

# Reissuing Indonesian Independent Music: Technology-Mediated Nostalgia, Hauntology and Future Projection

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**Abstract.** This research seeks to look deeper into interrelationships between technology, past, and nostalgia in musical reissue products of Indonesian independent recording labels. This research adopted qualitative-descriptive method. Data were extracted from documents which are in the form of reissue releases. This research used Media Archeology and Hauntology perspective in analyzing the data collected, which are in the form of physical reissue releases, photographic, and poster archives. Based on the results of analysis it can be concluded that nostalgia is a technology-mediated condition. Even though reissue releases are laden with past elements, it can be utilized to project future by tracing or identifying various potential creativities contained in past cultural products.

## 1 Introduction

Technological developments have been changing various aspects of human life, including arts and culture. Simpson [1] divided musical developments into three stages: mechanical era (musical pages), electronic era (analog music format), and digital era (CD and internet era). Here, developments or advancements in recording, information, and replication technologies are the main cause.

Technology has been changing the ways by which music is produced, distributed, consumed, and even archived. Emst [2] wrote that during information era, archives were transforming into long-term conservation. One form of those long-term conservations is reissue.

Several Indonesian independent record labels had reissued music products of the past. Lamunai Records reissued *The Philosophy Gang* (1973) by The Gang of Harry Roesli, and, later, it released two reissued album of this music group. Elevation Records reissued three

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albums composed by Gombloh, which were first released in 1970s. Grimloc Records from Bandung reissued several albums composed by Bandung independent musicians during the era between 1990s and early 2000s, such as Hark! It's Crawling Tar-Tar (2006), Koil (2007), and Balcony (2003). All of these reissued releases were released in ten years.

Technological developments allows reissuing to be easily conducted and accepted. Technological developments in arts do not only make it easier to find and release music of the past, but also have an impact on people's daily life. This research seeks to look deeper into relationship between music and technology in reissued products, and also its impact on present daily life, especially within musical sphere.

## 2 Literature Study

No research has been found yet that specifically examines Indonesian music reissuing by recording labels from Indonesia. A closely similar research had been conducted by Taufiq Hariyadi in his article "Transformation of Recording Media of Indonesian Popular Music on Irama Nusantara's Online Media" [3]. Hariyadi examined practices of digitalization, by Irama Nusantara, of Indonesian popular musics produced since 1950s. Hariyadi adopted an archeological media perspective, which also adopted by the authors in this research.

Khothibul Umam and Laura Andri wrote "Disrupsi Teknologi Versus Adaptasi: Geliat Grup Musik Nasida Ria di Era Kiwari" published in *Endogami: Jurnal Ilmiah Kajian Antropologi* [4]. In their paper, Umam and Andri the Media Archeology perspective to analyze the adaptation practices by Nasida Ria amidst the disruption of digital technology.

Elodie A. Roy wrote "Displacing the Past: Mediated Nostalgia and Recorded Sound" published in the *Volume!: Le revue des musiques popularizes* journal [5]. In this article, Roy analyzed practices conducted by two recording labels from England, Ghost Box and Finder Keepers, in bringing the past into the present through music releases. Finders Keepers is a label focused on reissuing old albums from various regions of the world. Roy examined interrelationships between technology, past, and nostalgia in these two recording labels.

In analyzing Indonesian independent music reissuing practices, the author adopted Media Archeology and Hauntology perspectives. Media Archeology pays specific attention to material aspects of the past media that have been forgotten now [6]. In this material there are various ideas intersected with "now" and new things that can be derived from them [7].

Hauntology is a Jacques Derrida's concept borrowed by Mark Fisher [8]. Fisher elaborated how aspects of the past in cultural products such as music, film, photography, architecture, and others are coming back and haunting us in present times.

## 3 Research Method

This research adopted qualitative-descriptive method. The authors collected data from documents and by conducting literature study. Literature study was conducted by selecting and studying references related to the research's theme. The documents used by the authors were reissue releases and archives attached. To analyze data, the authors used media archeology theory [6] and Mark Fisher's hauntology. Media archeology seeks to formulate and disseminate approaches and theories in studying media technology that have been marginalized from media history [9]. Meanwhile, hauntology tries to trace aspects of the past that are contained in cultural products and how their presence in the present has become a 'ghost' for its consumers [8].

## 4 Discussions

### 4.1 Technology as A Mediator of Nostalgia

While innovating phonograph in 1877, Edison stated: “We will be able to preserve and hear again..., a memorable speech, a worthy singer..., the last words of a dying man..., of a distant parent, a lover, a mistress.” [2]. This statement reveals relationship between technology, in one hand, and the past and nostalgia, in the other hand.

According to Kittler [7], because memory, dreams, or the past can be reproduced by technologies, so we are now living coexistently with the past (the deads, the ghosts). Technologies enable us to preserve events and many other things of the past. Kittler concluded that hallucination, the main symptom of nostalgia, is a phenomenon mediated by technologies.

