

OMBAK ZINE ⁰³



Special Issue

"I REFUSE TO KNOW MY PLACE:
EIGHT POEMS"



OCTOBER 2023

Photo in cover page:
"Dilarang melawan arus"
Taken in Depok, forget-when

I.

Setting:

Depok, Indonesia, circa 2012

A Seminar course

(a course dedicated to prepare students
in writing undergraduate thesis research proposal)

Glossary:

Skripsi = undergraduate thesis

I presented mine

On Indonesian backpacking

I forgot what I wrote

and what I presented that day

I can only remember one of the comments

from one of the lecturers in that room:

“Do you want to write a novel or skripsi?”

I forgot what I answered

But I kept writing a skripsi in my style

Simply because I did not know

how to write in other way!

(Some might feel it novel-esque

although I didn't)

That comment lingered

like a scratch from the past

It was resonated in me

during many pages I read

in Poetic Inquiry (Prendergast et al. 2009)

What's actually wrong

about writing a novel in academic spaces?

What's so wrong

about being poetic in social sciences?

How does certain style of writing is favoured

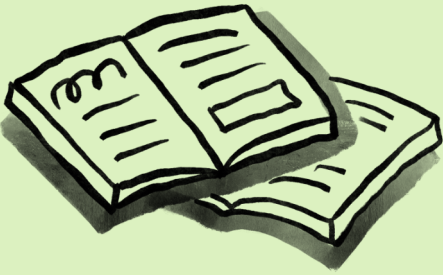
in the university,

but not the others?

Who decides?

For what reason?





II.

There is an issue of
Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change
in Hazel's bookshelves

One of the articles is mine
My first published academic article
(what a joy to be had!)

I read it again
and found it very strange
Unfamiliar
Who wrote that article?

I remember Afrizal Malna
(one of my favorite poets)
He once published his first poetry book:
Abad yang Berlari
He read it page by page
and concluded: "This is not my poetry!
This is Indonesian Literature's poetry!"

Perhaps the article is indeed
not mine
It is Academic Social Science Writing's

Afrizal then asked
more to himself:
"How to write my own poetry?"
He searched and searched
and searched...

III.

I write poetry because
I am a bad (BAD!) social scientist

I believe in poetic truth(s)
more than social science Truth
punctuated with a capital T

[Eut...]

I'm no Laurel Richardson
Can I do this? Dare I do this?
What will they think?

(A cento composed from
Faulkner 2022, Prendergast et al. 2009)



IV.

Poetic inquiry is the use of poetry as/in/for inquiry.

I imagine it happens when the poet inside the (social science) researcher can no longer resist the temptation of poetry.

Research is dull.

Language is inadequate.

Is poetry—a special language suited for those special, strange, mysterious moments when bits and pieces suddenly coalesce—an answer?

Aitken (2012), with a sound of manifesto:

“Words can be a blanket, slightly suffocating, or a wall, dividing.

The exception is poetry... Poetry is the way to describe and distill,

but remain porous, oxygenated. Poetry lets the light in” (my emphasis).

There are three kinds of voice potentially present in the poetry used as qualitative research:

1) researcher-voiced poems

2) participant-voiced poems

3) literature-voiced poems

Almost half of them, based on literature review conducted by Prendergast (2009), are #1. Poetry gives researchers a way of working that allow them/us/me to deal with ambiguities, complex relations, deep emotions, embodied understanding, and the-personal-is-political inherent in many contemporary social science inquiries.

Poetic inquirers create poetry in different phases of their research. Some write poetry as field notes. Some make found poetry from the interview transcript. Some use poetry as a way of communicating the finding and analysis.

And so on.

And so forth.

Questions remain.

Where am I in all of those possibilities?

Does it have to be poetry (form/at)?

How about other forms of ‘poetic’ writing?

Is it possible to be poetic without poetry?

What is poetry anyway? Can it be found anywhere? Is there a limit for poetry?



IV.

One of main highlights from my Poetic Inquiry readings is the notion of **poetic occasion** (chapter by Sullivan 2009). Occasions for poetry are myriad and infinite –“frying pan, fallen leaves, smell of gasoline, house fence, bacteria on carpet, motorcycle’s sound, drops of rain, and you-can-continue-the-list” (quoted from my master’s thesis). As Naomi Shihab Nye (1994) wrote,

Poems hide.

What we have to do is live in a way that lets us find them.

