Don’t Panic!

Reflections on crisis, criticism and media

Prolegomenon to a research programme

September 2020

Background

This piece is intended as reflective and exploratory. It began with my musing over the implications of almost everything we think we know nowadays being mass (or, increasingly, socially) mediated. Like many people, I fondly fancied that what I knew derived more or less directly from experience. Applied to daily life, as a tenet of empiricism it is largely fantasy. What we experience is in practice pointillist: it consists of fragmentary impressions of sense data onto which we impose prior ideas and frameworks to suture into a semblance of soundness and order.[1] Almost all our information (a slippery notion that cod empiricism invites us to adopt uncritically) is mediated, whether through broadcast, social or even old-fashioned print sources. As an academic I read. However I would be indolently naïve to presume that articles and books, let alone newspapers or audio-visual materials, do not inflect reality by articulating—put bluntly, massaging—it in countless ways. Again, as an academic, I am aware that what we write is designed to engage (Althusser would have said 'interpellate') particular kinds of readers in particular ways. In short, my colleagues and I are clandestine rhetoricians. We are in the business of persuading to imagined noble ends. As Critical Media Studies scholars argue: try and conceive of what an unarticulated account of reality would look like, unmediated by signs, icons, language and practices of interpreting. What we take to be objective, self-evident truth is carefully crafted illusion, communicated using debased coinage. 'Objectivity is the "unauthored" voice of the bourgeoisie' (see Fiske below).

A more immediate impetus for writing was the endless litany of claims we live in an age of crisis. Crises presuppose judgement and decision. Someone has to articulate events as reaching a critical stage. Far from being an innocent term, crisis is evaluative and presupposes some framework of judgement. A little digging shows that German scholars have made much of the classical Greek etymology linking crisis and criticism. That sent me off hunting a modern-day Snark. Not only do histories of Europe seem bent on attributing crisis with a determining role, but the notion turns up in weird contexts such as astrological influence on financial markets. By contrast criticism proved at once woolly and deeply contentious, not least as a battleground between German critical theorists and French post-structuralists. I expected the debate to be turgid; but it turned out fun and often funny. If Teutonic and Gallic styles of criticism are so at odds, as to reaching a decision through rational debate Dante was right: *Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch'entrate*.[2]

Media Studies throws a spanner in the works. If mediation inevitably articulates, and so transforms, its subject matter, the dispassionate critical gaze which underwrites truth itself requires critical interrogation. Criticism that omits self-criticism is *parti pris*. As it is hard to treat your own presuppositions disinterestedly, you depend on others. So a critical approach is in effect dialogic. That changes the whole ballgame. Double discursivity[3] is not just relevant to ethnography, but a *sine qua non* for any inquiry that challenges hegemony. Inflecting crisis and criticism through practices of mediation creates surprises. The world is never quite the same again.

[1] Should you still wish to assert that facts are transparent and the world is the way we think it is, Francis Bacon, arguably the founder of modern empiricism, offers a salutary antidote by outlining the common errors of thinking from misuse of sense data to general misconceptions and false notions that invalidate most scholarly and scientific thought (2007 [1620] #38-69). Frighteningly they remain as relevant today as four hundred years ago.

[2] This is the last line of the inscription of the gates above Hell in Dante's *Inferno*: 'Leave all hope you who enter'.

[3] By double discursivity I mean the irreducibility of the discourse of the subjects of study to the analyst's discourse (Hobart 2015a).

Media, Criticism and Crisis

For Brutus is an honourable man (Julius Caesar Act 3, scene 2)

Introduction

What on earth links media, criticism and crisis? If you wish to understand how a society works and what is taken for granted, you need to look at what can go wrong; and how to anticipate, judge and propose remedies for deficiencies and dangers. This requires discussing, deciding on action or inaction, communicating and obtaining support or at least passive acceptance. While the concepts might appear unrelated, they are processes constitutive of any society, or indeed any organization or assemblage.

Parts of this argument are not new; parts are. Crisis and criticism are linked through an ancient European lineage according to which crises are revealed by criticism; and when things go awry people tend to start questioning the *status quo*. More recent, despite a lingering nostalgia for the good old days of face-to-face communication, in the twenty-first century virtually all news and public commentary are mass mediated. Talking about criticism and crisis (and much else besides) is like studying organisms as if they were anaerobic. So doing is counter-factual and eviscerates analysis.

What do we commonly presuppose when designating events as a crisis? While ostensibly denoting objective conditions, crisis has curious connotations. Not all emergencies, catastrophes or cataclysms are crises. Crisis implies underlying structural or processual problems that have been building up to a tipping point. Unlike disasters, which may be unanticipated and unpredictable, crises divulge themselves upon careful deliberation: in short, upon critical thinking. 'Crisis' is not just an emotive term, but also gerundive. It not only grabs attention, but demands action. So much is fairly obvious. Its preconditions are less so. Crisis presupposes a narrative. If disaster is inevitable, it is not normally classed as a crisis. In a stable world, remediable disruption may be identified as a crisis that needs addressing. By contrast, evolutionary models may well involve—and revolutionary ones demand—periodic crises. How you classify and act when things going badly skew-whiff depends on the overarching narrative or cosmology. When someone declares a crisis, they are demanding your attention, that you engage in or at least recognize the need for action. Implicitly you accept and acquiesce to a particular world view. The urgency intimated in declaring a crisis deftly distracts from what is actually going on.

If crisis intimates a clear constellation of issues, with criticism the deeper you inquire, the harder it is to pin down. Matters are not helped by its everyday sense of fault-finding rather than deliberative judgement. Were judges, legal counsel or medical diagnosticians not critical as a matter of course, they would be failing in their duty. Is it then possible to distinguish a class of speech or action that is critical as against others that are not? Whether something counts as criticism however depends on the semantic context and the situation. Not uncommonly it is differently evaluated by different participants and onlookers. My opening quotation should make the point. Ostensibly Mark Anthony is praising Brutus. Repeating the statement several times makes it potential criticism. Asking searching questions in a seminar is appropriate; doing the same over drinks afterwards is rather different. There is a gulf between stating a bald proposition, what it implies and how people concerned may variously understand it in context. Omission may be highly critical; and criticism treated as complimentary.[4] Further, like

[4] In his analysis of the many forms of conversational implicature, Grice noted that when speaking much is left implied, so the full sense must be inferred. A famous example is a reference for a philosophy post for a weak student.

assertions of crisis, criticism is evaluative and may be gerundive. When a supervisor criticizes a student paper, its purpose is (or should be) to encourage the student to rethink. Trying to essentialize criticism ignores the illocutionary and perlocutionary aspects of utterances.[5] As with crisis, criticism presupposes a correct or proper order of things from which the present deviates. In utopia there is nothing to criticize. In the mundane world however, how are we to distinguish criticism from more general commentary? Unless you are a card-carrying positivist, criticism considered critically seems frighteningly open, uncertain, at times indeterminate and unfinalizable.

