

# ‘Tragedy’ and Space of Commemoration: An Inquiry to Semanggi Tragedy’s Significance on Jakarta’s Urban Space

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## ABSTRACT

A City does not only exist with its physical feature but also with its intangible thing within it, including the people’s memory. Our memory, either it is delightful or unpleasant, plays a role in molding our perception about our environment. Meanwhile, we also tend to build something—to construct our environment—for commemorating significant events. Regarding this phenomenon, this paper aimed to understand how a tragic event affects urban space by examining conceptions of “tragedy” and “absential feature” and their relation to space of commemoration. As a reflection of the conceptual inquiry, this paper analyzed how Semanggi Tragedy, which had happened on 1998-1999, affected Jakarta’s urban space. The study showed that the tragedy brought ‘absence’ that urges people to create a tangible feature to response their grief, loss, and hopes. Semanggi’s physical development—as a way to move on—only emphasizes the ‘absence’ of the tragedy and does not stop people not to forget it.

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Keywords: absential feature, 1998 riots, semanggi tragedy, space of commemoration, urban conflicts

## 1. Introduction

A City does not only exist with its physical feature but also with its intangible thing within it, including the people’s memory. Our memory, either it is delightful or unpleasant, plays a role in molding our perception about our environment. Meanwhile, we also tend to build something—to construct our environment—for commemorating significant events. To remember is an act that we often do in reacting on the loss of our loved ones. The absence of someone, which is usually present around us, sometimes urges us to recall past events to feel a glimpse of his or her existence. Related to this action, Heidegger [1] once wrote that human mainly lived by passing through three time dimensions altogether: (1) looking to the future as an act of anticipation, (2) looking back to the past for evaluating, and (3) actualizing decisions, which was made by regarding the future and the past, in present time. In this

sense, to remember is not merely to be nostalgic but also to feel ‘emptiness’ that does and will continually exist. It also means that remembering is a personal act since each individual’s experience is different.

Nevertheless, there is one thing that everyone needs in remembering his or her precious ones, regardless of how personal the act is: a particular space that gives them chances to do it. To recognize someone who has passed away in a specific moment is not only about reminiscing but also about being empathic to others who experience the similar grief. It is not surprising that the space for remembering can infiltrate the public realm with particular narration. For example, many memorials and cemeteries are built as parts of a cityscape. Richard Etlin in his book titled *A Symbolic Space* [2] generally called them and other kinds of space for remembering as “space of absence.” It is a void that has a strong message:

the absence of ‘the absent ones’ (Etlin focused on memorials for certain cadavers). It presents within “the aura of the monument.” He also categorized and explained about ‘space of absence’ by giving architectural examples, such as mausoleum, memorial, et cetera. In other words, Etlin argued that particular objects were capable in projecting memories, which had basically lingered in each individual’s mind, while they were emitting certain spatial quality to ones who did not have a specific memory about them so that they could still ‘feel’ it.

Regarding Etlin’s writing, I think it is intriguing to know that someone’s absence can encourage people to construct specific materials or objects to create a ‘space of absence.’ Even though bereavement and remembering are personal, we somehow need to bring it to the public realm through symbolic materials. This phenomenon drives me to examine commemorating process in urban space, especially when an unforgettable tragic event happened and became a piece of collective memory.

According to Halbwachs, collective memory is about how an individual’s thoughts collaborate with the society [3]. A collective memory is not only a narration from one individual to another, but society also constructs it. Discussion about collective memory is often related to urban identity as it is usually used for maintaining value from past events. Hugo von Hofmannstahl even wrote that our ancestors inherit a collective memory that would attach to our culture [4]. Nonetheless, as the discussion went further, the examination of collective memory found that it had a soft side that was easily affected by the present event [5].

For further elaboration, I will use Semanggi Tragedy as an example. Semanggi Tragedy refers to two incidents after 1998 riots (due to Indonesia’s monetary crisis) that specifically happened at Jakarta’s Semanggi Junction. The incidents were responses on Special Session of the Parliament at the end of New Order regime.

At that time, I was too young to understand the 1998 riots. I remember there were pillage and uproar at a shopping center near my school and I had to go home earlier than usual. My family was also strained. My father who was a policeman had not come back for days, and my grandmother begged my uncle who was a college student not to join the protestors. I realized that something was frightening out there, but I did not know what exactly had happened. Needless to say, my memory about it is different from other witnesses’ or the victims’. Nonetheless, all of the memories unite each individual into the tragic event.

