Rich kids can't cry

Reflections on the viewing subject in Bali

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Why do audiences still seem so elusive? After all, vast sums are spent on surveying, measuring, interrogating and even monitoring audiences. One problem is that the term has such diverse and contradictory referents that it resembles an empty signifier. So different theoretical frameworks define audiences in different and incommensurate ways. The outcome is a Babel of strident and conflicting claims. What additional complexities arise when we study other peoples as audiences, where presuppositions vary as to what spectacle, theatre and media do, what watching entails, and so how viewing subjects understand their experience? I draw on detailed ethnography of Balinese to examine how theatre spectators and television viewers reflect on their practices. So doing indicates how culturally and historically specific our supposedly objective and universal analytical categories are. I concentrate primarily on television audiences because the theorizing on mass media audiences raises questions about 'live' audiences and because Balinese, at least up to the 1990s often used theatre to evaluate television watching and *vice versa*. I address two questions. Why has the study of audiences proven so problematic? And what can we learn from the participants' own understandings?

A theoretical interlude

One way to think of media and performance studies is hermeneutically as the problem of the surplus of meaning, which cannot be contained at the point of production, distribution or reception. Because it is difficult to know much about how people engage with, use or ignore what they watch, much armchair theorizing is devoted to pre-interpreting the range of possible received meanings so as to circumvent undecidability and contingency. Between production and reception closure is achieved through positing devices, such as 'the text' or 'ideology' and 'interpellation' (Althusser 1971) or 'preferred readings' (Hall 1980) respectively. Crucially, each postulates the key to fixing meaning through abstractions in effect interpretable only by scholars, so neatly anticipating not only what is actually going on, but also how the participants themselves understand this. For this reason, detailed ethnographic study of production, performance and reception is less a supplement to a corpus of questionable knowledge, but a fundamental challenge. In what follows, I outline why 'the audience' is a critically useless, if necessary, fiction; and then explore some possibilities of ethnography.

To what does 'audience' refer? While spectators in theatres, concert halls and sporting venues are notionally identifiable, broadcast audiences have proven slippery. Are religious congregations, meetings, witnesses of an accident or an argument audiences? And what happens if non-manifest entities are the primary audience like Bakhtin's superaddressee (1986) or Balinese gods? What kind of object are audiences? And which properties essential, which contingent?[1] Are they

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[1] Much usage of 'audience' arguably involves at least two logical fallacies. As abstractions, labels and groups are not humans, they should not be attributed human characteristics (The Fallacy of Anthropomorphism). The Fallacy of Ambiguity is when an abstraction or hypothetical construct is treated as if it were a concrete, real event or physical entity. So any sentence intimating that audiences think, feel, enjoy are problematic. Their members of course may.

objects at all or relationships? Grotowski's definition of theatre (1968, 32) "What takes place between spectator and actor" suggests the latter. Relationships are situational, context-dependent, variously understandable by participants, so kaleidoscopic and unpindownable.[2] Should we therefore conclude that argument about audiences largely reduces to slippage between divergent usages?

The issue of reference is important. The philosopher Quine has famously argued that theories are underdetermined by evidence (1953). That is, theory is so powerful that different theories can explain any set of facts. Conversely facts are too weak fully to determine explanations. Even if the term 'audience' had an unambiguous reference, people's activities can be made to justify contradictory explanations or interpretations. So whether spectators are active or passive, agents or victims, depends in significant part on the analytical framework employed, rather than on unequivocal evidence. To complicate matters, audiences are often a means to access something else: what people, or particular social categories (the working classes, women), think or feel; how 'the text' or ideology works upon the bourgeoisie or the masses and so forth. 'Audience' means different things to different people.

Arguably therefore the audience approximates an empty signifier: what it refers to is vague, variable, non-existent, unspecifiable or unrepresentable (Barthes 1973; Baudrillard 1983; Derrida 1978, 25). Laclau has developed the notion of the empty signifier as part of his critique of society as an intelligible object. Confusion arises when attempts to fix privileged discursive points or signifiers are identified with their referents.[3] In politics, he argues that 'the people' has this status (2005, 102-7). Not only does 'the audience' have a similar status in the mass media, but more generally it is a means of trying to fix that elusive object 'the people' or 'the

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[2] To the extent that audiences are more precisely or usefully treated as relationships rather than objects, their study changes drastically. Relationships are of a different order from objects. Arguably audience is a third-order notion: that is they designate relationships between relationships (Peirce 1955). Relationships, by definition, involve at least three irreducible frames of reference: the relationship in terms of each of the parties or elements (so at least two) and as framed by an observer or analyst. There are at least four sets of relationships involved in most audiences (on audiences as relations, see also Nightingale 1996). These are:

1. the relationship of members of an audience to what they watch and *vice versa* the performers' relationship to the audience;
2. the relationship between a work, or text, and its performance;
3. the relationship of members of an audience to one another;
4. the relationship of members of the audience, and the audience as an assembly, to the situation and the contexts of performing and viewing.

I would add the relationship of members of the audience to those not present, for example those who organized the performance, those who were excluded, those to whom the event was reported.

Relationships, most obviously social relations, are inseparable from the practices through which they are constituted on specific occasions for particular purposes by given subjects. To reduce all these to a pseudo-object or element of structure is a charming, if hopeless, conceit.

