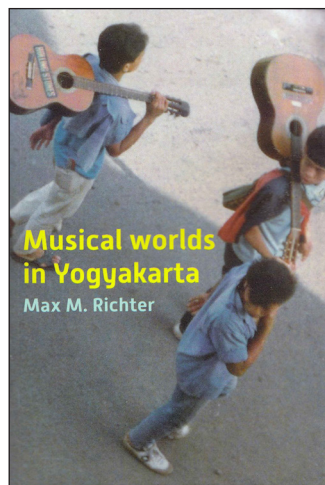


Max M. Richter, *Musical worlds in Yogyakarta*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 2012, xii + 210 pp. ISBN 9789067183901. Price: USD 39.90 (soft cover).



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In *Musical worlds in Yogyakarta*, Max Richter, the director of the Monash Asia Institute and lecturer in Anthropology at Monash, Australia, published the results of his doctoral fieldwork on certain aspects of music in the early post-Suharto Yogyakarta. The book itself is divided into an introduction and eight chapters, grouped into three topical parts: “Music and the street, Habitus and physicality, and State power and musical cosmopolitanism”. The text itself is a mixture of fieldwork notes and a theoretical framework or as Richter himself puts it: “The mode of presentation in this book combines what Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) term analytic arguments and thematic narratives” (p.26).

Most parts of this book are enjoyable to read, especially the parts, which are based on the fieldwork notes and those covering Richter’s in-depth experience with the musicians and his atmospheric descriptions of events. Max Richter obviously dived deep into the music scene of Yogyakarta. Through all the pages, his passion as well as his intense interest is depicted throughout the pages. Whether he was visiting night clubs, attending *kampung* concerts and stage events, describing the “other world dancing (*joged*)”, spending the night *nongkrong* (hanging out) with *pengamen* (street musician), or even showing courage during his participant observation fieldwork to perform “with KPJM and friends at the Air Force Academy” (p. 151), Max Richter was doing all of these wholeheartedly.

Getting into such close contact with the musicians and local informants might had given this book “a Javanese touch”; however, in some cases, it could be seen as a bias portraying a favourable picture of Yogyakarta or another kind of Java-centrism. Yogyakarta is one of the cultural centres of Indonesia but discussing about the stereotypes of this city would not add any reliable or new information, for example: “Referring to its multi-ethnic character; several people told me Malioboro Street was the ‘real mini Indonesia’, unlike the fabricated ‘Beautiful Indonesia in Miniature Park’ (known as Taman Mini) in Jakarta” (p. 5).

Moreover, the comment in one of the footnotes ignores the diversity and regional sub-centres of the so-called popular music in Indonesia: “In relation to contrasts and commonalities of popular music trends such as these across wider Indonesia, a prominent Indonesian musician told me [sic!] that the

country has four main centres, each with their own characteristics: 1. East Java [...]; 2. Yogyakarta [...]; 3. Bandung [...]; and 4. Jakarta [...]" (footnote 3, p. 10). The results from a research about music in Yogyakarta could not be generalized for all Indonesia even though the student scene and the local tourism of Yogyakarta has an important influence on (pop-)cultural developments all over Indonesia. Furthermore, media reports and Indonesian TV productions probably intensify this effect.

The real drawback of this book, and therefore the parts which are less enjoyable to read, are the parts Richter had probably to include because they are a prerequisite for a doctoral thesis that is in this case the theoretical framework from Bourdieu. Even Richter himself mentions the shortcomings of applying Bourdieu for a non-French speaking person: "Third, while Craig Calhoun (2002) points out that Bourdieu's writing style presents special difficulties for English readers, it remains the case that most of his writing is especially dense and his means of drawing on particular individuals and situations stilted" (p. 22). This theoretical framework brings one more dilemma: "A number of musical events that I documented during the research are not included in this study, as I was not able to fit them [sic!] into the analytic model I developed" (footnote 13, p. 26). It is a pity because the full panorama of the musical events and styles and genre and happenings in Yogyakarta are thereby, through Richter's chosen approach, partially deleted or at least, for the reader, inaccessible. The reasons for this are not clearly explained by Richter. It was probably because his text lacks any self-critics concerning this limitation of his model.

The application of Bourdieu's theory in this work seems to be a kind of academic practice, which is essential but barren. In his conclusion, Richter states: "While Bourdieu's theory therefore helps us to identify forms of political contestation that may otherwise be hidden, taking music rather than power as a starting point broadens the analytical parameters" (p. 153). Whether "broaden" here means "positively extended" or "less determined" stays unclear. The targeted correlation of power and music, first induced by the theory of Bourdieu and during the further procedure through Richter's scientific field of research, feels therefore to some extent compelled. The result of his analysis looks a bit meager and is for the reader on this account not entirely reproducible: "It is therefore reasonable to conclude that music not only reflected conflict avoidance, but also played an active role in it" (p. 78). The effect and influence of music or songs on aggression during the demonstrations against the Suharto regime is for example depicted by Kees van Dijk in his article "The magnetism of songs" (*Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 159/1: 31, 2003). Richter, of course, is fully aware of the problems he is dealing with. So, for example, he says: "This highlights how difficult it is to classify people into social groups, and furthermore that divisions such as violent/peaceful, rural/urban, and conservative/progressive need to be treated with great caution" (p. 182f), but he is not trying to avoid these classifications throughout his analysis.

Furthermore, from the beginning, his approach was based on a quite simple classification: "Class or occupational groups around the inner-city streets tended to associate foremost with one broad genre: *becak* driver and *campursari*; street guide and *musik jalanan*; cigarette seller and *dangdut*; upwardly-aspiring urbanite and 'hip' (for those up to 25 years old) or jazz (for those over 25)" (p. 184). Richter admits that "Identifying these kinds of divisions is not in itself new, but I have focused on how music helped the two groups [that is *jalanan* and *campursari* musical worlds, my addition] to coexist peacefully, a matter of great importance in the early post-Suharto years" (p. 185). The mixture in Richter's text of stereotypically depicted groups in conjunction with the social changes during the early years of *reformasi* and also the conflicts and conflict avoidances during that time evokes the taste of justification, as if the mere study of music in Yogyakarta alone would not be sufficient.

As a social anthropologist, his final statement, "[...] my overarching conclusions are that ethnographic research on musical performance can help to conceptualize political and other dimensions of social and cultural life in dense urban settings [...]" (p. 185), brings him away from musical anthropology and closer to the field of conflict or peace study. Moreover, it conveys to a proposal for the government on the usefulness of anthropology for social administration.

During the last ten years, there have been a number of publications on music in Indonesia due to the popularity of the cultural studies and the tendency to focus on subcultures. *Musical worlds in Yogyakarta* by Max Richter is one of these publications offering a dense and intense portrait of the music scene in Yogyakarta's suburbs. Following the different players Richter introduced in his work, readers will be eager to read future studies or research about these players who have been so intense in all their complexities described in this book. As explained earlier in this review, the book is enjoyable and fruitful science to read.