Although each individual has his or her response and opinion about Semanggi Tragedy, people still need clarification and justice for it. Since the New Order regime fell, news and articles about the riots’ prosecution have been published almost every year. In 2012, Kompas reported that since 2002 Jaksa Agung had not yet responded Komisi Nasional HAM’s investigation report on human right violation during the riots. Jaksa Agung did not even consider a verdict of Mahkamah Konstitusi (MK) No. 18/PUU-V/2007 about the human right judicial review to promptly enforce the law on the riots [6] Meanwhile young generations, who did not directly experience the riots or were not born yet, hardly realize the damage or devastation of Semanggi Tragedy. Blurry information and time gaps make the purpose of remembering and commemorating it unclear. In this sense, collective memory about the riots or Semanggi Tragedy is not static because it depends on current context.

Yet, Semanggi Tragedy has infiltrated our urban space with its site: Semanggi Intersection area. Every year on May and November, students from many universities march on Jakarta’s protocol streets, including around Semanggi Intersection. By marching on the road, the students remind public and government about the riots.

The tendency for ‘inheriting’ collective memory and commemorate it, despite the truth is vague, propelled me to know how a tragic event affects urban space. I chose Semanggi Tragedy as a case study since the event had happened at the center of Jakarta where it naturally became a contested public space. Although the 1998 riots was a national incident, Semanggi Intersection was the main ‘arena’ where the battles between people and government over reformation occurred. Moreover, looking over to its history, Semanggi Intersection has ‘witnessed’ most of Jakarta’s developments since Indonesia’s independence. Examining a tragic event that happened in this intersection would also give the illustration of how Jakarta reacted on it.

## 2. Material and Methods

The purpose of this study was to understand how a tragic event affects urban space. It needed a theoretical lens to examine the phenomenon. Thus, this paper used a qualitative method. According to Crosswell, a qualitative inquiry often use theories as lens o perspectives as “they shape the type of questions asked, informs how data are collected and analyzed and provides a call for action or change” [7]. This paper also examined some literature to sharpen my perspective on inquiring impacts of a tragic event in urban space. To get in-depth understanding, I used a case study—Semanggi Tragedy—as a reflection of the literature examination. I collected mapping data of Semanggi and interviewed some correspondents who witnessed and experienced the tragedy and described my analysis.

## 3. Results and Discussions

### 3.1 Conceptual Inquiry of ‘Tragedy’ and Space of Commemoration

#### 3.1.1 A Glimpse of ‘Tragedy’

We usually use “tragedy” as a term that describes a devastating event. Nevertheless, tracing to its etymological definition, “tragedy”

does not only about that. The term is from two Greek words, which are “trogos” that means “goat” and “oide” that means “song” [8]. Although it is not clear what “goat” refers to or means, “tragedy” assumingly refers to a satire that was played by an actor who is in a goat costume. The term indeed referred to a play with an unhappy ending in 14th Century [9]. Its meaning eventually changed into a heartbreaking event, such as a catastrophe, in the 15th Century.

Relating to that facts, Aristotle once said:

“Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action of serious stature and complete, having magnitude, in language made pleasing in distinct forms in its separate parts, imitating people acting and not using narration, accomplishing by means of pity and fear the cleansing of these states of feeling” [10].

It is obvious that what Aristotle meant was about tragic plays in Old Greek myths. His statement showed some points: (1) tragedy as a play that thoroughly mimics an important act has to be dramatic to emphasize its meaningful role; (2) tragedy also contains incidents that trigger pity and fear on its spectators by using accurate and intriguing words; (3) tragedy can elicit emotional nuance too, with catharsis of all sadness and fear as its ending (the catharsis is often presented by the main character that eventually receives enlightenment from the tragic incidents). These three points tell that ‘tragedy’, for Aristotle, is about giving fearful and distressing nuance as the roles’ actions in responding to an important situation so that the audience can learn from it.

The above explanation also means that the dynamics of “fear” and “pity” from a tragedy can give the spectators the aesthetical experience that they can emotionally be swayed. For example, Kierkegaard, who used

his pseudonym, Johannes de Silentio, in *Fear and Trembling*, ‘admits’ that tragic story of Abraham, who was a father that sacrificed his son to show his faith in God, had made him “paralyzed”:

“...when I have to think of Abraham, I am as though annihilated. I catch sight every moment of that enormous paradox which is the substance of Abraham's life, every moment I am repelled, and my thought in spite of all its passion cannot get a hair's-breadth further. I strain every muscle to get a view of it - that very instant I am paralyzed.” [11].