My thanks are due to Richard Fox for very helpful comments on this article and for the chance to work out my thoughts with him on relational models, substance and irreducible difference over the last few years. On his analysis of complex assemblages, like the mass media, as the relationship between different kinds of practices, see Fox forthcoming.

[3] The empty signifier is one element in Laclau's radical rethinking of the ontology and epistemology of the human sciences (e.g. Laclau 1990a, 1990b, 2005; Laclau & Mouffe 1985).

masses'. The term is perhaps best used as a loose label that simply indicates a broad topic of interest.

One reason that the audiences have not appeared more problematic is a tendency to realism (Collingwood 1940, 34-48). For media industries, and their collaborators in mass communications, research is preoccupied with ratings as the standard for selling and buying the audience as a commodity. "Institutional knowledge is not interested in the social world of actual audiences; it is in 'television audience', which it constructs as an objectified category of others to be controlled" (Ang 1991, 154). Ang concluded that

> we must resist the temptation to speak about the television audience as if it were an ontologically stable Universe that can be known as such; instead, our starting point must be the acknowledgement that the social world of actual audiences consists of an infinite and ever expanding myriad of dispersed practices and experiences that can never be, and should not be, contained in any one total system of knowledge (1991, 155).

Is the problem however simply realism, which more theoretically nuanced approaches like cultural studies avoid?

> In general, the cultural studies audience research dealt with the audience-text relation as accumulation–a textual account of the audience added to a qualitative assessment of the views of the audience… Instead of placing themselves in the problematic, as is possible with relational research, and being able to act with their research participants, the researchers imagined the participants phenomenologically as 'others'–the researchers were unwittingly co-opted to the administrative ends of programme producers and government agencies (Nightingale 1996, 146-7).

Slightly modified, these arguments apply equally to the study of live performance.

> A problem of totalizing systems is that they conceive

> of society as an intelligible totality… Against this essentialist vision we tend nowadays to accept the *infinitude of the social,* that is, the fact that any structural system is limited, that it is always surrounded by an 'excess of meaning' which it is unable to master and that, consequently, 'society' as a unitary and intelligible object which grounds its own partial processes is an impossibility (Laclau 1990, 89-90).

For audiences, this excess of meaning includes, besides their conscious and unconscious thoughts and feelings, the myriad activities and practices in which each member of an audience engages before, during and after.

How do practices square with Ang's concern with context and Nightingale's with text? The difficulty with situating audiences within their social worlds is that, for every single spectator, these are so extensive as to create an ethno-methodological nightmare. 'Text' in much English language usage tends to be hypostatized and runs directly contrary to the critical use of the term by Barthes, Derrida and others, where it was opposed to 'work' as "a fragment of substance, occupying a part of the space of books" (Barthes 1977, 156-57). By contrast the notion of 'text' was designed to indicate the impossibility of fixing meaning (the infinite deferment of the signified), origin, authorship or essence. More broadly "If

the social does not manage to fix itself in the intelligible and instituted forms of a *society,* the social only exists, however, as an effort to construct that impossible object" (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 112). If the object is illusory, the subject matter of inquiry shifts to studying the practices of struggling to constitute society, works or whatever. Here that implies we are concerned not with text and context, but with textualizing and contextualizing (Hobart 1996). Contextualizing puts stress upon the epistemological practices through which people attempt to make their worlds coherent and livable, be these the researchers' or the subjects' of study. Similarly recourse to textualizing potentially avoids hypostatization by interrogating the strategies that researchers and viewers respectively use in different situations. Such an approach questions the distinctly academic image of text, which reduces not only the gamut of practices that audiences and producers engage in daily from visualizing to commenting, ignoring, judging and so forth to a bookish metaphor, but also ignores the relations of power within which they do so.

What happens if we treat media industries' and scholars' practices as ways of audience-making by representing what is underdetermined as different kinds of knowable objects or subjects? The point made by pragmatist philosophers like Goodman is the need to avoid attributing to the object of inquiry what pertains to the framework of inquiry.

> Coherence is a characteristic of descriptions, not of the world: the significant
> question is not whether the world is coherent, but whether our account is… there
> is no such thing as the structure of the world for anything to conform or fail to
> conform to (1972, 24, 31).

Audiences do not exist purely in themselves as measurable objects, imaginative subjects, passive or active, independent of the frameworks used to study them.

It may be helpful to think of descriptions, interpretations and explanations not as corresponding to some self-contained reality, but as practices of 'representing as' (Goodman 1968, 27-31). Representations then necessarily transform what they purport faithfully to portray. Instead of asking what audiences essentially are, we may inquire into who has represented whom or what as audiences–or represented audiences as what–to whom, under what circumstances, for what purposes and with what consequences, intended and otherwise. If we think of audiences as the activities in which people engage as audiences (as 'representing-as' is itself a practice), we overcome the pernicious dichotomy which hierarchizes the knowing subject (media producers, academics) as against the known ('ordinary people').

Suppose instead of asking 'what are audiences?' we ask 'when are audiences?'. So doing lessens the risk of essentializing or hypostatizing. Such questions are well suited to the fluidity with which members of audiences shift between paying attention, to reading, doodling, SMSing, chatting, napping or whatever; or in meetings people may switch between being audience and speaker; or in theatre move from spectator to being gazed at, as with Elizabethan fops sitting on stage and interrupting (Butsch 2000: 4). 'When' questions highlight how situated and contextual acting as a spectator may be, as well as being part of a directed relationship, as when someone addresses a group of people *as* an audience. In so

doing the producers and performers are articulating the relationship and terms of spectating within, or in breach of, social conventions of viewing.[4] A stress upon occasion rather than essence refuses easy summation because relationships and their constitutive practices in different contexts and situations are in no small part contingent.