Rethinking crisis and criticism through media and communication do not add, as it were, a new dimension. They transmogrify familiar intellectual issues beyond recognition. If we acknowledge that all knowledge other than divine revelation (perhaps even that) is mediated by signs, symbols, utterances, sounds, gestures, smells and so on, under what circumstances can we regard these as irrelevant or not? As almost all scholarly and popular thinking takes it that mediation has little impact upon how we understand the world, if such assumptions are unsound, there are widespread reverberations. Unfortunately there are more grounds on which to question conventional wisdom than to reassert it, save convenience.[6] Media and processes of mediation impact on what we know and how we understand it in divers ways. Most obviously in the twenty-first century almost everything we know comes through mass or social media, which is the province of mass communications. It is also the most trivial because, while it sketches out the political and economic correlates of communication, explanatorily it is conventional and naïve. Less trivially, Cultural Studies enables analysis of how mass and social media articulate and interpret 'reality' through conflicting representations. Less trivially still, scholarly protestations notwithstanding, if there is no privileged access to certainty or truth, political worldviews, commonsense knowledge, theoretical models, even grand intellectual paradigms can no longer be taken as self-evident. They require interrogation as the inherently contestable products of antagonistic articulatory practices that make up the limits of the world as we know it. The question is: whose world?

Oddly, including media does not compound the ambiguities of crisis and the indefinability of criticism, but catalyzes them. On the one hand, *prima facie* mass and social media are in the daily business of articulatory closure. On the other, one person's crisis is another person's opportunity. Not only do different societies articulate differently what counts as gravely dangerous but competing interest groups often represent matters divergently. Industrialized media may use their clout to divert discussion in desired directions. That meaning is determined by the producers is a self-serving fiction for élites and has more holes than a sieve (Hartley 1992). It relies on two fantasies: hegemony is effectively unchallengeable, and audiences are stupid, lazy, passive and uninvolved. The moment that you move from arguing about how abstractions are imbricated to looking at the constitutive practices of producing, disseminating, engaging with and using media, all that seemed solid melts into air. Nor do such practices form a single assemblage. That is a delusion underwritten by the so-called transmission model of

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> Dear Sir, Mr X's command of English is excellent, and his attendance at tutorials has been regular. Yours etc. (Grice 1975: 33).

As a young research student, I remember a senior professor telling a speaker that his argument was remarkable. The speaker apparently took it as flattering, but those familiar with the professor read it as remarkable for its flimsiness.

[5] That is what you do in saying something; and the consequences of saying it. La Rochefoucauld's adage comes to mind: 'Few people have the wisdom to prefer the criticism that would do them good, to the praise that deceives them'.

[6] Three grounds that I discuss below are the presumed neutrality of signs, the transparency of representation and the commensurability of conceptual frameworks.

communication in a desperate attempt to obliviate the diversity and unpredictability of how people engage with mass and social media. Ethnographic studies of media production, distribution, reception and use show each to be riven with incoherence, uncertainty and contingency that threaten the contemporary Imaginary of 'societies of control' (Deleuze 1995).

So far, so straightforward. There is a twist though to introducing articulation. Our entire analytical and media industrial categories and styles of argument are European. That is fine so long as everyone else's ways of thinking critically and adjudging how things go wrong happen to fit. If they do not—and we have superabundant evidence that they do not—then we run the risk of marching heedlessly over, ignoring or at the least misinterpreting how others understand what is going on. How do we escape this trap? I shall consider two ways: to reflect on our own categories and to start from how some others think about and argue through the world about them. The familiar becomes the decidedly peculiar.

The aims and scope of this piece

My present aim is not to devise a research project. Rather it is a research resource: a prolegomenon to further argument and inquiry. I start by assessing relevant work on crisis, criticism and the role of the media. Then I elaborate an alternative approach that I hope is critical, theoretically informed and addresses hegemonic attempts to read the rest of the world in European terms. After noting potential topics for research in different disciplines, I conclude with suggestions for empirical and ethnographic inquiry in Media Studies.

As much has been written about crisis and criticism, first I review approaches to crisis. The discussion is fairly brief, as most work describes and analyzes crisis as if it were an objective natural class of events independent of how the social agents and commentators involved have used the notion. Yet the taken-for-granted ideas of normality themselves occlude presuppositions that remain unquestionable, because to question them might threaten the entire cosmology. As the voluminous literature on the link between crisis and criticism makes clear, whether circumstances constitute a crisis or not depends on someone articulating it as such. Much mileage is made of classical Greek etymology as if that somehow explained contemporary usage. Instead it displaces questions about how other peoples set about understanding, evaluating and dealing with the undesirable or unexpected. This obvious point may be obscured by mass media coverage. Not only do Western news agencies have close to a monopoly but, to the extent that being 'modern' requires adopting or imitating alien models, national media coverage may not encapsulate local discourses. Studying non-Western categories of criticism is not duck soup though, because the label is not substantive but evaluative and contextual. Considered as practice, criticism dissolves into broader (and, to my mind, more interesting) issues of commentary and argument. Here Cultural Studies approaches to media come into their own by refusing to treat crisis as an essence, instead rephrasing it as one particular articulation—and criticism as one style of argument—among several contending possibilities.

A preamble

We learn geology the morning after the earthquake (Emerson 1909: 243).

We live, we are often told, in a time of crisis. Besides global pandemics with their attendant economic, we face crises due to climate change, overpopulation, loss of natural resources, the precariousness of liberal democracies and threats to global political order. Locally all sorts of catastrophes happen, largely unreported. Other issues like genocide, corruption, breach of human rights, exploitation and injustice are usually not considered crises because they have long been with us. However, when Oxfam claims that some 2,000 billionaires have more wealth than 60% of the world's population, does that constitute a crisis, and to whom? [7] Questions arise. Is something a crisis if few know about or notice it? Are crises objective states of the world? Or do they depend on being recognized and articulated as such? Insofar as events require framing and disseminating as crises, they are inextricable from critical thinking, communication and representation. Indeed it is widely touted that modern social thought faces a 'crisis of representation'.[8]

How should we address crisis? Despite their ostensible differences, similar questions are askable of political and mass media representations on the one hand and expert or academic analyses on the other. Is crisis an objective and relatively uncontested descriptive concept, independent of possible frameworks of knowledge? Common sense might say it is. However common sense is conservative and ideological, not verifiable.[9] And, when it comes to the mass media, 'Objectivity is the "unauthored" voice of the bourgeoisie' (Fiske 1987: 289). Short of reverting to a pre-Kuhnian account, it is wise to treat statements as explicable as part of some conceptual scheme of which there are, both in theory and practice, always several incommensurate ones available (Quine 1953: 44-6; 1960: 26-79; Feyerabend 1975). How then do we deal with the problem of multiple possible paradigms?