Sullivan (2009) linked poetic occasion with intuition. And went deeper by reflecting on six occasions for poetry: Concreteness, Voice, Emotion, Ambiguity, Associative Logic, and Tension. While reading her chapter, I often thought about ethnographic arts of noticing and paying attention and being attentive. And I imagined how many **occasions for poetry** were missed just because I was not attentive/intuitive enough, or I was too busy (of life; what life?!) to notice. Final reflection:

HOW, THEN, TO LIVE A POET’S LIFE?

Poetic Inquiry offers me a sense of justification and hope; that it is perhaps now possible to write my own-not Social Science’s-thesis or journal article.

And it feels familiar already.

I wrote poetries a lot at the beginning of my undergraduate years. After that I explored other things (most notably I [still] enjoy writing short prose, still poetic but in paragraphs); not entirely not writing poetry, but shying away a bit from it.

I should have realized that, since Lhoknga, the poet inside me had been knocking the door, hard. I didn’t listen carefully. I didn’t pay attention. Now, at the last years of my academic/university training (yeah no more school!), I find poetry again. It comes full circle. How poetic.





I refuse to know my place
I decide to practice audacity

All thinking is experimental
All thinking is speculative

This is a plea for speculative audacity
This is a refusal of the obvious

To think speculatively is to slow down
To slow down is to provoke
To provoke is to arouse a slightly different awareness

This is my proposition
This is my proposal

Speculative Research found myself
in a bright winter morning
in the university.

Sun was shining
and I ordered a loan through
the library catalogue.

Speculative research found me how?
Probably thru Isabelle Stengers,
whose speculative thinking adventure
was speculatively written by Vikki Bell,
whose chapter was speculatively read
by myself, in total incomprehension of
Stengers' cosmopolitics.

Then what it is about?

Probably it is about the importance,
and constraints,
and risks of
speculative thinking,
whose mere existence has been often
diminished/dismissed
by status quos
in the academic research,
in the university,
in the politics,
in the contemporary social life.

Speculative thinking is radical empiricism
mixed with anti-solution for Future
mixed with phenomenology of the body that thinks
mixed with the impasse of the present
mixed with audacious/outrageous proposition for the possibles
mixed with the situatedness of experimental thoughts.

VI.

In particular,
a chapter by Diprose stole my heart
as she wrote about the role of
inspiration
in speculative thinking, and
in academic research, in general.

We often think of, and are taught of
literature, people, stories, etcetera
as some kind of goldmine,
whose resource needs to be
extracted, unearthed, used up, exhausted;
(used, employed, applied, cited, referenced).

Rather, Diprose invited us to think of
inspiration
as a communal and intercorporeal-affective basis
of speculative thinking.

Being-inspired is the politics and ethics
of speculative research practice.

VI.

Speculative Research makes me think of an art installation by Ade Darmawan.

The story I heard is as follows:

Ade wanted to make an artwork about pantai utara, Java northern coast.

He then asked a friend a suggestion about what book to read about it.

That friend suggested Arus Balik, just another Pramoedya's epic.

Ade read it and found that Pramoedya told so many details and stories about plants/trees/herbs/spices along pantai utara.

He then travelled along the northern coast, and collected a part of each plant/tree/herb/spice he could encounter.

He then extracted all parts of plants/trees/herbs/spices he collected.

Along with seawater from the java sea, he put the extracts in an assemblage of laboratory equipment, placed in a laboratory-like room.

They then were distilled into liquid.

Those liquids were then directed to drip on books about Soeharto.

The books were slowly eroded.

I like to imagine that his artistic process was radically speculative.

His way of reading Arus Balik is speculative.

His collecting plants/trees/herbs/spices' specimens is speculative.

His extracting the specimens is speculative.

His distilling the extracts with seawater is speculative.

His dripping the distilled extracts/seawater on books about Soeharto is speculative.

He did not think about the finality of his work when he started, and progressed.

He was just constantly inspired by the present speculative possibilities around him.

The poetic and the speculative collide/coalesce, forming
a risky and disobedient alliance.

Terbentur, terbentur, terbentuk
(Tan Malaka, Indonesia's most famous leftist)

To speculate is to take risk
To disobey is to take risk

To write poetry &/or be poetic here is to take risk
(to be dismissed
as irrelevant,
unscientific,
hallucinating,
non-existent)

It is audacious to write poetry &/or be poetic here

Isabelle Stengers:
"To disobey is a freedom.
It may be painful for the consequence,
but it's first of all fresh air,
you know?"



VIII.

(OR, POETRY AS SPECULATION)