Discussion of audiences often founders on confusions about agency and subjecthood. The former tends to conflate two separate registers: being relatively active or passive, and the distinction between agents, instruments and patients (Collingwood 1942).

> People do not act only as agents. They may also have the capacity to act as 'instruments' of other agents, and to be 'patients', to be the recipients of the acts of others… A person, or institution, acting as an instrument or patient may be, for his, her or its point of view, a more or less willing one. Indeed, the idea that instruments and patients are both complicit and resistant is implied in the notion of hegemony (Inden 1990, 23).

If agency, instrumentality and patiency are analytical not substantive, different parties may attribute them differently in different situations. Such representing-as itself involves agency. So describing audiences is potentially agentive. Being a patient or subject to the actions of others does not imply passivity (see Butsch 2000 on representations of British and American audiences). Audiences have little, if any, agency over broadcasting schedules or hiring of venues. That does not prevent them being highly active. So the debate over whether television audiences are active or passive (Fiske 1987, 62-83; McGuigan 1992, 124-68) confuses agency and activity. Such attributions are also situational. While Balinese theatre spectators often spoke of actors as if they had agency, actors often talked as if they were instruments rather than agents or patients depending upon the circumstances.

Audiences rarely get to speak for themselves where it matters. Privileged knowing subjects usually enunciate for them or on their behalf: that is they articulate them (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). Successful acts of articulation conversely disarticulate, marginalize and silence alternative accounts. To approach members of audiences as subjects requires addressing the "modes of objectification which transform human beings into subjects" (Foucault 1982, 208). These comprise not only those academic disciplines which objectivize subjects (here as viewing, listening or reading subjects) but also the study of "the way a human being turns him- or herself into a subject" (1982, 208). Might theatre-going or television-viewing bear on how people in different societies imagine, make or change themselves as subjects?

What can we know about other people's self-understandings without presupposing their subjectivities resemble our own? For example, Barthes'

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[4] An obvious step is to move from spectators being part of a performance to a view of them performing. This risks however stretching a broadly theatrical sense of performance to the point of vacuity. The pragmatist argument used here fits well with Judith Butler's quite different use of performativity (1993, 1994). Such an approach however requires radical rethinking of conventional categories, not least ideas of practice and the subject.

distinction (1975) between two effects of reading–*plaisir* (pleasure) and *jouissance* (bliss, ecstasy, orgasm)–is naturalized to cosmologize a bourgeois European, or academic, worldview as the self-evident poles of human experience (cf. Baudrillard 1988; Ferguson 1990). Assumptions of 'the psychic unity of mankind' (Wallace 1961) underpin not only claims to intersubjectivity, but also the catachresis that makes other societies suddenly accessible in their entirety. Among the most notorious is the dramaturgical metaphor (Ryan 1978) popularized by Turner (e.g. 1982) and reworked by Geertz for Bali, which he depicted as "a theatre state in which the kinds and princes were the impresarios, the priests the directors, and the peasants the supporting cast, stage crew, and audience" (Geertz 1980, 13). Seamlessly, the emotion among Malay peoples usually translated as shame or embarrassment, Geertz declared to be 'stage fright' in Bali (1973, 402). Balinese became not just occasional theatregoers; their entire social life and personal behaviour came to be governed by awareness of others as audience. Unfortunately, instead of asking Balinese what they were doing through theatre, he imposed a loose Western notion including a dichotomy of appearance *versus* essence in which performance implies artifice and dissimulation. By contrast, Balinese generally look to theatre for an informed, reflective and critical re-enactment of important social events. However titillating, such intellectual games foster misunderstanding of others.

Balinese as audiences

How do Balinese approach their own experience and practices as spectators? The subject and its experience are not self-evident.

> The development of the modern subject/person involves the unification of these spaces [personal, public, mythical, sacred]–without which the modern conception of a unified personality may not be possible–and then interiorization. Finally, the space of disclosure is considered to be *inside,* in the 'mind'… A view which places the space of disclosure outside of us, in real or mythical or metaphysical space, obviously puts human articulacy in the shade, gives it no important role. The articulation is seen as already there, in the structure of things. The world itself is to be understood in terms of meanings, and meaning-connections (Taylor 1985a, 277, my parentheses).

If this interiorization belongs to European history, it raises questions about how others appreciate experience. If self-consciousness or experience is "is not a primitive datum, but is rather something achieved" (Taylor 1985b, 90), under what circumstances do humans learn to experience?[5] "The problem is that people are not audiences by nature but by culture… We learn to act and to think of ourselves as audiences in certain contexts and situations" (Nightingale 1996, 147). When I attended performances during my first fieldwork, Balinese approached me to ask me whether I had yet learned to watch theatre.

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[5] For example, our experience of cinema, theatre and even television is pre-articulated for us through advertisements, trailers and other people's opinions. Indeed, our experiences are often clarified, crystallized or changed after the event through discussion, reflection and so forth.

