The SCIENCE OF FICTIONS
Hiruk-Pikuk Si-Alkisah
A film by Yosep Anggi Noen
Indonesia/Malaysia/France
106 mins / Color & BW / DCP / Sound 5.1
Set in 1960s Indonesia, Siman is a quiet man who accidentally discovers a moon-landing shooting by a foreign crew, in a haunted and unpopulated area. Siman is caught by guards and his tongue cut off. Siman goes through life in slow-motion imitating an astronaut in outer space, labeled as crazy.
The *Science of Fictions* is a journey for the seeing eyes and the memorizing brains, set against the technological development of camera and the history of human struggle to utilize the visual allure to rule over other humans.

The film begins with iconic events of the Cold War during the 60s—from the moon landing, the coup in Indonesia, and the genocide afterward.

In the present age, Siman strives to prove his credentials as an astronaut. He builds a rocket in his backyard and lives inside it for years, as he dreams to fly to the moon someday. His fervent imagination censors his trauma.

In Siman’s village, a man in a semi-military uniform wanders around. He considers himself an important part of the nation’s history—a supreme leader, a leader of the nation—as he struggles to fit in the contemporary world with his idea of the past.

Around them, the times are changing. The dawn of modern technology fails to lead mankind toward a more dignified form of humanity. Instead, it only brings about new methods of human exploitation.

The story then expands its horizon. We witness tales from a village full of people with repressed anger. Social relationships are nothing but ego-driven affairs and exploitation are rife in every facet of the village’s social fabric.

All the world over, the march of history brings about the exploitation of people by people.

I believe cinema has transformed mankind’s perspective on reality, memory, and imagination. Nowadays technology makes it possible for every human to film their own realities. One could use a camera to record anything, anytime, anywhere—be it for innocent or devilish ends.

In the future, we do not know to what extent the make-believe world of cinema could replace reality. Maybe, one day in the future, we would only experience life as endless series of imaginations, for reality has been situated in a temple named cinema.
1. **What drew you to this story?**

I grew up in a time of changes. Growing up under Suharto’s regime, I am familiar with countless propaganda about affordable food, robust economy, democracy, freedom of the press. Eventually, like all propaganda, they all turned out to be lies. Then Suharto stepped down. People now could talk about things that were previously restricted in Suharto’s regime: democracy, freedom. As a society, Indonesia began to learn about democracy. But, way before we learn our lesson, the arrival of new technology enables people to create their own propaganda. Before, propaganda belongs to the state. Nowadays, it belongs to the people. Everybody could do it. For us, this is a lesson on our maturity to embrace this newfound freedom of expression.

Consequently, I commit lots of thoughts on the nature of fiction and its standing within these changing times. Despite the succession of regimes and transformation of society, fiction somehow prevails. Now it is being used to control public opinions.

Recently, as reported by various media, a fisherman found a naked female doll on a shore. He brought the doll to his neighbors and dressed it up with Muslim hijab, so the doll would fit within the local Islamic customs. The people considered the doll to be a fallen angel. The news soon spread through the social media networks. People flocked to the island, to visit the man who found the doll. This commotion attracted the police’s attention—not long after, they conduct their own investigation. Turned out the supposed angel is a sex doll washed up from some unknown corner of the ocean.

2. **The story begins in the 1960s. Please tell us more about the history period of Indonesia portrayed in the film.**

The 60s was a decade of political struggle. Nationalists, communists, and religious groups contested their ideologies in the public domain, in the hope of influencing the masses. The struggle peaked at 1965, when a bloody coup toppled Sukarno’s regime. Amidst the chaos, Suharto came into power. Since then, Indonesia wrote its history in blood, which include the mass killings of communists and their affiliates. Suharto’s regime also detained thousands of people without trial—they were exiled on islands in the eastern part of Indonesia.