Cultural Studies offers interesting ways to rethink familiar issues. The notion of articulation ('perhaps one of the most generative concepts in contemporary cultural studies' Slack 1996: 113) invites consideration of the social, political and economic conditions under which different classes and interest groups represent social reality in different ways.[10] It is critical in the sense that it interrogates the workings of power behind supposedly transparent and innocent accounts of the world. While articulation is an abstract concept, it lends itself to examining social practices as transformative. As the pragmatist philosopher, Nelson Goodman, argued, it is impossible to represent something as it is in the fullness of all its properties in all possible

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[7] https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/worlds-billionaires-have-more-wealth-46-billion-people; accessed 30th. July 2020.

[8] Curiously, the origin of much-used this phrase is supposedly anthropological. It arises because

> ethnography is in the midst of a political and epistemological crisis: Western writers no longer portray non-Western peoples with unchallenged authority; the process of cultural representation is now inescapably contingent, historical, and contestable (Clifford and Marcus 1986, frontispiece).

Rabinow invoked the expression to highlight what he took to be a post-modernist dilemma (1986: 252).

[9] Gramsci: 'Common sense is a chaotic aggregate of disparate conceptions, and one can find there anything that one likes' (1971: 423).

'From what has the certainty of common sense originated? Essentially from religion... but religion is an ideology, the best-rooted and most widespread ideology, not a proof or a demonstration' (1995: 432).

[10] As Stuart Hall famously put it, articulation suggests

> the form of the connection that *can* make a unity between two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. You have to ask, under what circumstances *can* a connection be forged or made? So the so-called 'unity' of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be rearticulated in different ways because they have no necessary 'belongingness'. The 'unity' which matters is a linkage between that articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions, but need not necessarily, be connected (1996: 141).

For a comparison of Hall's and Laclau's different accounts, see the original version of Hobart 2000.

contexts (1968: 21-31). We represent something *as* something, to which I would add that we do so to a particular audience on particular occasions for particular purposes. In other words, in representing we inevitably articulate within some framework, simplify and transform, while more or less disingenuously protesting faithfulness to the original. Combined, these approaches enable us to inquire into who represents what *as*, say, a crisis, to whom on what occasion for what purposes. They permit inquiry into the circumstances under which people go about representing matters in different ways: inquiry at once empirical and critical in a strong sense. Not only is it critical of the circumstances under which people present claims to truth, rightness of authority but *pari passu* it allows us to question the purposes and presuppositions in our research. This comprehensive sense of criticism incorporates Cultural Studies divisions of race, class and gender and, crucially, opens these categories of argument to reflexive questioning.

Why complicate matters by dragging in the media? If social reality is always articulated, how does it work? Media Studies emerged on one account to answer this question posed by Cultural Studies. Now, issues of mediation and communication might be marginal. That is if, for most purposes, either mediation is transparent and does not affect meaning or else there are viable procedures for dispensing with distortions. Either possibility assumes that the media work by transmitting messages, so problems are effectively confined to eliminating confusion, noise, unclarity, skew or malformation. That presupposes there is such a thing as undistorted information in social communication (as opposed to mathematical modelling).[11] If the rigid separation of medium and message is untenable, then the cultural, social and political circumstances of communication take centre stage.

Crisis is not a self-contained topic because it leads to questions of explanation, not least nowadays 'recovering critique in an age of datafication' (Couldry 2019). What counts as self-evident, true, compelling, persuasive or believable, and to whom? Assertions about crisis presuppose interpretive schemas of what comprises normality with its founding narratives and political cosmologies, such as the good life, evolution, development and so on. When, how and where are rival visions promulgated and argued out? As almost everything we imagine that we know is mediated, how tenable is it to presume that audiences, consumers, the masses heed, let alone believe, what they are told? The idea that meaning is what a political and media élite wish it to be is a comforting, if counter-factual fantasy. Nevertheless it is a fiction (Hartley 1992) that most scholars in the human sciences adopt as the alternatives are inconvenient and require jettisoning or rethinking their arguments.

[11] The philosopher C.S. Peirce, recognizing that logical signs would only work if symbols were neutral and did not affect the truth value of logical argument, was driven to inquire into how signs worked. To his dismay, he could find no way to achieve the necessary transparency. He was driven to develop serial theories of what he called semeiotics as he realized the impossibility of his original hope. The approach is quite different from Saussurean semiology as it centres upon signifying not as an abstract ideal model, but as a situated social practice. Two brief quotes may give a sense of the problems. 'Nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign' as 'all thinking is dialogic in form. Your self of one instant appeals to your deeper self for his assent' (Peirce 1931-58: 2. 172; 6.338). Signs are inseparable from the actions of interpreting them and, further, being dialogic, they are understandable only in the context of social relations.

Two later pragmatist developments are relevant. If representation is dialogic, you always represent something *as* something in some context. Extrapolating signs, symbols and statements from the circumstances of their use is intellectual butterfly collecting. Furthermore choosing between alternative representations is not like choosing flavours of ice cream. We are dealing with conceptual schemes or theoretical frameworks that may be internally coherent but are incompatible, even incommensurable, each with their own presuppositions and entailments.

Incidentally the transmission model rests upon an unacknowledged and questionable 'conduit metaphor' according to which communication must 'contain' something, that something being meaning (Reddy 1979).

Crisis revisited

> Capitalistic production moves…through a state of quiescence, growing animation, prosperity, overtrade, crisis, and stagnation (Marx 1898: 28).
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> *Modernity itself is defined by crisis,* a crisis that is born of the uninterrupted conflict between the immanent, constructive, creative forces and the transcendent power aimed at restoring order… Hobbes established the spatial metaphor of sovereignty for all modern political thought in his unitary Leviathan that rises above and overarches society and the multitude. The sovereign is the surplus of power that serves to resolve or defer the crisis of modernity (Hardt & Negri 2000: 76, 325).[12]
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> There is, in truth, no such thing as a crisis as such, no state of things that, neutrally and objectively, constitutes a crisis. Rather, in performative fashion, a crisis exists only insofar as it is proclaimed and recognized as such. In other words, crises (though not, of course, the actual events they typically surround) are discursive phenomena, and there is invariably a strategic element to invocations of the language of crisis, whether this be as a means of engendering fear, stifling dissent, and consolidating hegemonic power structures, or, conversely, of mobilizing disaffection, laying bare societal divisions, and agitating for radical change (Crosthwaite 2011: 4).

Is there a workable definition of crisis?[13] Given the superabundance of events described as a crisis, even leaving aside casual usage such as 'persona' or 'mid-life crisis', it seems a formidable task.[14] We are told that there are financial, economic, neoliberal, capitalist, debt, technological, environmental, ecological, democratic, governmental, geopolitical, empire, revolutionary, crisis state, terrorist, public health, welfare state, European mastery, religious, faith, humanism, urban, energy and many more kinds of crisis. They have little more in common than intimating a bad situation requiring urgent action or remedy. Scholars have traced their origins to classical Greece, to astrology, to medical aetiology, to military battles, to economic processes[15] or political events to diagnoses of grand philosophical and political

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[12] All emphases and parentheses in quotations are in the original unless otherwise indicated.

