Culture Letter 1

Jakarta, 3 January 1975.

Friend,

Our statement made on 31 December 1974 was a cultural event, as it was so rightly formulated by Hardi. Why? Because we have achieved, even jumped out of, a common assumption that our situation is fixed, is good and doesn't need changes or alterations. In other words our statement has broken down the closed-mindedness (or in its philosophical term: immanence) of historical processes that are commonly held to be the norm, natural and in-keeping with an evaluation that is universal (the transcendent). Once more, this is a cultural act. Because in mankind's cultural development, factual history and judgment (evaluation) is so strongly entwined. Culture depends on man's activities that never cease to surmount what is given to him from nature. He never cease to question progress, renewal, and change. He, the cultural being, does not only question how the problem actually sits but also problematizes how this problem should in fact disclose his existence. Principles and evaluation are a transcendental dimension that break down natural immanence, which in itself demands original acts, daring and creative, from a person or a group of people. It is here that the dynamics of human history come to be defined.

From the above formulation it is clear that human beings always grabs the natural environment, or the conditions of his own creation that has become "natural" to be changed, molded according to the new hopes and desires that come about from within him. But human beings also tend to curl up and enjoy the safety of nature and manmade nature (tradition) and surrender to natural laws. This kind of attitude is truly a vegetative kind, much like the seed of a papaya that will grow into a papaya tree.

The first attitude, which is to mold the natural world according to human hopes, shows that human beings are strategic beings. He has cultural strategies. They are called cultural strategies because they are oriented towards a better future, which is more suitable to the human condition, which assures his humanity. The process of capturing our surroundings is a manifestation of the

cultural strategy if it is a humanizing process, a process of its own humanity. We know that human beings are differentiated from animals and plants based on their limitations. But their limitations are also their superiority. And because of this, they are also beings with a multitude of possibilities. A bear is born with its fur, but a person was born naked, that is his limitation. However for this reason he is able to choose how his body will be clothed: with a blazer and a pair of trousers or a *sorjan* and a sarong. It is not only his physical sides that he develops so that he differs from the bear but also his spiritual aspects. With his ability to choose between a blazer and a *sorjan* he displays that he is a spiritual being. However if this spiritual side is not molded from the perspective of humanity then a process of becoming-animal may occur within him. He is capable of creating intrigues whether subtly or crudely. Then he becomes a wolf for his other human fellows. As such, we may conclude that in creating strategies human beings are not free from the dangers that are located within their very beings.

The second attitude, which is to hide under comforting blankets and enjoying the safety of what already exists, is already a threat to culture. A most primitive human situation is marked by a vegetative attitude, such as looking for and picking things up, leftover food that one finds around him in order to survive. In a situation such as this it is certain that questions about the meaning of surrounding events will arise, for he is only staying alive based on second-hand goods. The purpose of his life is only to fulfill elementary needs. He merely becomes adaptive. These sorts of conditions also influence the most important dimension of his sense of self, which is his spiritual dimension. An adaptive and vegetative attitude wil breed a certain kind of mentality, a spiritual attitude that is based only on the need to guard the above mentioned elementary needs. He may turn aggressive, into a cannibal. It is clear that this sort of condition may be found not only in primitive men of the Stone Age. Recently we have witnessed those conditions within our everyday lives. The term “l’exploitation de l’homme par l’homme” is a statement about the existince of modern cannibalism. Intrigues, spying on other people, is simply a more “modern” face of primitive aggresiveness. And so is manipulation towards human beings through new techniques such as film, advertising films, propaganda that are one-dimensional in nature, which are all attempts to guard life as it already is and to take as much profit from other people.

At the end of this short reflection, I would like to emphasize once again that our statement has given ourselves the task to re-think, to re-identify the most underlying problems of mankind and its culture. This is important if we wish to deepen and broaden our insight regarding what we are doing as well as what we would like to do. We must always gain some distance from ourselves, to question our work in a critical way. It is then that we fulfil the purpose of our existence: to become creative rather than vegetative beings.

With warm regards.