping the very *gunungan* itself evokes the dense layers at play between the relationship with land, food, and to the extent, the infrastructure-tourism complex. This, is also, a redress of the anachronistic theme of “food security” taken by Festival Kebudayaan Yogyakarta (FKY) —inviting the same aura where modernistic agendas permeate projects of government’s rationality, purporting a clean slate to the changing whims of global developmentalism which once again subjects (used-to) smallholders as much the crucial actors as victims.

In the same way this notions paradox, Ethnosonic finds concern on the same anticipation to which the idea of “culture” has been transformed —from man-land relations into epiphenomenal, asocial aestheticism— or as shared by the coordinator of FKY steering committee, Butet Kartaredjasa, as “mere entertainment...in various budget politics and policies” —the reason for its rebranding from “Kesenian”. Departing from the Javanese phrase of “*sedhumuk bathuk senyari bumi ditohi pati jiwa*” —an ideal of agricultural poesis where the land and crops are worked with care and pride —this multi-modal presentation works toward putting forth the quotidian, viscerally experienced, through sensory evocations to what it feels to live and [no longer] “culture” [from the Latin word *cultūra* meaning ‘cultivate’].

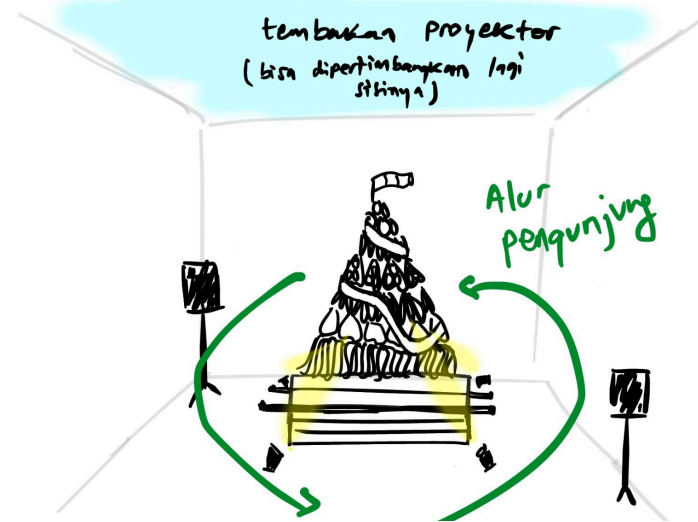
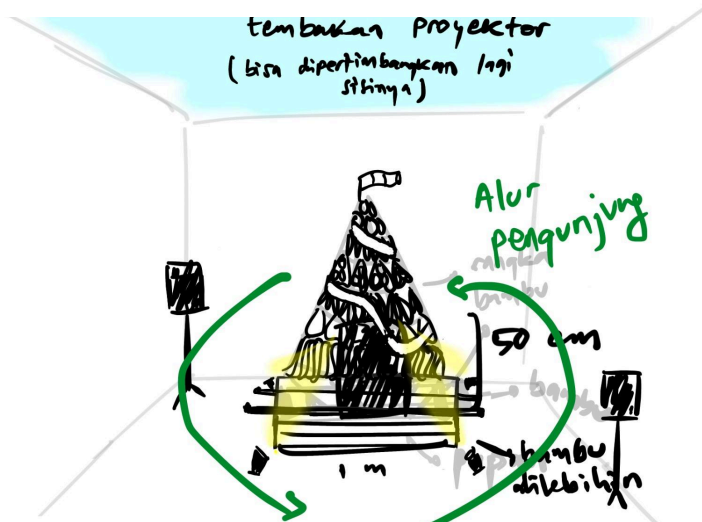
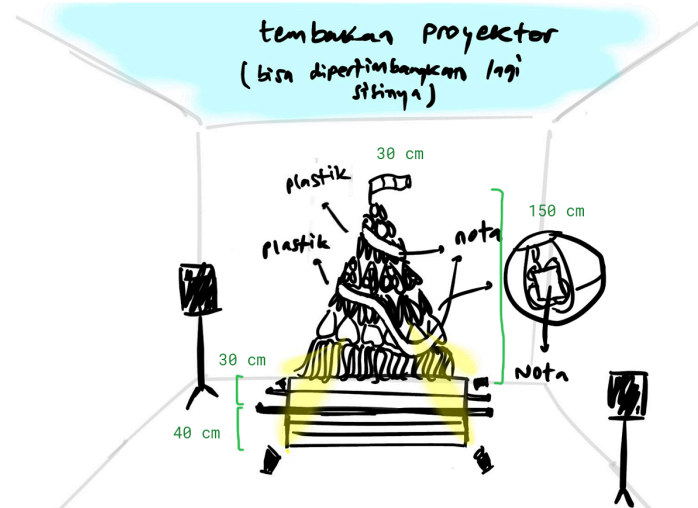
Suggested presentation

Our case is made from this sedimented 'feelingful dimension' of body experiences and the material relationship with the environment —pressured from 'above' to be 'made nice' under the guise of Culture, at the foreground of the quotidian and in spite of, the squeezing of settlement and sustenance. The aim is to evoke this actuality through an interplay between the senses through *gunungan*, built upon and with the vegetables and fruits, the 'crops,' bought and brought from outside the kelurahan, narrating the shift from "garden to table" to "market to table" following land loss. The sound of aircraft emanates from inside the installation so as to imply the corporeality of the omnipresence of YIA to which its vibration synchs, even overplay, the brim of bodily vibration as the pe-nderes of Kelurahan Palawija experience. Surrounding the installation, two sound line arrays to navigate the ever presence of this sound around and encircling the mock festivity of *gunungan* —a rethinking from the border to the center. A video of an airplane is to be projected upwards toward the ceiling as a way to emphasize the domination of the airport, not only in the audial, but also in the visual. Heard from the ground, seen in the sky, felt in between. The installation is to synesthetically map the everyday experience of the people of Kelurahan Palawija, materially, but also, discursively.

The work will be a *gunungan* with a diameter of 1 m and an overall height of 2.5 m. Divided into 3 parts: a base/level (p, w: 1 m x 1 m; h: 30-40 cm), stretcher (*tandu*) + foundation (d: 1 m; p, l: 1 m x 1 m; h: 30 cm + bamboo stretcher support ± 1.25-1.5 m long), *gunungan* (d: 1 m, t above foundation: 1.5 m + 30 cm support for windsock). On the outside of the stretcher + foundation, the bamboo frame is covered with plywood like the level below. Some crops are covered in plastic and some are not. In between the harvest are receipts from markets, placed inside the plastics to further evoke the variety of locations where these crops are brought. Inside the *gunungan* there is a 10-inch audio speaker device (t: ± 50 cm) while outside, a set of 2-3 stereo speakers. *Gunungan* is surrounded by four spotlights. There is also a projector that will be shot at the ceiling of the room with visuals of airplanes. *Gunungan* will be placed in the middle of the room so visitors can walk around the mount to see the details of the work.

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Sketch and Plan for Installation
on room, material, flow, and references.





plywood crates as layers at the base



example of plastic-wrapped vegetables and fruits in gunungan from Temon



stand-in speaker inside and around *gunungan*,
recommendation: Yamaha CBR10