Further developments in technology are capable of not only reproducing the past but also of mass replicating diverse cultural products. Bull [10] stated:

“Nostalgia and mechanical reproduction go together: experience is reproduced (the dead come back to life), and that which is forgotten is bathed in a light of recollection. Mediated nostalgia – nostalgia generated through the record player, the photograph, or the iPod – reverses the irreversibility of time in the mind of the subject.”

Reissue is one of those cultural products. Reissue contains not only the past (musical content, narratives, lyrics, etc); reissue were intentionally brought back (released again) into the present as a commodity for us to consume.

### 4.2 Music Excavation, Release Material, and Nostalgia

Eventhough main content of any reissue release are immaterial objects (tone, vocal harmony), these immaterial objects are still related to material object(s). Distinctive sound of piano of the 1970s rock progressive era found in Harry Roesli’s album, *Philosophy Gang* (1973), can be reproduced because the vinyl record re-released by Lamunai Records in 2017 was playing on turntable.

It reveals duality of recording products. According to Roy [5], eventhough past content is intangible (immaterial), it still contained in the form of recording release materials and needs a driving tool in order to produce sound.

Aspects of materiality cannot be ignored when we are talking about reissue releases of Indonesian independent music. Reissue products of Lamunai Records, Elevation Records, and Grimloc Records are available in physical (material) forms (CD, cassettes, and vinyl records).

These forms of releases are very uncommon during this digital streaming era. According to Menus’ note [10], less than 20 vinyl record releases of Indonesian independent bands are produced during the 2004-2014 period. In addition, pressing plant or printer, which formerly owned by Lokananta in Solo, has disappeared [12].

Reissuing conducted by Lamunai, Elevation, and Grimloc is a complete-packaged nostalgia. These releases were available in the form of music release material and also contains “not-now” sounds. Not only “of the past”, these albums has almost been forgotten in Indonesian music realm. Even at first, Randi Pratama, a Lamunai Records’s officer, was not interested to Harry Roesli’s music [8].

Regarding the material aspects of physical release, the Balcony’s album, *Metafora Komposisi Imajinar* (2003), can be taken as an example. This album was released first in cassette form. Tape cassette has two sides; thus song list of an album divides into Side A and Side B. It is because cassette rotating machine produces sounds by reading data contained in recording tape. This form is used by the Balcony by creating a theme or

narrative on each side: side A contains songs with dark and angry nuances, while side B contains songs with themes on melancholia, sadness, and nihilism [11].

### 4.3 Hauntology and Future Projection

Fisher [8] stated that presence of the past elements in 21-age cultural products closely relates to economic and political settings (neoliberal regime and financial capitalism) and has also an impact on human psyche. The world, as viewed by Fisher, has been becoming a giant museum. Nothing is new in every cultural product and landscape but only banal re-polished products (or, *pastiche*, a term introduced by Fredric Jameson) for merely capital accumulation interests.

These conditions make culture and, as a whole, social life, barren: there is nothing new and there is no desire to struggle for something new, there is only repetition or recycling. Fisher calls these conditions as “slow cancellation of the future.” Future has failed to come because novelty and imagination of novelty is no longer in the minds of individuals today.

However, Fisher saw that there is another way to go. He formulated a concept of hauntology which was modified from Jacques Derrida’s concept of hauntology. Hauntology is a future (which does not/yet come) that haunts the present and is not a nostalgia of the past. In the context of (economic-)political system, Fisher stated:

“What should haunt us is not the *no longer* of actually existing social democracy, but the *not yet* of the futures that popular modernism trained us to expect, but which never materialized. These spectres – the spectres of lost futures – reproach the formal nostalgia of the capitalist realist world.”[8]

The state of non-imagination about the future is an objective condition of the present. But there are potential fragments from the past that can be reflected, formulated, and rearranged to invite the future back.

Reissue releases by Indonesians independent record labels can be viewed as a part of attempts of excavating past elements in order to project the future. Reissue releases from these three labels present not only recorded media but also liner-notes, photographic archives and other supporting archives such gig poster documentation and promotional posters.

Liner-notes in these releases wrote various things: stories about creative process, social, political, economic, and cultural conditions that became the background at the time of the album was being composed, as well as personal stories that often praise and evaluated the albums [13]. Presence of archives and liner-notes do not place audiences to become passive consumers. There is explanations about context, narratives, reflection upon releases brought back and past artifacts in the form of photographic archives and gig posters.

The presence of reissue with all its companions is an escavational effort in presenting potential fragments from the past to be used as fuel to pick up the future. In celebrating the releases of the reissues, these three labels also hosted a discussion between labels, musicians (if they are still alive) and the audiences for dialogues and they were trying to regain creative potentials that were scattered in past music records.

## 5 Conclusions

The presence and development of technologies have been changing the style of music ecosystem significantly, but also were opening up opportunity for new practices. In reissue, technology, the past, and nostalgia are closely related and, consciously or not, have an impact on people’s personal lives. This linkage can be utilized for developing music ecosystem and, even, culture at large. A critical attitude in being a consumer becomes the

main weapon in consuming reissued music. Understanding the context, actively enjoying, and reflecting on each reissued music becomes crucial in an effort to excavate the potentials scattered in past cultural products.

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