[13] My title 'Don't Panic' will be familiar to most English people. It was the catchphrase of Corporal Jones, a character in the sit-com Dad's Army (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nR0lOtdvqyg). It also featured in Douglas Adams's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, when the protagonist picks up the book of that name: '"I like the cover," he said. "Don't Panic. It's the first helpful or intelligible thing anybody's said to me all day"'. My usage is ironic. I consider crises not as causes of panic (including moral panics), but as ways of representing the world and how to engage with it. Conventional accounts overlook the extent to which crises and panics both involve mass media articulation. If Baudrillard's argument about crisis being spectacle seemed *de trop* when he originally wrote it, now it looks rather obvious. He added that panic is

> just a mode of propagation by contiguity, like contagion, only faster—the ancient principle of metamorphosis, going from one form to another without passing through a system of meaning. This process of effects in the absence of causes is a form of extraordinary expansion. The 'speed' that Virilio talks about is an effect of panic with respect to movement. A giddiness effect. Panic can also be the inflation of the event by the news media. All the communication theories have to be revised, including my own, which is still too meaningful (1987: 78).

What is supposed to constitute a crisis, and so grounds for panic, transforms when media images become their own referents—in other words simulacra (a contemporary example being QAnon).

> When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity. There is an escalation of the true, of the lived experience; a resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared. And there is a panic-stricken production of the real and the referential, above and parallel to the panic of material production (1983: 12-13).

[14] Over 23,000 books published in the twentieth century had crisis in their titles (Graf & Jarausch 2017: 4). In the first instance I exclude political and popular uses of 'crisis', as the term is used so prolifically and uncritically as to make clear definition impossible. The significance of this will become apparent shortly. Even casual usage may have a serious ancestry. For example, 'Kant throws us back into the crisis of modernity with full awareness when he poses the discovery of the subject itself as crisis' (Hardt & Negri 2000: 81).

[15] 'There is said to be a commercial crisis when a great number of merchants and traders, at once, either have, or apprehend that they shall have, a difficulty in meeting their engagements' (Mill 1885: 394).

convulsions, these days often linked to modernity and capitalism. We are confronted with an *embarras de richesse* with a wonderful array of pick 'n' mix solutions on offer.

To avoid being caught in academic bickering, perhaps we should look to the 'real world' for commonsensical solutions. Two examples should suffice. There is a growing industry of crisis management that proposes solving the problems through research design towards an integrated methodology that identifies organizational or structural weaknesses, the need for pro-active leadership that enable not just crisis management, but perception and impression management to achieve acceptable outcomes so that, if the crisis is not resolved, at least the stakeholders feel assuaged. The seeming generality of the solution depends on a closure achieved by fitting complex circumstances to a pre-designed template. The effect is to prioritize the impression of rigour and rationality over the complexity of observable situated social practice. The neatness of the models and methods function to obscure a highly questionable relationship to actuality.[16]

The greater the global impact and the graver the risks, the more critical reflection you would have expected to go into economic and political decisions when facing crises.

> In 2007 and 2008, as global credit markets seized up, venerable banking and insurance institutions collapsed, and stock prices around the world slid and then tumbled, desperate financial professionals sought supernatural insights into the unimaginable disaster that had befallen them. In London, psychics experienced a dramatic surge in demand for their guidance from City workers.
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> Reports from the 1990s and 2000s suggest that astrological thought continues to play a role in a significant proportion of chartist activity, including that of major Wall Street institutions, British high street banks, and City investment funds... many of the most celebrated exponents of the discipline are notably reluctant to rule out the validity of astrology. A piece of wisdom attributed to the legendary turn-of the-century Wall Street financier J.P. Morgan is often quoted in these circles: 'Millionaires don't hire astrologers. Billionaires do.'…
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> Also widely cited is a remark attributed to Donald T. Regan, a chairman of Merrill Lynch who went on to serve as Secretary of the Treasury and White House Chief of Staff under Ronald Reagan (whose presidential schedule was itself, notoriously, determined at times by consulting horoscopes): 'It's common knowledge that a large percentage of Wall Street brokers use astrology.' (Crosthwaite 2011: 178, 184).

As with the notion of 'influence', either crisis has failed to throw off its astrological ancestry or a rethink is overdue. That the zenith of corporate management methodology turns out to be the nadir of uncritical superstition tells us something about our difficulties in recognizing uncertainty and indeterminacy.

The myriad attempts to define crisis distracts attention from usage. If the term is invoked not descriptively or forensically but evaluatively, its sense depends on who uses it for what purposes in what contexts.[17] Insofar as crisis connotes urgency, its use is rhetorical: it sets out to persuade someone of something. Most analyses of crisis focus on reasoned argument (*logos*) and downplay how important the credibility or authority of the speaker persuader (*ethos*) and, crucially, creating a convincing story to sway the audience's emotions (*pathos*). The performance of crisis management, like witchdoctors' pronouncements, are designed to swathe the speaker in an aura of expertise and to prevail upon clients. Crises is rarely presented in

[16] There is a good example of this kind of bureaucratizing crisis into pseudo-submission through management-speak in Bundy *et al.* 2017. This technique has long been used for development projects, where the imposition of imported management criteria has almost invariably failed to address or even recognize what is actually going on.

[17] 'In Greek, a single concept encompassed today's distinctive meanings of "subjective" criticism and "objective" crisis '(Koselleck 103). Evaluative is not necessarily subjective: it simply notes that there are judgements of value not just fact.

measured, reasonable, relaxed, unhurried tones. The more dramatic and terrifying the crisis, the more effective the *pathos*. Crisis is not just evaluative, it is gerundive. Indeed, it is agentive. *Act now*! In describing a situation, it implies, urges or demands a course of action that is the product of the description, not strictly of the situation, which is always open to alternative interpretations. When newspaper headlines or tweets shriek 'Crisis!', we are witnessing *pathos* in full flood.

What are the antitheses of crisis? As it refers to no discriminable class of phenomena, there can be no clear antonym. We can, however, ask what crisis presupposes. It implies deviation from a state of affairs or processes that are desirable, generally benign and normal because they are subject to order, organization, regularity and system: if not stasis or stability, at least predictable and controllable change. What threaten these happy conditions are either chance, accident, uncertainty and indeterminacy, or else organization collapsing and the system going awry. The entire edifice is predicated on contingency being marginal and eliminable, not constitutive of reality.[18] If only life were so easy. As Hacking noted, the discipline of statistics became not just possible, but necessary, because the prevailing belief in determinism 'was eroded during the nineteenth century and a space was cleared for autonomous laws of chance. The idea of human nature was displaced by a model of normal people with laws of dispersion' (1990: vii).[19] On the one hand, you have serious statisticians wrestling with the complexities of this world of chance (and so potential crisis or even chaos); on the other, there are crisis managers emulating anthropology's witchdoctors busily burnishing their *ethos*.