How useful is it to approach watching or spectating as practices? For present purposes, I take it that practices are those recognized, complex forms of social activity, through which humans set out to maintain or change themselves, others or the world about them. Activity suggests taking part in a specified pursuit in which the being of the subject is not a primary consideration. As with agency and patiency, the distinction is analytical and involves differences of degree and kind. What to one person is a leisure activity, say watching television news, may to another be the practice of making yourself into a good citizen (Monteiro & Jayasankar 1994).

Through what practices have Balinese constituted themselves and one another? Unlike Europe, neither sexuality nor truth through confession appears salient. Instead the régimes of the many overlapping corporate groups to which Balinese belong are central.[6] More generally, different kinds of being are considered as created, maintained or transformed through five highly elaborate complexes of practices. These are *manusayadnya*, rites for forming full human beings; *pitrayadnya*, rites for transforming the dead; and *resiyadnya*, rites for inducting people into specialist, usually religious, roles. (The remaining two are *déwayadnya*, rites for deities or to encourage benevolent forces, and *bhutayadnya*, rites to propitiate dangerous forces.) Such practices, *karya* (from Sanskrit *kārya*), designate work to be done, duty or performance. Yet other practices are shrouded in secrecy, as they centre on attaining exceptionally efficacious knowledge and power (*sakti*) commonly to agonistic and violent ends. Neither groups nor rites necessarily impose on Balinese as subjects other than to regulate public behaviour. Beyond these limits people are left largely to their own ends. As audiences, Balinese are perhaps as much heterotelic as heterogeneous. In the absence of regulatory institutions, a key measure of personal morality is the inevitable fruits of your actions (the law of *karma pala*). People therefore need examples of the implications of appropriate and inappropriate actions. Performing and understanding theatre provide a means.

Viewing has a history. Older Balinese were brought up with theatre and learned to appreciate narrative structure, character, rhetoric and allusion. Theatre, being extemporized, lends itself to social and political commentary and criticism of powerful figures. Just as mature actors bring a formidable repertoire of techniques of reference and indirection, so spectators and listeners have learned how to unravel (*melutang*, literally 'to peel or strip') with varying acuity not just theatre but radio and television. While much television production is industrialized and formulaic, to reach its intended audiences it still has to be inflected through cultural conventions.

Up to the 1980s, in most places audiences were still groups in the strong sense of the entire community performing or watching plays, which are obligatory at the many temple festivals each village holds. You did not have to watch to participate. Many people listened from food or coffee stalls, gambled or gossiped, while young

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[6] Urbanization and the Indonesian state, not least as disseminated through broadcast media, increasingly provide alternative frames of reference according to the circumstances. When discussing such matters among themselves, outside settings formally designated as official or Indonesian, Balinese, whether modern urban or rural, usually drew upon a broadly similar congeries of presuppositions. 'Balinese', like audiences, is a contested notion and I use the term just as a label without suggesting any essence.

couples would disappear off to secluded spots. According to both popular and actors' accounts, before schools were introduced, theatre in Bali was not only the main source of divertissement but also of education. A major shift has taken place from watching theatre live to watching theatre on television to watching television. With the advent of television from the late 1970s, theatre attendance dropped steadily as performers professionalized. People preferred to watch higher quality theatre on television, often in quite large gatherings of extended families and neighbours, who were far more vocal than was appropriate for live theatre. The dialogic relationship between actors and audience has been partly replaced by the dialogue between viewers, sometimes with witty speakers offering commentary, mockery and occasionally approval.[7] For Bali it is not always easy to draw a clear distinction between live and television 'audiencing'.

Talking about watching

If it is a virtually impossible task to research the social worlds of actual audiences in Bali, how do we approach their study? One route is anthropological: through an analysis of the relationship between how Balinese represent themselves to themselves and what they do. My concern is not with what people think, which is effectively unknowable, but with what they said to one another in public. My object of study therefore is commentary, not just in the formal sense used by Foucault (1981, 56-61), but the innumerable ways in which people comment on, qualify and disagree with one another in daily life (Hobart 2006).

By way of background, I have lived and worked since 1970 in a once-remote village in the uplands of South Bali. As colour sets proliferated in the late 1980s, television viewing became so widespread an activity that, perforce, as an ethnographer I had to participate. I made myself useful by owning a television and video-recorder, so villagers could watch replays of their favourite theatre plays. The extracts below are from discussions recorded during evenings in July and August 1994. There was a central core of participants with others dropping in and out. All were neighbours and they often chatted together in food stalls. Conversations usually started off with what we watched, then meandered according to people's preoccupations that day, with me intermittently pulling discussion back to the topic. That year there were five key participants whom I had known for some twenty years. While they spanned three generations, both genders and great diversity of education and occupation, all were articulate. Three were actors, who constitute local intellectuals. Often they disagreed, which suggests that culture–here 'what audiences think'–consists less of collective representations than of styles of arguing.