Similar to what Kierkegaard had felt, impacts of horror incidents, in reality, can scare or depress the witness. The emotional experience that they think makes them call the incident or event as “tragedy.” Needless to say that “tragedy,” in this condition, does not refer to a play. It possibly occurs from an ‘event’ that distracts their routines or habits. The ‘event’—a situation that is not attached by time continuity as if it stops in a particular moment [12]—imprints into their mind and gives a chance to its witness or experiencers for valuing it.

Meanwhile, an ‘event,’ that is considerably tragic affects human’s emotion and makes ‘tragedy’ inevitably commemorated. There is a particular ‘absence’ that occurs from the disturbing moment. It urges the need of space and objects to do commemoration. How ‘absence’ does it will be explained in the following section.

### 3.1.2 *‘Absence’ that Creates ‘Absential Feature’*

Deacon in *Incomplete Nature: How Mind Emerged from Matter* mentioned the role of ‘absence’ in giving awareness about an intangible thing. Deacon explained that there is an ‘absential’ feature, a phenomenon which its

essence of absence precedes its physical existence. We do not empirically sense it, but it is attached to what we experience with our senses. We cannot fully understand the world’s value that we experience without ‘absential’ feature. For example, when we wave our hand to our colleague. Its aim is not to move our fingers gracefully toward our colleague, but to get a chance for socializing and sharing. The chance or possibility—of purposes that have not been achieved yet, of function that does not necessarily work, of value, et cetera—is called ‘absential’ feature. Deacon also emphasized it through his statement below:

"Without this “something” missing, they would just be plain and simple physical objects or events, lacking these otherwise curious attributes. Longing, desire, passion, appetite, mourning, loss, aspiration—all are based on an analogous intrinsic incompleteness, an integral withoutness" [13]

‘Absential’ feature occurred as something that we do not find in nature. Thus, creating a difference in a certain steady order is the nature of ‘absential’ feature. Our tendency as a human being is to keep bringing it into physical existence by metaphorically expressing it or creating another rule to generate a new order. Number zero (0), which is also a paradox, is one of the examples. The number symbolizes ‘without value’ but generates the new chapter of calculation after nine (9). Even though it does not contain quantity, zero becomes the carrier of other numbers to bring them into bigger quantity numbers (1, 10, 100, and so on). Deacon mentioned the nature of ‘absential’ feature is as a “placeholder” since the network of one space to another won’t occur without it. For example, zero can change one (1) into ten (10) just by existing next to it. Without zero, the paradigm of calculation from one to nine would not be shifted.

From the previous explanation, we know that ‘absence’ is a characteristic that triggers the emergence of ‘absential’ feature—a more sensible feature. Meanwhile ‘absence’ is also noticed when something that (physically) exists is suddenly absent. It occurs to me that the absence of ‘absential’ feature emphasizes its essence like how zero materializes null. Conception about null had might been ‘felt’ since long time ago, but its absence had not been realized until arrangement of roman numeral reached its limit. At this point, the absent null urges the need-of-zero as ‘absential’ feature. In other words, ‘absential’ feature occurs in a material when the need of its essence takes place.

Regarding the previous explanation about ‘tragedy,’ ‘absential’ feature in this situation can be messages or impressions that arise after tragic events happened. In fact, we often entitle them to “tragedy” because there is an ‘absential’ feature that pushes us to do so. The absence of the overwhelming event gives the witness or spectator pause and awareness that what they just experienced was tragic.

As Aristotle mentioned about catharsis in every tragedy, ‘absential’ feature in a tragic event can be enlightenment for spectators because the absent—no longer exists—event gives a lesson and new aim. Aristotle also wrote about hamartia or guilt and eudaimonia or new potential happiness in his explanation about tragedy [14]. Both constructs ‘absential’ feature of a ‘tragedy’ because in almost every tragic event there is always an issue about who is to blame and willingness to not letting it happen again—to have a happier ending.

Every form of ‘absential’ feature also attaches the spectators’ memory of the tragic event. Messages and impression, which has occurred from tragic events, demand space for remembrance. Sometimes we make particular objects to remind us of the ‘tragedy’ and emphasize its space of commemoration. How a

city accommodates, it will be explained in the next section.