The rise of Suharto gave way to new products of state propaganda, among them is a film that was made mandatory viewing and broadcast on public television every September. The film claims to reveal the truth behind the killings—it portrays the communists as a bunch of cruel godless traitors, and legitimizes the state’s action as an effort to save the people and unite the nation. Most people my age grew up with that version of history, with the state’s version of truth behind the 1965 event. The terror was designed in such a way to make people believe that Suharto is the answer to all the nation’s woes.

On the other hand, in the 60s, the space race was the trending topic on the global scale. Everyone was talking about it. People see the space as this promised land, some kind of dream. One day during my research, I found a piece of newspaper, New York Times, dated 1969. It was about President Nixon’s promise to give a piece of moonstone to President Soeharto, as a gift for Indonesia. The same news was also reported by Kompas, one of the major news outlets in Indonesia, on the same week.

Perhaps, stories from all over the world are connected by a common thread: power.

3. **How do you choose Siman as the main character? The protagonist seems to be portrayed in an ambiguous way.**

At the beginning, Siman is the cornerstone of the story—he moves the plot. Later, Siman serves a more passive role, as a man whose life is defined by other people’s desires and perception. I imagine Siman to be a symbol for history itself. History is never still—it is always defined by other people, to serve their own purpose, including to stay in power as long as possible. Siman is like a memory card. He experiences and remembers all these past events, yet his life is being used by other people, repurposed for various money-making schemes. Siman is unique. Yet it is because of that he is exploited by the people around him, so much that Siman loses his sense of self. Siman is a victim. The fact that he cannot speak makes his case even more pathetic.
4. Your film changes its tone and focus thoroughly after the B&W segment. What led to this approach?

Cinema allows us to play with time. This film provides me an opportunity to see time in non-chronological ways, like scattered molecules of air. In the film, some characters serve two or more roles in different parts of the story, defined by the color on screen. I work with certain cinematic dimensions in such a way, that memory and time could reside in the same duration, just like air filling up a room. I believe cinematic dimensions are like puzzles—they could be reassembled to form a peculiar image. The image may not be understood by all, but still it is an image. Any image, however impenetrable it is, has the capacity to stimulate minds and imagination.

5. How do you define the connection or distinction between your film and the genre Sci-Fi films?

Since the dawn of time, science and fiction has been challenging each other. When fiction dreams about human soaring high into the sky, science realizes it. Science discovers chemical formula, while fiction romanticizes it through music, beautiful images, and endearing love stories.

As a creator, I consider science-fiction as a delicate genre due to the limitation of budget and technology in our industry. Of course, I say this in regards to the standards set by Hollywood for science-fiction films. I try to make my own standards, my own scenario: the exploration of human’s body and mind as the intergalactic expedition toward the deep mysterious space.

I seek to explore cinematic possibilities from the simple moments I experience near my house and in my childhood memories. The television in my parent’s living room has carried my imagination deep into the collective trauma (or at least what I understood to be) that’s been simmering under a regime of violence. My film, The Science of Fictions, is my question regarding the fine line between fiction/cinema, memory/remembrance, and human body/trauma.

6. What was the biggest challenge in making the film?

I’ve been writing this film since 2012. At the time, I had trouble securing funds for production, therefore I conclude money to be the biggest challenge. However, during my struggle to secure production funds, I am surprised by the bursts in technological development and social media. Through this film, I seek to involve the current technology as part of the acting repertoire.

Recently there have been new developments in visual technology named deep fake. It allows you to combine and superimpose existing images and videos using a machine-learning technique. The result is seamless, almost real. I saw it while editing the final draft of the film. Then, for some reasons, the film I made suddenly became like an old film.

If seen, this film also tries to combine the ‘idea’ of camera technology, from celluloid cameras, high speed cameras, Go-Pro, drones, cellphone cameras, journalistic cameras. To certain extent, this film shows that the eye is a natural camera, made for storing human memories. The challenge is how to present it to a film that can later be watched comfortably, no longer as a meticulous concept but as part of the story.
History has a beginning, a middle, and an end. But not necessarily always in that order. On its own, history could never break from its own chaos. The only being powerful enough to do so is an author. Commonly, such author would be called “historian”, who writes history by negotiating the tenuous line between memory and documentation. In truth, with the right set of tools and circumstances, anybody could write history, be it a dictator or a director.