Knowing many of the people well made generalities about 'audiences' or 'audiencing' vacuous. For example, of the regulars the senior was a distinguished

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[7] Hahn has a good discussion of cinema audiences in Tonga, another Austronesian-speaking people. Audiences would listen to expert narrators embellish and personalize the films, much as Balinese do with television to people with whom they have complex social relationships. As she noted: "The Tongan audience is not yet composed of a crowd of solitary individuals" (2002: 266).

actor in his late eighties (known colloquially as 'Gung 'Kak). However bad, he would sit through every play and television programme with a beatific smile of enjoyment until challenged, whereupon his comments became nuanced and critical. The second was an elderly rich farmer, whose passion was shadow theatre, which he observed with a sharp eye to textual accuracy. While professing never to watch television, he was often spotted apparently enjoying himself. The third was an old landless labourer, who was unpopular because his acerbic wit deflated empty talk. The fourth was a middle-aged ex-village headman, amateur actor and public orator. He attended most performances, because that is what active adult males should do.[8] Television was his window to the world beyond Bali, which offered him the challenge of working out what lay behind the screen presentation, not least when it concerned matters Indonesian rather than more familiar Balinese. The last was his daughter-in-law, a graduate of the national Institute of the Arts with a growing reputation as a classical dancer, actress and singer of *Arja*, Balinese dance-opera. She had been an avid theatregoer until she married. Thereafter she preferred watching Bali's great performers on television when she could listen to the dialogue, which in live performances is mostly drowned out by poor sound systems and ambient noise. As the other spectators I knew were equally idiosyncratic, 'audience' suggests an occasion for diversity.

Television and desire

Balinese can be cheerfully direct about the attractions of theatre and television. One evening, the actress asked the old actor what he looked at first when a programme started.

Excerpt 1

Old actor	I would be just wondering... Which story are they going to use?
Ex-headman	No. No. When you first catch sight of the actors, you don't say to yourself "I wonder what story this is". That isn't what you ask yourself, 'Gung 'Kak. It's "Hmm, isn't she beautiful". That's what happens.
Old actor	First of all?
Actress	Oh! "She's beautiful, she moves elegantly"–something like that.
Ex-headman	Only a bit later, "Huh, what story is this?"
Old actor	Ah! So that's where you're taking this–to their looks.
Ex-headman	Got it.
Actress	"Ooh, it's just begun..."
Old actor	Ah, if it's just begun, I watch very intently. Ah, as soon as they appear, I'm riveted. Is there really someone who looks beautiful? "Wow! Now that's really a stunning actress, isn't she?"

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[8] The following extracts might suggest that the ex-headman dominated discussion, which is to misunderstand Balinese ideas of agency and respect. Agents and senior figures generally say little. They leave orators to speak and confirm, correct or expatiate as necessary. Discussion is markedly dialogic with others commenting or affirming briefly every sentence or two. The contrast with the modern Indonesian bureaucracy is striking where long-winded speeches are the norm.

Actress	Yes, that's what happens first.

It might appear slightly unusual for a woman in her early twenties to ask a man of nearly ninety whether he was aroused by beautiful actresses. The old actor had recently had a double cataract operation and was relishing his newfound clear eyesight. The actress's point was that even the elderly are prey to desire to which television offered new temptations. She was presumably referring to Balinese understandings of Indian Sāṃkhya, as the commentators drew upon them repeatedly as presuppositions during discussion. On this account nature and human nature are comprised of three antagonistic dispositions (triguṇa): *sattwa*, goodness, reflective thought; *rajah,* passion, emotion, affection; and *tamah*, mental darkness, ignorance.[9] On this account, watching television involves conflicting dispositions.

For poor Balinese however, visions of wealthy lifestyles and expensive consumer goods reiterate their lowly status. For the most part, villagers see themselves as subjects of others' decisions. In what sense though were they passive?

Excerpt 2

Ex-headman	It's like this. If ignorant village people wonder what clever people are up to, we don't know what is going on in government. We do not know their motives. That's how most people think in the countryside. To my mind, it's like advertising.
Rich farmer	Advertising?
Ex-headman	The aim [of getting your theatre company on local television] is to be seen, so that they will get lots of work. Doesn't that fit, 'Gung 'Kak?
Rich farmer	If viewers enjoy it, that's who they will choose to hire [when they have a festival].
Ex-headman	Whether it's medicines or food, if it's advertised on television, everyone's talking about it. On TV they tell you it's good. When you try it, it turns out to be useless.
Rich farmer	Completely useless. It turns out it's rubbish.
Ex-headman	What is there of any substance that you can emulate in films or television? Films are about people stealing, about having affairs. That's what films show. It can be copied then by children–little children, who have just begun middle school, primary school. Even up to high school you can get influenced.
Rich farmer	They are affected.

To explain how television works on viewers, media studies draws extensively on Althusser's analysis of how ideology interpellates people as subjects through their recognition that they are being addressed (1971, 173). The difficulty of such top-down accounts (including Hartley's ideal of optional, but highly structured, subject

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[9] As state television had been broadcasting textualized versions of 'Hindu' philosophy from the 1980s, it is rather difficult to estimate how far such use indicated successful dissemination to audiences. As the old actor had used this register before it became common on radio and television, it seems likely that it had ceased to be the preserve of priests or intellectuals and that 'ordinary people' felt they could use it without appearing arrogant. Without a comparison with discussions before televised plays and religious broadcasts made them popular, it is hard to know how widespread such understandings were.

positions, 1992, 116-17) is to what degree and how they work in practice. Being interpellated does not entail accepting or being uncritical of the subject position imposed.

The sustained theme of discussion to which the commentators kept returning was: however tantalizing the images, succumbing is ultimately a matter of choice.