### 3.1.3 *City, Collective Memory, and Comemorating Space?*

The problem of commemorating ‘tragedy’ in a city is not detached from a discussion about memory. Schudzon once wrote,

“there is no such thing as individual memory...memory is social. It is social because it is located in institutions rather than in individual human minds in the form of rules, laws, standardized procedures, and records, a whole set of cultural practices through which people recognize a debt to the past...”[15].

For Schudzon, memory basically operates through social interactions and cultural artifacts. Memory often occurs as responses of social stimulation. For example, when a Christian passed away, his or her family will give a particular speech to other relatives as a form of commemorating. This ritual creates a kind of cooperative activity in remembering the deceased. His or her image becomes a ‘new’ memory through the spoken speech.

At the same time, memory can also appear because of a sign—a cultural artifact—that is designed and constructed to preserve it. Museum, books, records and other documentaries ‘save’ memories into objects that connect people to past time. This also means that memory is constructed in the artifacts. Therefore, what we remember through it is not only about what we purely remember but also about what the artifact ‘wants’ to tell us.

In relation to the above explanation, it is arguably to say that our memory, which is tententiously constructed by culture, makes our act of commemoration not personal. The action can infiltrate public space because memory has never been shackled only in one individual’s

mind. The gap in between ‘something that once existed’—in this case, ‘tragedy’—eases the memory is distorted. We never know how, in details, an event happened. This is memory’s fragility, which makes it easily molded into a new illustration.

Memory distortion also makes (collective) memory socially functions as a value construct, which is as fragile as the memory itself. One of the examples that show this phenomenon is Taman Makam Pahlawan Nasional Utama Kalibata (Kalibata National Heroes Cemetery) that constructs heroic values in Indonesia’s independency nuance. Soon or later the nuance gradually vanishes and the noble values in heroes of Indonesia’s struggle in independence fade as the conception of heroes in society shift.

In urban design realm, it is crucial to observe the relation between perception and urban physical feature, including buildings that contain memories like Taman Makam Pahlawan Nasional Kalibata. Lynch mentioned that a city needs ‘sense’ dimension, which is a basic component in satisfying the emotional needs of its [16]. ‘Sense’ dimension also contains reality that human has a limit in perceiving information. It is also undeniable that meanings in urban physical feature shift or change. Meanwhile, there is ‘significance’ that is rooted in human’s perception. It is an ingrained component that symbolizes the life cycle, historical moments, social structure and people’s culture in a city. ‘Significance’ is palpably formed if cultural artifacts are always able in narrating stories about the civilization of a city.

On the other hand, Carmona also wrote almost similar to Lynch's inquiry on ‘sense’ dimension. Carmona named it “perceptual dimension” that triggers our sense to mold perceptions toward urban space. Carmona wrote, “the ‘environment’ can be considered as a mental construct, an environmental image created and valued differently by each

individual rather than being simply a biological process, perception is also socially and culturally ‘learned’”[17]. In other words, we need to observe the relation between cultural artifacts (including urban physical feature) and a human who consider it as a trigger of memories’ appearance. The reason is human’s perception depends on the physical and non-physical environment.

At this point, I can briefly conclude how tragedy affects space of commemoration in an urban context. “Tragedy” that entitles a considerably tragic ‘event’ gives a particular impression because of its ‘absence.’ The impression is also called as ‘absential’ feature. It can be a catharsis, guilt, and loss, and a new aim as responses of the ‘tragedy’’s destructions. ‘Absential’ feature intangibly attaches anyone who witness or experience ‘tragedy’ to memory about it. Thus, we tend to commemorate in responding to the event.

Needless to say that the act of commemoration is personal since the experiencer or witness of the ‘tragedy’ has his or her memory about it. Nevertheless, to remember or to recall memory has its fragility since the ‘tragedy’ no longer exists—creates a gap that potentially shifts his or her memory. In other words, memory, which is also preserved through a particular material or cultural artifact, is easily constructed by society. Therefore, we often use “collective memory” as terms that justify an event that is considered significant for society. At this point, commemorating insinuates public space and contains considerable role in urban design.