Professionally speaking, Yosep Anggi Noen is no historian. He is renowned for making narratively challenging films rather than veritable historical documents. Sure, he has touched on historical subjects before—his second feature, Solo, Solitude (2016), portrays a chapter in the life of Wiji Thukul, one of the key activists during the 1998 Reformation in Indonesia. But history is rarely the main concern for the Yogyakarta-based film director. Instead, his films often focus on moods and landscapes—his films are more situational rather than sequential, the main feature of historical narratives.

Yet, as a director, Anggi Noen is no stranger to reinterpretation of time, one quality that defines the work of any historian. His first feature, Peculiar Vacation and Other Illnesses (2012), deals with the action of two runaway lovers. The story is rather basic: a wife goes on a business trip with a man, while her husband stays home and labors away in solitude. Instead of narrating the events in a linear way, which is very possible to do so, Anggi Noen chose to jumble up the sequence. There is no clear beginning, middle, and end. We see the lovers here and there, in between moments of domestic boredom. In one scene we see the girl with her lover, in the next scene we see her with her husband—one moment is the future, another is the past.

Peculiar Vacation plays more like a memory rather than a story. It is best described as how the characters—and the director—wishes to remember the affair. By doing so, Anggi Noen plays around with the perception of time. We might experience time as a linear passage, just like we experience a movie from start to finish, yet our memories only sort and select moments that has values to us. In our heads, the past is rendered into a version that suits us best. It is rarely linear and often nonsensical—it is peculiar.

Philosophically speaking, history is never a straight line. Rather it is a collection of fleeting moments as understood from a single perspective in the present time. For the past to survive as documents of history, its remains—images, artefacts, memories—must have some sort of relevance with the author’s concerns. Anything irrelevant is in danger of disappearing forever. A historian must sort and select moments of the past, and sequence them in a way that fits the narrative that the historian wishes to convey.

In his latest feature, The Science of Fictions, Anggi Noen once again plays the role of faux-historian. This time, rather than personal histories, he takes on something bigger, something that might define an era.
Anggi Noen’s *The Science of Fictions* begins with a well-known hoax: fake moon landings. For those unfamiliar, the moon hoax is one of most widely-debated conspiracy theories ever. It even survived the Internet age. Opinion polls taken in various locations have shown around 20% of Americans, 25% of Britons, and 57% of Russians believe that the landings were faked.

There are many versions of the moon hoax, but the basic template remains the same: NASA failed to send their crew to land on the Earth’s natural satellite, so they staged the event in a film studio and broadcast the footage as “live from the Moon.” Several versions even mentioned Stanley Kubrick’s participation in the charade, presumably because the legendary director had just directed 2001: A Space Odyssey, which featured scenes on the moon with advanced special effects, one year before the landing.

*The Science of Fictions* retells the moon hoax with a local flavor. The filming of the fake moon landing happened somewhere in 1960s Indonesia and a simple villager named Siman somehow manages to witness it. The moment turns out to be historic for all the wrong reasons. For his trespassing, Siman is forced to bite his own tongue. From that day on, Siman is fascinated by space. Siman gathers scraps to build a rocket as his home and everyday he moves in slow motion, mimicking the way an astronaut moves in outer space.

Siman’s antics introduce us to a key theme of Anggi Noen’s latest feature: performativity. Robbed of his ability to speak, Siman could only gesture to communicate with the people around him. It may seem absurd, but Siman’s action mirrors how performances dictate our society. Whether through the clothes we wear, the conversations we hold or the food we eat, all are a performance designed as a signal-system to ourselves and to others of our place within our social group. Our performances—both as individuals and members of certain communities—seek to reinforce and communicate our identities in society.