For crisis to occur, normality must break down or be suspended. That defers, not addresses, the problem because what is habitual, usual or normal is essentially contested (Hacking 1990: 160-88), because there are always multiple explanatory frameworks. Insofar as what is ordinary, everyday or normal is social in its broadest sense (including the economic and political) it corresponds to no unambiguous state of affairs. Worse, it is inchoate, unmarked, taken for granted, which is why attempts to ground a political philosophy in the quotidian run into quicksands (de Certeau 1984; Lefebvre 1991, 2002a, 2002b, 2005; Roberts 1999). It is in effect what does not really need accounting for or thinking about: it is just how things are. Most of humanity has lived without worrying about why they do not suddenly fly up into the air, explode, implode or turn into cockroaches. The Balinese have a nice expression for unanswerable why questions: '*Mula kèto*', 'It's always been like that'.[20] If crisis is deviation from the normal, circularly the normal is simply when things are not going wrong.

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[18] The counter-arguments are often dismissed as too arcane, complex, theoretical or 'academic' (we have seen what the real world with its reliance on astrology looks like), achievable only by reifying crisis as an aberrance. Critics of this (ultimately Aristotelian) intellectual myopia include C.S. Peirce's who argued that absolute chance is at work in the world (1878). Deleuze and Guattari famously dismissed root and branch this entire arboreal ontology and epistemology of organization and control (1988).

[19] Common sense however is a poor guide.

> In Newtonian physics it is presupposed that some events have causes and others not… In the nineteenth century we find a different presupposition being made by the general body of scientists: namely that all events have causes… In modern physics the notion of cause has disappeared. Nothing happens owing to causes; everything happens according to laws (Collingwood 49-50).

To which Hacking added that we now think in terms of

> 'a universe of chance' in which 'chance was no longer the essence of lawlessness, but at the core of all laws of nature and all rational inductive inference' (Hacking 1990: xi-xii).

[20] Balinese play with the idea of the limits of the usual or ordinary (*biasa*), exemplified in their of concepts like *sakti*, poorly glossed in English as 'magical power'. In war, if an army of 10,000 defeats an army of 1,000 in battle, it is rare to claim victory due to the winning king's *sakti*. However, if the reverse occurs, it is unexpected, out of the ordinary and invites attributions of *sakti*.

Crisis is not necessarily bad. If a state of affairs is judged poor, corrupt, unfit for purpose or dysfunctional, signalling an alarm invites you to consider taking action, either conservatively to patch up defects or revolutionarily to instigate drastic change and a new order—a new normal. Some systems like capitalism arguably need perpetual crisis to reinvent and extend themselves. Crisis is only possible by virtue of criticism. As social interests inevitably diverge, the nature of crises and the proposed remedies are variously justifiable through critiques that appeal to overarching narratives, be they religious, political or historical.[21]

Criticism and crisis 1: Entry of the Germans

> There are all kinds of devices invented for the protection and preservation of countries: defensive barriers, forts, trenches, and the like... But prudent minds have as a natural gift one safeguard which is the common possession of all, and this applies especially to the dealings of democracies. What is this safeguard? Scepticism. This you must preserve. This you must retain. If you can keep this, you need fear no harm (Demosthenes).

The relationship of criticism to crisis is an important topic, not least because several of the world's human scientific heavyweights have waded in. Their arguments are, perhaps unsurprisingly, at times complicated. So, in the next three sections, it is helpful at times to draw on extensive quotations.

> The word 'criticism' (French *critique*, German *Kritik)* and the word 'crisis' (French *crise*, German *Krise*), both derive from the Greek *κρίνω* [*krínō*]: to differentiate, select, judge, decide; Med.: to take measure, dispute, fight.(The same root, cri-, is found in the Latin *cerno* and *cribrum*, Fr. *crible*: sieve). The Greek usage of *κρίνω* and *κρίσις* [*krísis*] generally, even if not originally, referred to jurisprudence and the judicial system. 'Crisis' meant discrimination and dispute, but also decision, in the sense of final judgement or appraisal, which today falls into the category of criticism. In Greek, a single concept encompassed today's distinctive meanings of 'subjective' criticism and 'objective crisis' (Koselleck 1988: 103).

Elegant as appeal to the ancient etymology is, what has it to do with the analysis of politico-philosophical criticism? Crucially it underwrites a culturally singular account of intellectual history.

> In his analysis of the intellectual roots of the French Revolution, he stresses the philosophical criticism of the Enlightenment as cause of the ensuing political crisis. Rejecting the optimistic faith in human progress, Koselleck describes the emergence of bourgeois society as a 'pathogenesis,' a form of disease that reached a decisive moment when the Ancien Régime was overthrown… Following its semantic diffusion, the concept of crisis became essential for Koselleck's diagnosis of a modernity in which critical intellectuals try to improve social, political, and economic institutions by envisioning better futures. In doing so, they widened

[21] An overlooked question is: whose narratives? In stressing hegemonic accounts, it is easy to forget that for every articulation, there are always counter-articulations. What tends to be ignored—and so disarticulated—are quotidian narratives, so natural, normal and self-evident that they serve, as it were, as the substrate against which everything is measured.

To give one example, in theory Balinese subscribe to the Hindu system of four epochs or *Yuga*. Needless to say we live in the Kali Yuga, the final and direst which, scripturally, lasts 432,000 years. One day in the research village I joined a small group of men sitting at a coffee stall. They were discussing how long the *yuga*s actually lasted. Working from the Dutch conquest of South Bali in 1908 through the war of Independence after WWII to the massacres after the supposed communist coup in 1965-66 to the present period of calm, they concluded that the four *yuga*s together lasted sixty years. Contrary to nationalist ideology, ordinary Balinese whom I knew found colonial rule far less life-threatening than the incessant warfare previously. Things had then gone downhill gradually culminating in the murders of one in five adult men in the village in the 1960s. Under the New Order, Bali experienced peace and relatively prosperity. Nor was this conversation one-off. When the need arose to frame events, Balinese villagers drew on very similar narratives. The moral is: Beware scholastic hegemony.

> the gap between the 'space of experience' and the 'horizon of expectation,' opening the future as a malleable realm for human creativity. This modern perception of time was epitomized in the collective singulars of 'progress' and 'history' and fueled the political ideologies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Crises became the transitional but potentially disruptive phases in this generally progressive temporalization of history (Graf & Jarausch 2017: 3).

The vision of philosophical criticism causing political crisis and precipitating change has inspired many commentators and imitators. The argument is not all it seems. Its key ideas are far from innocent. Terms like history and progress groan under the burden of their culturally singular presuppositions, locked into a self-validating conceptual scheme.[22]

Crisis may throw the legitimacy of an entire political order into question, a point developed by Habermas in his *Legitimation crisis*. On his account, a crisis happens when serious contradictions emerge between the elements of a social system. Such a crisis has subjective and objective aspects, analyzable as the difference between social integration (the world as participants experience it) and system integration (the analysis of the system as such).[23] The problem is that, left to themselves, markets become dysfunctional which offends a bourgeois ideology of fairness and so needs political legitimation. Habermas's argument aims to redress weaknesses in a purely systems approach by placing it in a kind of dialectical relationship between people's understandings (drawing on Schutz 1967). The move raises the question of ideology as it entails that the participants' consciousness is false. This is where criticism as rational communication comes to the rescue by leading from ideological benightedness towards emancipation.[24] So crisis leads to constructive criticism.