### *3.2 Semanggi: the Tragedy and Its Current Condition*

To have a deeper understanding of how a ‘tragedy’ affects urban space, I examined Semanggi as the location or site where unforgettable conflicts, Semanggi Tragedy, happened. In this section, I firstly described Semanggi’s spatial and historical context and

continued to elaborate details of the tragedy and its conditions after that.

The word “Semanggi” is used by people at Jakarta to mark an area around a huge intersection with elevated highways, which is administratively located at the border of South Jakarta and Central Jakarta. Semanggi Intersection has been a busy traffic node since it connects both one part of Jakarta with another and Jakarta with its outside area. Nevertheless, its role is more significant than a small connector. As one of the strategic nodes in Jakarta, Semanggi Intersection has represented Jakarta’s progress from time to time.

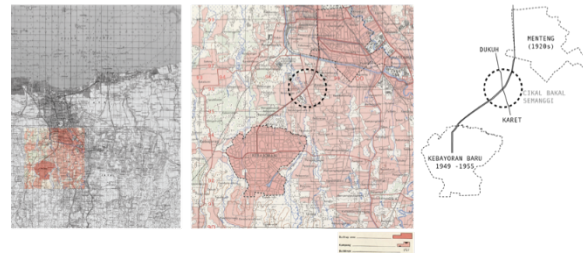


Source: (Hendola F, 2013)

Figure 1: Semanggi and Jakarta’s Satellite Cities

In the 1950s there was only a crossroad without elevated highways at Semanggi area. The crossroads connected Kebayoran with Menteng and Dukuh with Karet (Figure 2). It possibly occurred as an impact of a new development at Kebayoran Baru that had begun since 1949 and had been followed by housing developments at Grogol, Tebet, and Pejompongan [18]. At that time the intersection had not been built yet and kampung—settlements that rapidly grow until there is no space except for houses [19]—still

existed.



Source: (Hendola F, 2013)

Figure 2: Semanggi Military Map, 1959

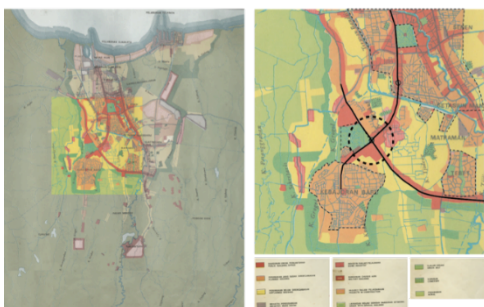
The crossroad had been nothing but four ways connected until it became more monumental than before in the 1960s. In 1962, Jakarta was chosen to be the host of Asian Games and Games of the Newly Emerging Forces (GANEF). With discourses about nationalism and proudness of being independent, Soekarno—president of Indonesia at that time—initiated to build some facilities in order to organize the event uneventfully. His initiations included Gelora Senayan sports complex, Hotel Indonesia, and Semanggi Intersection to connect both of them. Soekarno wanted the route in between Hotel Indonesia and Senayan as a ‘gallery’ where Indonesia’s glorious and modernity could be shown off. As an impact of Soekarno’s desire, public buildings, offices, and housings were planned to replace kampung near Semanggi Intersection (according to Jakarta’s Master Plan 1965, Figure 4.)



Source: (Hendola F, 2013)

Figure 3: Semanggi and Gelora Senayan, 1964





Source: (Hendola F, 2013)  
Figure 4: Semanggi Map, 1965

As New Order began to gain its power, Semanggi was not only a part of Indonesia's modern progress but also an essential location for business and commercial. Jakarta Planning Atlas 1975 (Figure 5) shows that Semanggi Intersection was considered as the main road with commercial buildings built around it. Even though the plan demanded a dedicated business area, informal street vendors still occurred at Semanggi and even at Gelora Senayan. At the other side, development in Grogol, Tebet, and Cempaka Putih had spread. Both facts emphasize Semanggi Intersection's role as a strategic commercial point and a connector.



Source: (Hendola F, 2013)  
Figure 5: Semanggi Map (Jakarta Planning Atlas), 1975

In the early 1980s, there were development and expansion in satellite cities around Jakarta, such

as Bogor, Tangerang, and Bekasi [20]. Semanggi then became a node that tied those cities with Jakarta. Unsurprisingly its highway became crowded as the number of vehicles passing it was increasing. In 1995 skyscrapers, such as Wisma GKBI Tower and Bursa Efek Indonesia building, were built while erecting tall or significant architectural object is a part of a global economic phenomenon in this era. Kusno wrote that highways and skyscrapers were a representation of economic progress, which could make the user glaring the city's view from a higher level [21]. Semanggi's image became different from it used to be in Soekarno's era. It changed from focusing on putting "Jakarta on the map of world cities" [22] to the emerging of private sectors through skyscrapers.