Excerpt 3

Ex-headman	You get influenced by films. If I stop and think about it, television is a good thing. Why so? Because there are many different programmes. For an ordinary human being like me, I can decide what is fitting for me to follow. Isn't it a bit like theatre, 'Gung 'Kak?
Old actor	Yes.
Ex-headman	If you let your thoughts wander, it leads to trouble. If you don't–what do you call it?–let your thoughts stray, you will be safe, things will turn out fine.
Rich peasant	That's called vacillating. It's not stable.
Ex-headman	"May the thoughts of Your Lordship be constant." (*Spoken like a servant in theatre addressing his master or mistress.*)
Old actor	*(Continuing the theatrical reference)* "If I have been steadfast and honest, and pray to God for blessings, surely I shall be rewarded..."
Self	Can you give me an example of someone who wavers as against someone steadfast?
Ex-headman	A person who wavers is someone who doesn't reflect upon good advice. It's–what's it called?–lust.
Old actor	Lust. In other words, greed. [Later he expatiated: "to be overcome by *rajah tamah* (passion, sloth)"]

Passive viewing opens you to uncontrolled desire. Spectators have to learn to work upon what they see and hear; and so may come to rather different conclusions. Becoming a reflective viewer is to learn the practice of taking command over your relationship with what impacts upon you. As the switch to theatrical language suggests, the commentators articulated the dangers of new media by invoking the sort of advice or admonition (*pitutur*) that privileged servants proffer their masters when the latter's feelings threaten to carry them away. In so doing they made a neat play on agency: it is the powerful who determine broadcasting, but it is also the powerful who have more temptation and opportunity to get carried away. In theatre at least, it is the task of the underlings to act as anchors. In any event, responsibility for one's feelings and actions is placed unequivocally on the subject.

By contrast to the historyless atomic individual of empiricism, Balinese assume that learning to appreciate a particular medium takes time and effort. So it is hardly surprising that older people who had been actors found theatre easier to relate to that to television.

Excerpt 4

Old actor	The purpose of watching is to look at the action and the dialogue in order to establish what is worth my–what's the word?–emulating in my thinking. If the play is on a conventional stage,

| | if you really work hard, you can get something worthwhile. If it's on television, while the dialogue is very clear, there is less feeling than under ordinary circumstances. |
| Ex-headman | Yes, people say it's like that… What I watch on TV disappears from my mind faster. For me if I watch [a play] on television it's actually the same, but I have really to concentrate. |

Rather than disagree publicly, the actress waited till later to tell me that she preferred watching on television because you could hear the dialogue properly and see facial expressions in close-up, unlike live theatre with poor amplification where much was usually lost.

Conversation turned to the sufferings of the hero in a *Sendratari* (mass ballet) recently on television, which sparked off a discussion about how it is easier to cope with suffering if you are rich.

Excerpt 5

Ex-headman	[Trying to catch up with the conversation] What was it about?
Actress	It was about criticizing those in power. About criticizing the government if people do not get any reward of their work. If there is dirty work to be done, get the masses to do it.
Poor farmer	The masses are worked to the bone like that…
Self	Is that allusion brought up in the play?
Actress	Indeed. It's brought up.
Ex-headman	The play discussed that. For example, if there is a wise ruler and I am his servant… It's like water from a spout landing on a rock.
Self	What?
Ex-headman	When water in a spring falls onto a rock below, I shall be sure to get some spray. That's what happens if water gushes out onto rock.
Old Actor	It splashes everywhere.
Actress	It splatters.

Theatre in Bali and Java is widely appreciated as social commentary and criticism. Knowing how to sift the dialogue to establish the actors' concealed references is a skill that Balinese learn. Good actors are adept at critical allusion, which relies on spectators' interpretive skill. When well done, the target–here the Balinese élite–feels the justice of the criticism, without being able to fault the actors. The reference to springs was not a loose simile. Balinese do not conceive of the person as individual, in the sense of a self-contained indivisible entity, which is distinct from its actions or the actions of others towards it. Just as, according to *karma pala*, you are the product of your actions, so you are the product of others' actions towards you (cf. Marriot 1976). As standing near a waterspout eventually soaks you, so good or bad permeates you by proximity.[10] Television viewing cannot therefore be a

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[10] To make it quite clear: I am not arguing that reference to water splashing or philosophical terms is evidence of underlying collective representations which somehow constitute a unique cultural explanation. Self-evidently I lay no claim to generality. The aim is to address how Balinese talk among themselves. If culture is merely 'how we do things around here' (Hobart 2000, 2) then the practices by which different Balinese–or anyone else–argue with one another and enunciate about

harmless activity. People need to practise discipline as well as critical and reflective thinking as part of care of the self.

Degrees of engagement

If Balinese may imagine themselves as subjects vulnerable to their surroundings and to their own thoughts and feelings, how does this translate itself into strategies for selecting or rejecting what affects the subject? The extracts above dwelt at length on learning how to identify what is dangerous, however sugar-coated. Conversely people recognize different kinds of engagement, which involve a transition from fairly passive thinking to active practice with tangible outcomes.