On the surface, Siman’s gesture calls back toward his cinematic birth—a victim. His fascination with space is forever linked with his violent past, which renders him mute and unable to speak about his trauma to others. Instead, people see him as nothing more than a freak, an outcast. Later on, as the story progresses, Siman turns into a commodity. The rising popularity of dangdut music marginalizes a traditional dance troupe, which in turn begs help from Siman to be one of its performers. Strangeness sells, and so it proves. Once meaningful only on personal level, Siman’s gestures is now the enjoyment of many.

Siman hardly changes. He remains a faux-astronaut until the end of the film. It is the society around him that changes, and along with it the meaning of his everyday performances. Siman is hardly the only one. Residing in the same village is a world-weary general. From his gestures, we could guess that he is trying to impersonate the spirit of Indonesia’s first president and once supreme leader, Sukarno. Or, perhaps, he is Sukarno himself?

It is never made clear. Throughout the film, the general exists at least on three planes of existence. As a part of the film’s story, the general is exactly like Siman—a regular person with a peculiar obsession that eats, breathes, and walks around. Yet, in some instances, we see him on screens and televisions. Some scenes even show him live his daily moments with cameras pointed at him, creating a film-within-film situation. On the other hand, we could also see the general as mere gears of a cinematic work—he is just an actor in real life that is hired to play an actor in a reel life.

Through him, the performances in *The Science of Fictions* take on a new meaning. By impersonating Sukarno, the general ties the film’s narrative within a certain historical connotation. By employing camera as a myth-making device, the general brings up a question about the nature of history itself, one that is related to a painful chapter of Indonesia’s history.
III

What is history? To be exact, what is history in *The Science of Fictions*?

In one of his novels, Julian Barnes wrote that “history is that certainty produced at the point where imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation.” It is striking how he puts the word “certainty” in between two forces that are defined by absence and therefore could never complete each other. It seems history could always be negotiated and renegotiated, over and over again, until it reaches a satisfying point. Whatever remains of history could always be reproduced or even reinvented, until a version of the past is coherent enough to be passed as a legitimate piece of history.

Any dictator knows this malleable nature of history all too well. It could be said that every dictator lives by the same tenet, “Where history ends, memory begins.” In the dawn of his or her reign, a dictator would always enforce a rigid image of History to censor people’s memories. For Suharto in 1960s Indonesia, that History was his accusation against the communists. In public, he said the communists were not to be trusted, for they wanted to take over the government and were responsible for an alleged coup on 30 September 1965. Thus, began the mass killings—anyone affiliated with the communist party was hunt down to the last drop of blood.

To legitimate his action, Suharto turned to cinema. With the aid of the military and the state film company, his regime released several films. The most notable one is *The Betrayal of G30S PKI* (Pengkhianatan G30S PKI). Directed by legendary director Arifin C Noer, the film is presented as “the official story” behind the alleged coup. Seven generals were murdered, and out of the chaos Major General Suharto emerged to save the day. Scattered along the plot are iconic scenes that sow myths about the communists as the big bad evil—from a communist hacking a Quran in broad daylight to a group of left-wing ladies slashing captive generals with razor blades.

*Betrayal* was made mandatory viewing every 30 September. Every year since 1984, schools organized field trips to movie theaters and public television broadcast the film for the masses. The decision would only be retracted in 1998, several months after Suharto was forced to step down. But the damage has been done—millions, even generations, has been brainwashed by the film.

Ariel Heryanto, a notable intellectual, once called the myth of 1965 as the mother of all hoaxes in Indonesia. Indeed, the myth of 1965 burns ever brighter to this very day, decades after the fall of Suharto. Some sections of the population even demanded for the return of mandatory screening of *Betrayal*. More significantly, in Indonesia, the trend of myth-making using technology has become the rule of any political debates in recent years. One only needs to remember the last two presidential elections and the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election—every partisan forged their own myths in the social media and passed them around as facts.