What happened to Semanggi Intersection from Soekarno's era to Soeharto's indicates how post-colonial discourse appears in urban design. Jakarta's developments, as shown by the above explanations, cannot be detached from both presidents' desire to create the modern image of Indonesia to the world. As Soekarno wanted to display Semanggi Intersection's surrounding to international realm, Soeharto aspired to "ensure fluidity of the global and national economies" by constructing high-rise buildings [23], such as developments around Semanggi. Nonetheless, the desire to be developed was followed with a contradictory condition. Since its independence, Indonesia has not been apart from squalor issue. Jakarta as its capital city has been considered as a place where there are many (economic) opportunities. In the 1950s, it triggered massive population expansion without cautious planning. The impact was lack of employment, traffic congestion, poor housing and social facilities [24]. Nevertheless, Soekarno thought to build modern urban spectacle was necessary for people's pride instead of reducing the problems. Urban duality, then, became a usual view in Jakarta, including around Semanggi. Informal sectors



were spreading (as explained above from the map) near modern buildings. Here, Semanggi Intersection became a significant urban space that was developed to represent each regime's notion. Yet, at the same time, it could not detach from class segregation.

In 1998-1999, triggered by the monetary crisis at that time, riots happened at Jakarta. It was started with students protest on May 12, 1998, to end the New Order regime. They demanded reformasi—reformation—of Indonesia's government. At that time, security forces did not allow them to march to National Parliament building. By the dawn, a savage riot happened which led to death of some students and massive violence toward ethnic Chinese. This tragedy did not stop the students to occupy the parliament a week after that, followed with Soeharto's resignation.

Although Soeharto already stepped down, a riot happened again in November 1998. At this time, students wanted to reject a special session of the new assembly and demanded to put Soeharto in the trial, but their requests were not granted. The students kept on protesting and gathering at Semanggi as Atmajaya University became their basecamp. The base camp was strategic because it was near security's boundary (2 kilometers radius from National Parliament building) and linked to the center of Jakarta, including to Istana Merdeka, via Sudirman road. In the evening, after the session finished, security forces resorted to violence against the protestors. This incident has given a different meaning of Semanggi Intersection as urban space: an arena of battling people's rights.

### *3.2.1 Semanggi Tragedy's Impacts on Jakarta's Urban Space*

Lynch's conception about 'sense' dimension is not only mentioning roles of the urban physical feature. 'Sense' as an evocative dimension is also related to 'event' in a city. 'Sense of event' occurs in a city through eventual or temporary

occasion that interrupts habits, such as music concert, historical day celebration, or even conflicts or riots. In this case, Semanggi Tragedy is the 'event' that also constructs 'sense' dimension in Jakarta.

In 1998, people marched and protested on the street to bring New Order regime down. Meanwhile, military forces such as Republic of Indonesian National Police (POLRI) and Indonesian National Armed Force (TNI) were trying to control the protestors. Because of some provocation, both sides attacked each other. Nonetheless, this tragic event was not only about people's struggles in taking New Order regime fall. As I previously mentioned, it was also a chaotic situation for Chinese as a minority ethnic. People blamed the Chinese for the monetary crisis and even sexually harassed the women. The trauma has deeply imprinted in people's mind. The complex motives of the tragedy created a fuzzy image of what had happened at that time.

As I stated before, Semanggi Tragedy was related to Trisakti Incident. In May 1998, students and intellectuals demanded the resignation of Soeharto. According to a former student of Trisakti who often shares about the incidents, there was an intense issue about the regime and monetary crisis that had been discussed by other universities' students. To show their concern on those issues, Trisakti students protested at the campus' parking lot, in front of Syarif Thayeb building. The protest continued with their willingness to march to National Parliament building. However, military forces only allowed them protesting until 4 pm.