While crisis may be a handy diagnostic tool for spotting problems with political and social systems, it only works if systems and structures are what they are supposed to be in ideal models. It is one thing in the natural sciences to identify macro-systems, then investigate the micro-systems that underpin them. It is quite another to apply the metaphor to society, because practice, whether observable or interpretable, is rarely ordered. Appeal to notions like order, system, structure are assertions of ideals rather than how things actually work. As Nietzsche

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[22] Notoriously spatial metaphors of process—the 'space of experience' and 'horizon of expectation'—hypostatize and create an aura of tangibility, materiality and coherence which marginalizing openness, indeterminacy, even unknowability.

[23] Habermas's opening chapter gives a flavour of his approach.

> To use the expression 'late capitalism' is to put forward the hypothesis that, even in state-regulated capitalism, social developments involve 'contradictions' or crises. I shall therefore begin by elucidating the concept of crisis…
>
> We therefore associate with crises the idea of an objective force that deprives a subject of some part of his normal sovereignty. To conceive of a process as a crisis is tacitly to give it a normative meaning—the resolution of the crisis effects a liberation of the subject caught up in it.
>
> A society does not plunge into crisis when, and only when, its members so identify the situation. How could we distinguish such crisis ideologies from valid experiences of crisis if social crises could be determined only on the basis of conscious phenomena?
>
> Crisis occurrences owe their objectivity to the fact that they issue from unresolved steering problems… A social-scientifically appropriate crisis concept must grasp the connection between system integration and social integration. The two expressions "social integration" and "system integration" derive from different theoretical traditions. We speak of social integration in relation to the systems of institutions in which speaking and acting subjects are socially related [*vergesellschaftet*]. Social systems are seen here as life-worlds that are symbolically structured. We speak of system integration with a view to the specific steering performances of a self-regulated system. Social systems are considered here from the point of view of their capacity to maintain their boundaries and their continued existence by mastering the complexity of an inconstant environment.
>
> With the appearance of functional weaknesses in the market and dysfunctional side effects of the steering mechanism, the basic bourgeois ideology of fair exchange collapses. Re-coupling the economic system to the political—which in a way repoliticizes the relations of production—creates an increased need for legitimation (1978: 1, 4, 36).

[24] Habermas recognized that rationality was not some floating, indeed transcendent, system but required grounding in human communication (1984, 1987). Unfortunately he opted for ideal conditions, which rather vitiated the applicability of his argument to situated social practice.

remarked: 'I distrust all systematizers and stay out of their way. The will to a system is a lack of integrity' (Kaufmann 1976: 470).[25] That does make them irrelevant, but it does follow that ostensible crises of structure, which are generally claims by people serenely remote from the hurly-burly, may have precious little to do with how things function. From an example based on fifty years of participant-observation in one university, which I now know pretty well, organization and system is what you use to hit other people over the head with when it suits you or behind which you shelter when they are after you. In such circumstances, which are hardly unique to universities, structure is performative. It is used to present matters at certain moments to certain audiences, mostly on public occasions, when seeking political advantage or in theatrical displays of mastery. Those who have managed to rise to the top are less masters of structure than skilled masseurs.

Habermas's thesis rests on a number of premises that are relevant to my argument. It presupposes a clear distinction between subjective and objective worlds. It does not question the fundamental merits of systems theory, instead it mitigates shortcomings by juxtaposing human lived experience. Like systems, such experience—rarified, generalized, uncoupled from anything quotidian—is taken to comprise a coherent whole, in the latter instance thanks to ideology. The existence of false consciousness sets up a dialectic towards a true, undistorted consciousness, guaranteed by a rationality that is systematic, self-validating and potentially nigh on omniscient.[26] Lastly, the whole of human history, from primitive, through traditional to liberal-capitalist social formations, is neatly organized and encompassable in a single totalizing narrative.

Criticism and crisis 2: the French riposte (or, Elementary my dear Habermas)

> They who are to be judges must also be performers (Aristotle, Politics 8.6).

It should come as no great surprise that not everyone buys into this vision. Lyotard's famous *The postmodern condition* is 'a thinly veiled polemic against Jürgen Habermas's concept of a "legitimation crisis" and vision of a "noisefree," transparent, fully communicational society' (Jameson 1984: vii).

> Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it… The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal…
>
> Thus the society of the future falls less within the province of a Newtonian anthropology (such as structuralism or systems theory) than a pragmatics of language particles. There are many different language games—a heterogeneity of elements. They only give rise to institutions in patches—local determinism (Lyotard 1984: xxiv)

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[25] The original was: '*Ich misstraue allen Systematikern und gehe ihnen aus dem Weg. Der Wille zum System ist ein Mangel an Rechtschaffenheit*' (Nietzsche, F.W. 1980 #26; translated 1997: 9).

[26] Heidegger raised questions about philosophies that ground themselves in consciousness or the subject.

> Because the status of the world is firmly anchored in human subjectivity, it becomes subject-centered, and philosophy becomes consciousness-centered. This syndrome Heidegger calls modern Subjectism *(Subjektität*) is a broader term than subjectivity, for it means that the world is regarded as basically measured by man. In this view the world has meaning only with respect to man, whose task is to master the world. The consequences of subjectism are many. First, the sciences take preeminence, for they serve man's will to master. Yet since in subjectism man recognizes no goal or meaning that is not grounded in his own rational certainty, he is locked in the circle of his own projected world... Therefore, says Heidegger, the great metaphysical systems become expressions of will, whether phrased in terms of reason (Kant), freedom (Fichte), love (Schelling), absolute spirit (Hegel), or will-to-power (Nietzsche).
>
> The will to power that is grounded in subjectism knows no ultimate value, only the thirst for more power (Palmer 1969: 144-5).

Against 'Newtonian' systematic rationalizing, drawing of Kuhn's (1970) and Feyerabend's (1975) critiques of natural science, Lyotard points out that the observable practice of scientists heads off in quite different directions. In place of system, we have a pragmatics of heterogeneous language games.[27]

What does Lyotard have in mind by metanarratives? It is not storytelling, but

> the status of science and technology, of technocracy and the control of knowledge and information today…[in which] legitimation becomes visible as a problem and an object of study only at the point in which it is called into question. As far as science is concerned, this crisis may be taken to be that of which the historical theories of Kuhn or Feyerabend stand as crucial symptoms… [This vision of science rests on] two great legitimizing 'myths' or narrative archetypes (*récits*)…disengaged by Lyotard and identified as the alternate justifications for institutional scientific research up to our own period—that of the liberation of humanity and that of the speculative unity of all knowledge (qua philosophical system) (Jameson 1984: viii-ix; square parentheses mine).