A dictator like Suharto knows well enough that performance is power, even more so if it is facilitated by technology that could reach masses. But nowadays one doesn’t need to be a dictator to spin his or her own reality. Thanks to portable digital technology, everyone has their own stage to perform, enforce their power over others, and narrate their own history.

In this regard,*The Science of Fictions* feels relevant with today’s political moods. Almost every character is connected to some digital device—the general with the screens and cameras, Siman with smartphones used by his audience. More importantly, the film’s narrative plays around with historical facts and events almost carelessly. One moment we witness a fake moon landing, the next we see the 1965 mass killings. One is a well-known hoax; another is a well-kept secret. Yet, by sharing the same narrative, both events hold equal credibility.

In *The Science of Fictions*, history is not necessarily the lies of victors. In fact, nobody wins in the story. It’s more the memories of the survivors, all of whom are neither victorious or defeated. Through that version of history, we see our own ugly faces in today’s society.
Yosep Anggi Noen is an Indonesian film director who’s been experimenting with cinematic narratives since mid-2000s. Born in Yogyakarta on 1983, he studied Communications at the Socio-Politics Faculty of Yogyakarta’s Gadjah Mada University. After directing and producing several short films, he directed his first feature, *Peculiar Vacation and Other Illnesses* (2012), which premiered in Locarno International Film Festival. At Vancouver International Film Festival, the film received the Special Mention Award followed by the Dragon and Tiger Award for Young Cinema. His next project, a short film titled *A Lady Caddy Who Never Saw a Hole in One* (2013), won the Best Short Film at Busan International Film Festival and the the Grand Prix of Tokyo Short Shorts Film Festival. *Solo, Solitude* (2016)—his second feature—premiered in the Concorso Cineasti del Presente Competition in Locarno International Film Festival. Two years later, his short film, *Ballad of Blood and Two White Buckets* (2018), premiered in Toronto International Film Festival. His latest feature, *The Science of Fictions* (2019), will have world premiere in Concorso Internazionale of Locarno International Film Festival.
C R E W

Writer & Director: Yosep Anggi Noen
Producers: Edwin Nazir, Arya Sweta, Yulia Evina Bhara, Yosep Anggi Noen
Co-producers: Arnaud Dommerc, Robin Moran, Pinkan Veronique
Executive Producers: Raja Jastina Arshad, Najwa Abu Bakar
Associate Producers: Azlina Megat, Alea Abdul Rahim
Director of Photography: Teoh Gay Hian
Editors: Akhmad Fesdi Anggoro, Yosep Anggi Noen
Art Director: Deki Yudhanto
Make-Up & Wardrobe: Irmina Kristina
Music Director: Yasuhiro Morinaga
Sound Designers: Yasuhiro Morinaga, Hadrianus Eko, Firman Satyanegara
Sound Recordist: L.H. Aim Adinegara

C A S T

Gunawan Maryanto
Ecky Lamoh
Yudi Ahmad Tajudin
Alex Suhendra
Lukman Sardi
Rusini
Asmara Abigail
Marissa Anita
Production Company
ANGKA FORTUNA SINEMA / KAWANKAWAN MEDIA / LIMAENAM FILMS /

Co-Production Company
ASTRO SHAW / GOSTUDIO / ANDOLFI / FOCUSED EQUIPMENT /

WORLD SALES
Rediance
Email: info@rediancefilms.com
rediancefilms.com

PRODUCERS CONTACT
Edwin Nazir
Email: edwin@angkasinema.com
Phone: +62 811-1190-105
www.angkasinema.com

Yulia Evina Bhara
Email: yulaevina@gmail.com
Phone: +62812-82275-648
Kawankawan.media

Arya Sweta
Email: limaenamfilms@gmail.com
Phone: +62 812-2955-550

Co-Producer Contact
Arnaud Dommerc
Email: production@andolfi.fr
Phone: +33950652305
www.andolfi.fr