The situation heats up as the sun almost set. A riot occurred in front of the West Jakarta's mayor office, which triggered Trisakti students—who had already been in the campus after the protest—to march on the street. As if the urgency to 'discipline' the protestors got more significant, the military forces used their

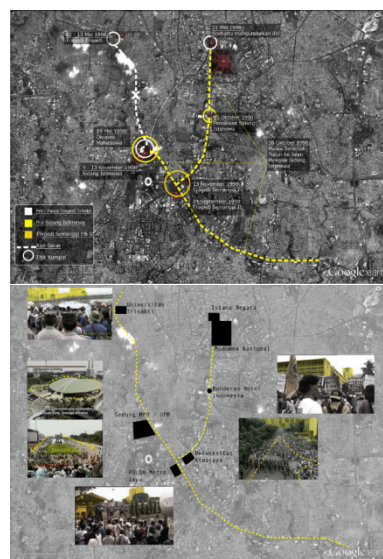
weapon to take control. According to an informant, even though students were already at the campus, some military force still chased and shot their bullets toward the students.

Meanwhile, plunders and sexual violations happened everywhere in Jakarta and even in other cities. The incidents that took approximately two days made four students and hundreds of civilians killed. A week after that, the students occupied National Parliament building. On May 21, 1998, Soeharto declared, "I decide to resign."

Although Soeharto was no longer president of Indonesia, the turmoil did not stop. In Youth Pledge Day on October 28, 1998, Jakarta's protocol roads were full of protesting people. So were the main streets in other cities [24]. At that time Habibie had replaced Soeharto as president of Indonesia, but not everyone agreed with his position. Some people thought that Habibie's government was not different with New Order regime and would only be its continuation. The protestors screamed about the rejection of the parliament's Special Session. On November 13, 1998—the last day of the Special Session—a riot happened, and it was not less chaotic than Trisakti Incident.

In order to anticipate riots during the Special Session, the military forces put barricades at three essential points around Semanggi Intersection: road to National Parliament building that was in front of Hotel Sultan, road that connects the intersection to Pancoran, and under Semanggi bridge which was located in front of POLDA Metro Jaya (Jakarta Regional Metropolitan Police). The barricades placement was not for a random reason. It would ease them in controlling protestor not to get inside the intersection. Nevertheless, riots still heat up after the session finished. They reached its climax at Semanggi when a gas station near a park exploded. As Semanggi has been one of the most strategic points that connect Jakarta to

its surrounding, the explosion stopped traffic and distribution around that time.



Source: (Hendola F, 2013)

Figure 6: Chronology of Semanggi Tragedy and Conditions in each Gathering Point

Some correspondent whom I interviewed saw Semanggi Tragedy as the peak of previous incidents that had indicated the regime's shifting. A riot once had happened on July 27, 1996. Since that, Indonesia's governmental condition had not been stable. According to a correspondent who works as a policeman, since the 1996 riot, he and his colleagues got many duties on securing and negotiating with potential protestors to prevent riots. What had happened in Semanggi Tragedy, for him, was an act of military forces based on awry commands.

In an article of Tempo May 25, 2003, dr. Lie Dharmawan, who is famous for his voluntary actions in serving unfortunate people, said that there were many rape victims during 1998-1999 riots that did not get any stewardship from the government [25]. Meanwhile, most of them are reluctant to report it to the police, even up to know, because they are afraid of getting reprisals [26]. The stigma about Chinese still exists while their trauma still lingers.

Both short statements explained that behind the battles between people and military forces, the incidents were more problematic. Despite the heroic narration about reformation, there was a complexity, which makes Semanggi Tragedy not only about people's rage. Semanggi Tragedy had brought the absence of something that usually exists through death and trauma from the riots. This was not only happened to victims and their relatives but also to a whole nation who witnessed the event or heard about it.

Like 'tragedy' conception that I previously explained, Semanggi Tragedy also contained 'absential' that similar to Aristotle's 'tragedy': guilt, catharsis, and a new aim for the happy ending. Semanggi Tragedy is considered as a tragic event without an enclosure. People still try to know who is the one to blame or guilty for it. Both trauma and loss make each individual fused into a society that fully aware of the historic days. Memory about it is inevitably being preserved and shoot out to the public realm. People have still protested and demanded justice for it until now. At the same time, Semanggi Tragedy's chaos also brought a new opportunity to construct an ideal government.

