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Reframing Auteurism: Bront Palarae's Interstitial Authorship and the Critical Transnationalism of Nusantara Cinema

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ABSTRACT

This study proposes Interstitial Authorship as a critical framework to revise conventional auteur theory, focusing on the cinematic contributions of Malaysian actor, director, and producer Bront Palarae. Palarae's career is marked by a consistent thematic imprint centered on multicultural hybridity, urban anxieties, and moral complexity that structurally transcends his primary credited roles. Utilizing a Critical Transnational Auteur Analysis methodology, the paper synthesizes Hamid Naficy's Accented Cinema (2001), postcolonial critique (Shohat & Stam, 2014), and Maharam's Nusantara Cinema (2020). Key films, including One Two Jaga (2018) and Stone Turtle (2022), serve as primary case studies. The analysis demonstrates that Palarae's consistent vision and strategic use of the producer role establish an interstitial mode of production (Naficy, 2002). By championing marginalized narratives and resisting ethnonationalist frameworks, his filmography exemplifies critical transnationalism within the emerging Southeast Asian Auteur Wave. The study concludes by formalizing Interstitial Authorship as a vital critical category for understanding collaborative, hybrid cultural production in the Global South.

Keywords: Interstitial Authorship; Auteur Theory; Nusantara Cinema; Critical Transnationalism; Malaysian Cinema; Cultural Hybridity; Bront Palarae

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of Malaysian cinema necessitates a critical re-evaluation of authorship. Traditional Auteur theory privileges the director as the singular creative force (Sarris, 1962), a definition inadequate for analyzing figures like Bront Palarae, whose influence as an actor and producer consistently defines the thematic and aesthetic outcome of his projects. This paper introduces Interstitial Authorship to define Palarae's unique position: an authorial figure who operates within the system, utilizing strategic collaboration and production control to imprint a uniform, critical vision across diverse films (Naficy, 2002). This vision, preoccupied with hybridity, moral ambiguity, and social critique, resists restrictive ethnonationalist framings and instead embraces the Nusantara framework (Maharam, 2020), which views Southeast Asia through shared archipelagic motifs like merantau (mobility/sojourning). The study argues that Palarae's body of work including One Two Jaga, Fly By Night, and Stone Turtle functions as a defining example of critical transnationalism, demanding a methodological approach that accounts for this collaborative and cross-cultural complexity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis confirms the validity of the Interstitial Authorship hypothesis through three principal

findings: Structural Control via Production: The case of One Two Jaga proves that Palarae's influence is structural. His active role as producer ensured the film's critical focus on corruption and marginalized immigrant communities, demonstrating the interstitial mode of production (Naficy, 2002) by navigating institutional hurdles (police approval, censorship) to bring politically sensitive narratives to mainstream Malaysian cinema (Palarae & Nam Ron, 2018). Aesthetic Consistency and Thematic Depth: A formal analysis of Fly By Night and Stone Turtle demonstrates a consistent visual language regardless of the director (Woo Ming Jin or Zahir). This shared aesthetic characterized by subdued atmosphere, low-key lighting, and psychological depth serves as the emotional rendering of Palarae's thematic preoccupation with moral ambiguity and urban alienation. This places his work in dialogue with the emerging Southeast Asian Auteur Wave, alongside figures like Dain Said and Joko Anwar, who prioritize aesthetic sophistication to achieve critical socio-political critique (Hamzah, n.d.; Based.Indo, 2024). Critical Transnationalism: Palarae's filmography fundamentally contributes to the Nusantara framework. By focusing on motifs of displacement, hybrid identity, and the ambiguous status of non-citizens (Stone Turtle's Indonesian protagonist), his work actively challenges the historical push for ethnonational purity in Malay cinema (Ramlee, 2020), instead asserting a cosmopolitan, critical regional identity (Maharam, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Bront Palarae's cinematic career represents a pivotal case study for understanding authorial influence in collaborative, transnational contexts. His demonstrated Interstitial Authorship exerted through strategic production, consistent aesthetic imprinting, and a commitment to critical socio-political discourse successfully links local cultural complexity with regional and global cinematic trends. By asserting the validity of the Producer-Auteur model in the Global South, this research provides the necessary critical framework for analyzing collaborative authorship and strengthens the position of Nusantara cinema in contemporary film studies.

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