If there is a cogent argument against accepting natural science in its own ideal terms, *a fortiori* theories look distinctly dodgy like Habermas's or Koselleck's that celebrate the liberatory agenda behind the grand sweep of (European) history and the unity of knowledge based on (again a distinctly European) rationality. Amusingly, this rationality, far from being a guarantee of the truth of argument, turns to consume itself, as German and French philosophers both use to it in contrary ways to contrary ends.

Because it is germane to what follows, I wish to sketch out one aspect of Lyotard's argument, which is developed further in the work of Deleuze and Foucault, namely rethinking these grand myths in terms of humble practice.

> Social pragmatics does not have the 'simplicity' of scientific pragmatic It is a monster formed by the interweaving of various networks of heteromorphous classes of utterances (denotative, prescriptive, performative, technical, evaluative, etc.)… For this reason it seems neither possible, nor even prudent, to follow Habermas in orienting our treatment of the problem of legitimation in the direction of a search for universal consensus through what he calls *Diskurs,* in other words, a dialogue of argumentation.
>
> This would be to make two assumptions. The first is that it is possible for all speakers to come to agreement on which rules or metaprescriptions are universally valid for language games, when it is clear that language games are heteromorphous, subject to heterogeneous set of pragmatic rules.
>
> The second assumption is that the goal of dialogue is consensus. But as I have shown in the analysis of the pragmatics of science, consensus is only a particular state of discussion, not its end. Its end, on the contrary, is paralogy [the continuous creation of meaning]. This double observation (the heterogeneity of the rules and the search for dissent) destroys a belief that still underlies Habermas's research, namely, that humanity as a collective (universal) subject seeks its common emancipation through the regularization of the 'moves' permitted in all language games and that the legitimacy of any statement resides in its contributing to that emancipation (Lyotard 1984: 65-66 square parentheses mine).

[27] Drawing on the role of the mass media, Lyotard notes that how 'scientists' argue in public shows narrative being made to re-emerge from system.

> This return of the narrative in the non-narrative, in one form or another, should not be thought of as having been superseded once and for all. A crude proof of this: what do scientists do when they appear on television or are interviewed in the newspapers after making a "discovery"? They recount an epic of knowledge that is in fact wholly unepic. They play by the rules of the narrative game; its influence remains considerable not only on the users of the media, but also on the scientist's sentiments. This fact is neither trivial nor accessory: it concerns the relationship of scientific knowledge to "popular" knowledge, or what is left of it. The state spends large amounts of money to enable science to pass itself off as an epic: the State's own credibility is based on that epic, which it uses to obtain the public consent its decision makers need (1984: 27-8).

Although 'postmodern' is a term of abuse among the more troglodyte Anglo-Saxon scholars, Lyotard's argument is an essay in the pragmatics of knowledge (esp. 1984: 18-27), which draws on the performative approach of Austin and Searle.

In short, much, if not all, theoretical argument about crisis and science involves narrative, grand or workaday. Certain historically and culturally particular presuppositions have however become so axiomatic that we take them for granted. An example is evolution and its avatars like progress and development. Amusingly many scholars imagine the notion to have been established empirically by Darwin, whereas it emerged in the eighteenth-century as a new paradigm of history.

> Modern cosmology could only have arisen from a widespread familiarity with historical studies, and in particular with historical studies of the kind which placed the conception of process, change, development in the centre of their picture and recognized it as the fundamental category of historical thought... Transposed during the next half-century into terms of natural science, the idea of 'progress' became the idea which in another half-century was to become famous as that of 'evolution' (Collingwood 1945: 10).

Before we offer pujas, consider some of the implications.

> Since evolution became fashionable, the glorification of Man has taken a new form. We are told that evolution has been guided by one great Purpose: through the millions of years when there were only slime, or trilobites, throughout the ages of dinosaurs and giant ferns, of bees and wild flowers, God was preparing the Great Climax. At last, in the fullness of time, He produced Man, including such specimens as Nero and Caligula, Hitler and Mussolini, whose transcendent glory justified the long painful process. For my part, I find even eternal damnation less incredible, and certainly less ridiculous, than this lame and impotent conclusion which we are asked to admire as the supreme effort of Omnipotence (Russell 1961: 53-54).

Crisis is, in effect, a symptom of deviation from the norm or ideal. If the world is imagined as stable, then crisis is disruption of the fixed order of things. Crisis in an evolving world is more complicated because it requires distinguishing normal from abnormal change, at which point, far from constituting a crisis, revolution may become the ultimate form of evolution.

Criticism and Crisis 3:

> Even in its most naive form, that of evaluation, the critical act is concerned with conformity to origin or specificity: when we say of art that it is good or bad, we are in fact judging a certain degree of conformity to an original intent called artistic (de Man 1983: 8)

Crisis and criticism have something else in common: they are judged by conformity to an original or an ideal. So far, so straightforward. However, arguments like Habermas's rest on a set of highly conventional presuppositions, the validity of which is reinforced by appeals to an ancient pedigree. Perhaps the most succinct counterargument is Nietzsche's, who questioned the status accorded to language and so truth by remarking that they are in effect the congealed deposit of social relations.

> What is truth? a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations which were poetically and rhetorically heightened, transferred, and adorned, and after long use seem solid, canonical, and binding to a nation. Truths are illusions about which it has been forgotten that they are illusions, worn-out metaphors without sensory impact, coins which have lost their image and now can be used only as metal, and no longer as coins (Nietzsche 1989: 250).

In sum, our most treasured beliefs are simply extrapolations from social representations. And the aura of unique truth to European thinking has not a little to do with its previous colonial power.

What bearing does this have on crisis and criticism? For a start, it raises questions of the criteria of judgement.

> The trend in Continental criticism, whether it derives its language from sociology, psychoanalysis, ethnology, linguistics, or even from certain forms of philosophy, can be quickly summarized: it represents a methodologically motivated attack on the notion that a literary or poetic consciousness is in any way a privileged consciousness, whose use of language can pretend to escape, to some degree, from the duplicity, the confusion, the untruth that we take for granted in the everyday use of language. We know that our entire social language is an intricate system of rhetorical devices designed to escape from the direct expression of desires that are, in the fullest sense of the term, unnameable—not because they are ethically shameful (for this would make the problem a very simple one), but because unmediated expression is a philosophical impossibility.
>
> The need to safeguard reason from what might become a dangerous *vertige*, a dizziness of the mind caught in an infinite regression, prompts a return to a more rational methodology. The fallacy of a finite and single interpretation derives from the postulate of a privileged observer; this leads, in turn, to the endless oscillation of an intersubjective demystification… literature finally comes into its own, and becomes authentic, when it discovers that the exalted status it claimed for its language was a myth. The function of the critic then naturally becomes coextensive with the intent at demystification that is more or less consciously present in the mind of the author. This scheme is powerful and cogent, powerful enough, in fact, to go to the root of the matter and consequently to cause a crisis (de Man 1983: 9, 10, 14).