On the other hand, Semanggi Tragedy also left 'traces' that have still been related to Jakarta's people's everydayness. Sudirman Road and Inner Ring Road, for example, are two daily-used Jakarta's main roads. Their function changed when the tragedy took place. Protestors use it as a space for shouting their aspiration. It is not surprising that years later the roads become one of the historian sites to remember Trisakti incidents and Semanggi Tragedy. A desire to maintain the memory makes the roads and other buildings that still exist until now—such as Gelora Bung Karno, Hotel Sultan, GKBI Building, and Atmajaya University—operate as 'absential' feature. Either people realize about it or not, the 'traces'

of Semanggi Tragedy can be reminders about its nuance.

### 3.2.2 *Semanggi Now: New Narrations to Forget?*

After the Reformation, Semanggi remains being developed. In the last decade, the number of built skyscrapers around Semanggi is increasing. Plaza Semanggi is probably the first significant post-reformation development at Semanggi. This commercial building surrounds the older one, Balai Sarbini (built in the 1960s) and creates different nuance around the highway. In 2004 a bus rapid transit system, Transjakarta, also started to operate and created a new image of Semanggi with its transit spots and busways. Nevertheless, traffic congestion is still an issue at Semanggi. Thus, Semanggi Interchange was built in 2017. It is a new elevated-highway circling the intersection, which is expected to solve traffic congestion around Semanggi that gets worse.



Source: (Hendola F, 2013)

Figure 7: Changes at Semanggi: New Buildings and Gas Station in 1996; Plaza Semanggi surrounding Balai Sarbini, 2006



Source: (<http://news.liputan6.com/>, retrieved on June, 2017)

Figure 8: Semanggi Interchange Under Construction

The existence of Plaza Semanggi, Transjakarta and Semanggi Interchange has made new impressions of post-reformation Semanggi. The mall noticeably gives an interruption for employees who work around Sudirman. Transjakarta and Semanggi Interchange become their transportation and access for commuting. Nonetheless, the developments have made people forget, too, about the dark history of reformation. Semanggi's new image has represented Indonesia's current government, especially in Jakarta, which is obviously different from the New Order regime. "Commercials area" and "traffic countermeasure" become new narrations of Semanggi. The consequence is narration about Semanggi Tragedy slowly fades as the new description continually distracts.

Borrowing Nietzsche's point of view [27], changes or developments that make us forget actually give an opportunity to search for the truth of a history—in this case, Semanggi Tragedy. For Nietzsche, to forget is as essential as to remember. Although the post-reformation government seems trying to forget about the tragedy, the absence of the event has brought distinct impression for some people up to this time. People at Klender, East Jakarta, do not want to let the tragedy forgotten. They built Prasasti Jarum (Needle Inscription) as a remembrance of the victims. The similar action also occurred at Trisakti University. Monument of Reformasi was constructed to remind the students about the incidents. Some communities even routinely protest and organize discussion every year as a way to "menolak lupa"—reject forgetfulness. In other words, the oblivion of Semanggi Tragedy through physical developments may only make the people more concern about it.

#### 4. Conclusion

Semanggi as one of the most prominent intersections at Jakarta has physically developed without considering the tragedy in

1998-1999. This fact makes Semanggi Tragedy as an 'unfinished' event. The tragedy gave 'wound', which is not only felt by the victims or witness, but also by the whole nation. It gave Indonesians fear and pity. It also affects Jakarta's urban space through its 'absential' feature: guilt, loss, and hopes.

At the same time, it remains unclear who is responsible for Semanggi Tragedy and other riots before reformation. As the consequences, protests for justice of 1998-1999 incidents always occur on May and November every year and some monuments, such as Monument of Reformasi and Prasasti Jarum, were constructed. It does not matter if Jakarta has rapidly developed, the tragedy has already given 'absence' that urges people to keep remembering—to not forget—by explicitly emphasize its trace in Jakarta's urban space: building monuments and doing protests around Semanggi.

#### Acknowledgement

This paper is based on several observations for my thesis that I wrote in 2012-2013. I would not make it proper without the help of Gunawan Tjahjono and Mohammad Nanda Widyarta who gave insights and time for enlightening discussions that inspired my thesis and this paper. I also thank Muhammad Damm for his wise advice on books and literature that addressed this research topic.

I would also like to show my gratitude to Universitas Pembangunan Jaya (UPJ), that supported this paper, and colleagues at architecture study program of UPJ—Eka Permanasari, Ratna Safitri, Rahma Purisari, Sahid, Aldyfra Lukman, Muhammad Mashudi—for their wise advice during this paper's writing progress.

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