Excerpt 6

Ex-headman	If I think about it–now this is about old people, you understand– when they watched a performance in the past, I don't think it went as far as any profound understanding. They just watched, watched normally, just enjoyed watching.
Old actor	Just happy to follow along.
Ex-headman	Enjoying watching means not really understanding. If it's the news, you just need to register what it's about. Viewing only involves knowing. Knowing comes first. Then enjoying.
Old actor	Indeed…
Self	Is it possible to view and enjoy without understanding? Or do you have to understand?
Ex-headman	Now if it's the news, that's only about knowing. Yes, it's just paying attention.
Self	(*Deliberately mixing up the order*) Is there any order? There is viewing and enjoying; there is feeling; there is knowing; there is understanding; there is taking seriously.
Ex-headman	There is reflecting on something.
Self	Can we compare them? Which one comes first?
Ex-headman	It's knowing first, isn't that so 'Gung 'Kak? Knowing. What else is there 'Gung 'Kak?
Old actor	Knowing; enjoying; feeling; reflecting seriously.
Ex-headman	Understanding comes earlier on.
Old actor	Understanding, that's rather less than reflecting of course...
Ex-headman	Yes, what's fitting to absorb, that's what's good. What's good is what has good advice.
Old actor	It can be used, held up as a mirror.
Ex-headman	Which can be used as a resource for living. And which is not suitable. Isn't that so, 'Gung 'Kak?
Rich farmer	In short, you have to watch right through until the end. Now when it's over, only then can I grasp the full implications of the plot. What ought I to use, what ought I not?

By contrast to academic stress on cognition as the key faculty, to the commentators it was just the first step in deciding the degree and kind of engagement. Knowing

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audiences under different circumstances is all there is as the primary object of study (for a strong account of practice, see Hobart 2010).

requires paying attention, registering and linking with previous knowledge. Knowing is as far as most television and much theatre goes.

Here and elsewhere Balinese spoke of enjoying as involving a degree of choice and will, not as a mechanical reaction to pleasurable stimuli. Enjoying however is also a strategy for refusing to be more involved. You can enjoy the banter between servants in theatre or the emotional acrobatics of soap operas, but refuse to take it further. That would involve feeling (*rasa*), at which point your being is implicated. In a sense subjects are modulating how far they allow something to affect them. The remaining two stages are more complex and active. The next stage is to understand, *ngaresep*, an interesting term (from *kawi*, *rĕsĕp*) "a two-sided word, lit. 'entering, penetrating' and 'entered, penetrated'" (Zoetmulder 1982, 1543), which catches neatly the ambiguity between understanding as what you do as against what happens to you. At this point the thought permeates and so leaves the subject poised for change. Matters may stop there. Alternatively you may take your understanding seriously (*nelebang*), in which case it results in an outcome: you are changed and act differently thereafter, or you act upon your understanding. Far from this process being confined to the moment, until the play or programme is finished, you do not even know fully what it was about, let alone feel able to reflect, understand and take seriously. Balinese treat engaging with theatre and television as closer to actions or mental episodes (cf. Matilal 1986, 100) over which you seek to attain command than to states somehow induced in Mind by the image or the text.

Beyond tears

Both women and men would often remark that women cried more often than men when watching theatre or films on television. When the topic arose, I asked the actress if she ever cried while watching.

Excerpt 7

Actress	If a film is sad, if it is about people being maltreated, I soon start crying.
Ex-headman	That depends on whether you watch sufficiently long for you to cry. It also depends upon your life.
Self	Yes?
Ex-headman	For example, if a person has suffered...
Rich peasant	has experienced grave hardships previously.
Ex-headman	...at an earlier point in their lives. Then, if they see a film where the suffering resembles their own somewhat–the tears come straight out.
Self	Yes?
Ex-headman	If you are watching a live performance, it's the same, isn't it?
Old actor	That's right. That's right.
Actress	They can't cry.
Self	Who can't?
Actress	The children of rich people.
Self	What?

Actress	Yes. When we're learning to act, the teachers test whether we can all cry. Most of the poor people in the class are very good at crying.
Self	This is at the Institute of Arts?
Actress	Yes. In 'Dramaturgy'.
Ex-headman	Isn't it so that you can make the performance come to life?
Actress	We're also taught to laugh.
Self	Can you manage it?
Actress	Yes. I can.
Ex-headman	For instance, if there is a rich person, a person who has never known real difficulty, then they meet someone who has suffered, they are incapable of being affected by it.
Self	What happens if they encounter difficulties? How are they then?
Ex-headman	They just laugh.
Self	What!
Ex-headman	That person hasn't been brought up by a stepmother as happens here in Bali. That adds to it. If you are watching a play or a film which is a bit sad, you just start crying…

The exchange surprised me sufficiently that I checked subsequently with several staff at the Institute of Arts. Those from wealthy families seemed not to grasp the issue. The few from poor backgrounds however quietly confirmed that the actress was quite correct. This popular Balinese conception is, as it were, the tip of an iceberg of quite different presuppositions about the human subject.

What does crying connote to Balinese? Far from being able to weep or feel deeply for others being a sign of weakness, it is an index of humanity. Villagers often remarked how distressing they found it when rich townsfolk came to watch plays and laughed at them if they cried during the sad scenes. The rich, on this account, are more likely to lack a sense of humanity because they have never known acute suffering. Furthermore, by spoiling their children, they rear children who are at once happy, arrogant and marked by this lack. Conversely the lowly commonly have to tolerate contempt, abuse and humiliation. From an early age ordinary Balinese learn, and are taught, to *ngeret manah*, to restrain your thoughts and feelings, to show nothing except a pleasant face, whatever the provocation. The famed courtesy and friendliness of Balinese results from the rigorous practice of self-command.

Balinese audiences as subjects

To what do these fragments of ideas about the subject amount? Humans are endlessly changing mixtures of antagonistic dispositions. One, passion, is inflamed by television and so requires reflective thinking to master it. People are profoundly affected by what is said and done to, by and around about them, not as sovereign individuals who remain fundamentally unchanged. Maturity is learning to recognize, modulate, reject or act upon what impacts on you. The varying circumstances of birth, upbringing and life make people fundamentally different, but continually open to change. Much television may be informative or entertaining, but on the whole it offers little for the care of the self, except for genres like theatre and serious film.

Theatre that enacts and reflects on the human condition offers discussion, allegories and models that you can use not just to divert yourself, but to feel, understand and act upon.

While ideas about the subject are widely treated in Anglo-Saxon cultural and media studies as unproblematic, to French scholars the topic is central and vexed. The modern European subject is "posited as *autonomously determining* in relation to an object which is determined by it; its autonomy is revealed in a relation of domination over everything which is not itself" (Guzzoni 1996, 203). For Lacan too "the subject is never more than supposed" (Seminar XXIII, cited in Fink 1995, 35). Moreover this subject is neither "the individual nor what we might call the conscious subject (or the consciously thinking subject), in other words, the subject referred to by most of analytical philosophy" (Fink 1995, 36).

> What we call the critique of subject is in fact the critique of the concept of the subject (or of the concept of subjectivity)... According to this critique, it is an illusion–an illusion ascribable to a 'metaphysics of subjectivity'–to believe that a lover is the subject of his desires, that a thinker is the subject of his thoughts, that a writer is the subject of his writing, that an agent is the subject of his action, and so on (Descombes 1991, 120-21).

This subject cannot be identical with the grammatical, logical or ethical subject: some agent has to assign actions to subjects (1991, 131). So Descombes concluded that, while this philosophical subject must be posited, it is otherwise largely vacant– a conclusion, significantly, which is reminiscent of philosophical debates in Buddhism and Sāṃkhya some thousand years earlier.

The modern subject has to be the source and agent of all its thoughts and feelings (Guzzoni 1996). By contrast, Balinese conventions are quite complex. While direct predication of wishes of the self is common, when referring to one's thoughts, it is often "*di keneh…*", "*manah antuk tiang...*" "in my thought/feeling…", "according to my thoughts…". And of belief: "Ring kapracayaan wènten Batara", "In my belief there is God", not "I believe in God". Nor is this a quirk of grammar or locution. According to Wassmann and Dasen (1998), Balinese are almost unique in not treating themselves as the centre when referring spatially, but as positioned by wider coordinates. Similarly Balinese widely attribute deep attraction to another person as a destined partner (*jatu karman*) as determined by who helped you across the swaying bridge (*titi gonggang*) over fire in the other world before you both reincarnated. You are the patient of your desire not its agent.

In their discussions the commentators presupposed in the distinctive Indian ontology of Sāṃkhya, in which the three constitutive processes governing nature (*prakṛti*) also encompass human nature non-dualistically. As there is no radical distinction between beings and the world, they mutually affect one another. Writing of philosophical Sāṃkhya, Larson noted that "primal material energy...is capable of spontaneous activity (*rajas*), rational ordering (*sattva*), and determinate formulation or objectivation (*tamas*)" (1987, 66). Subjectively this tripartite process appears as a

> continuous flow of experience that is capable of pre-reflective spontaneous desiring or longing (*rajas*), reflective discernment or discriminating (*sattva*), and continuing awareness of an opaque, enveloping world (*tamas*). The continuing

> flow of experience actively seeks continuing gratification...[but] the quest is frequently frustrated (*duḥkha*), and, although there are occasional times of reflective discernment that bring satisfaction (*sukha*), there are also moments when experience is completely overwhelmed by the sheer plenitude of the world (1987, 66-67).

Balinese popular understandings seem at moments not so far from philosophical Sāṃkhya.

How does this discussion bear on the broader study of audiences? Comparative study highlights the risks of ethnocentrism and of treating our folk ideas about human subjects as timeless and unproblematic truths. Although assumptions like 'the psychic unity of mankind' promise to make comparative study of audiences relatively unproblematic, the effect is to project our prejudices onto others and so lose the possibility of recognizing difference unless pre-tamed.

Most theories of communication, cognition and interpretation struggle in different ways with 'audiencing'. They are ill designed to cope with events that are situated, relational, directed and partly contingent, or with audiences as the heterogeneous practices of subjects who must be posited while remaining largely unknowable. Others end up imagined as either measurable atomized individuals or the patients of the text, ideology or culture by the knowing academic subject in "a relation of domination over everything which is not itself".

Where mind is not represented as interiorized, as Taylor suggested the spaces of disclosure, articulacy and ways of understanding the world may well be quite different. A society where most theatre retells endlessly stories as well known to the spectators as to the actors establishes distinctive relationships between spectators and actors. Theatre emerges as an aid to maintaining and developing the self in a way that national television is not designed to be. Insofar as you are what you watch, older people are concerned that television *inter alia* may change younger Balinese in undesirable ways. The conclusion is not that ethnography is a way to save the audience as an object of study so that 'normal science', to use Kuhn's phrase, may trundle on undisturbed by critical concerns. Detailed study of what Balinese said and did exemplifies clearly how the social only exists as an effort to construct an impossible object. It does not follow though that critical inquiry is pointless. On the contrary, if we take seriously what a young actress had to say about the children of the rich being unable to cry, we may have to rethink how–and why–we set about studying what formerly we called 'audiences'.

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