This post-Nietzschean turn undermines not just a retreat to safe ground of European ideas of reason, but also to language as ultimately referential and transparent, rather than a rhetorical thing of shreds and patches. If language is not the obedient servant of reason and does not guarantee the validity of one interpretation over others, then the nature of criticism turns around sharply to question the questioners. If truth is in effect myth (albeit a singularly entrenched and persuasive European myth), criticism becomes the task of demystifying it.

If truth and reason have rocky foundations, so do two other cornerstones of European grand narratives. Am I not being slightly unkind in lambasting European arguments about criticism and crisis? I think not. Husserl approached the issue head-on in a lecture, *The Crisis of European Humanity and Philosophy* (reworked in 1970). As de Man notes,

> Husserl's own text, especially on the numerous sections in which philosophy is said to be the historical privilege of European man. Husserl speaks repeatedly of non-European cultures as primitive, prescientific and pre-philosophical, myth-dominated and congenitally incapable of the disinterested distance without which there can be no philosophical meditation (1983: 15).
>
> The privileged viewpoint of the post-Hellenic, European consciousness is never for a moment put into question; the crucial, determining examination on which depends Husserl's right to call himself, by his own terms, a philosopher, is in fact never undertaken. As a European, it seems that Husserl escapes from the necessary self-criticism that is prior to all philosophical truth about the self… Lévi-Strauss had to give up the notion of subject to safeguard reason. The subject, he said, in fact is a 'foyer virtuel', a mere hypothesis posited by the scientists to give consistency to the behavior of entities… Lévi-Strauss' suppression of the subject is perfectly legitimate as an attempt to protect the scientific status of ethnology; by the same token, however, it leads directly into the larger question of the ontological status of the self (de Man 1983: 16, 18-19).

Criticism, which initially seemed a rational, powerful, uncontroversial way of exposing crisis, can, and needs to, be turned to criticize its genealogy. Language, truth, even the self and human consciousness, are up for grabs.

Criticism—when the wheels come off

> A good critic is the sorcerer who makes some hidden spring gush forth unexpectedly under our feet (François Mauriac, *A critique of criticisms*).

What provisional conclusions can we draw from this discussion? It does not make much sense to talk of crisis independent of some normal state from which it is judged a serious divagation that demands action. Similarly criticism, on most accounts, is only conceivable when matters fail to conform to some origin or ideal. After all, utopia renders criticism obsolete, perhaps inconceivable. If truth is inextricable from language in social use, narrative and rhetorical styles cannot easily be dismissed. The monoliths of reason, knowledge, society and so on may require rethinking as social practices, not in order to distill an acultural essence from them, but to appreciate how irreducible diversity human activity and thinking is. Any such recognition plays havoc with the object of study as conventionally understood.

It is interesting to reappraise the implications for critical theory. The object of study, the modern state and its economic and political structures, as a notional totality becomes problematic. So does the goal of critical theory as human emancipation by recognition of the false consciousness that ideology imposes on people in society. Unless we can extrapolate a single kind of false—and its antithesis 'true'—consciousness from the different 'language games' and multifarious contexts of human action and thinking, the problem transforms. And are we to take it that emancipation has always taken one form for all humanity? It looks rather frighteningly as if critical thinking ends up in a monologue created by a cadre of intellectuals, comfortably sure of their own rightness. An aspect of criticism that the scholars in question deftly finesse is what made them, of all the people on the planet, uniquely, exclusively and authoritatively qualified to engage in privileged critique?

> The notion that response was judgment depended, of course, on the social confidence of a class and later a profession. The confidence was variously specified, originally as *learning* or scholarship, later as *cultivation* and *taste*, later still as sensibility. At various stages, forms of this confidence have broken down, and especially in C20 attempts have been made to replace it by *objective* (cf. subjective) methodologies, providing another kind of basis for judgment. What has not been questioned is the assumption of 'authoritative judgment' (Williams 1983: 85-6).

We now see why hardline rationalists get so enraged by criticism (*sic*!) and go to such inordinate lengths to defend their particular, indeed idiosyncratic,[28] versions of some all-embracing, binding rationality. It is their 'authoritative judgment', and with it the self-appointed right to speak on behalf of people everywhere, that is being questioned.

Contrary to dyed-in-the-wool defenders of reason, the choice has never been between the claims of universal (aka European) reason and loony relativism. The critics of universalism use reason to argue; they are just aware that it has limits. Abstract notions of truth, reason or the subject need to be inflected by looking at how people assume, assert, reflect upon, question and deny what is true by drawing upon cultural styles of reasoning in practice. If this summons up the bogeyman of rhetoric then, insofar as people phrase their ideas, try to persuade others, allow themselves to be persuaded or even hold such truths to be self-evident, it looks oddly like imposing 'authoritative judgment' to inform them that they are misguided or plain wrong.

[28] While rationalists of different hues all blazon reason, they are inclined to trumpet their version against all comers. Alas, almost all have different definitions of what constitutes reason. For some it is a fairly straightforward retread of Aristotle's laws of logic, for others it is some version of pure reason, for yet others it is practical reason or, more sensibly, in Charles Taylor's formulation 'reason plus', the plus being variable. As almost no two rationalists agree about exactly what reason is and does, it were no bad thing were they to get their house in order before prescribing how everyone else should think.

Incidentally, it does not follow that critics of rationalism forswear reason and embrace unreason (whatever that is). Patently there are contexts when using canons of logic of different kinds (after all, besides the obvious ones, there are symbolic, modal, predicative, presuppositional, let alone non-Western logics) seems a good idea. There are contexts when it appears inappropriate.

The idea that it might be wise to inflect styles of reasoning according to who is deploying them under what circumstances is not idealistic. On the contrary, it is empirically grounded. Drawing on Cultural Studies, human subjects are not unitary but divided and often set against one another by fundamental differences of race, class, gender (and other possible considerations like religion and generation). It is asking rather a lot to imagine that all the differences, conflicts, contradictions and antagonisms of rival, incompatible and indeed incommensurable interests are likely to be resolved through rational communication into Habermas's ideal of consensus where one point of view (presumably the true or correct one) eventually prevails. Instead of this privileged monologue, for some time there has been an alternative vision of social discourse that Lyotard called 'paralogy' and Bakhtin 'dialogue', 'heteroglossia' or even 'polyphony' (see Morson & Emerson 1990). The vision of society either as a coherent, integrated system or one in which conflicts are ultimately resolvable through communicative reason is not wrong. It is one articulation—one asserted to be uniquely authoritative—among several. The question is: How do others, notably those that are capable of appreciating diverse interests and styles of argument, think of and deal with criticism?

Criticism unchained

> An Irishman was cutting peat in the depths of Connemara when he encountered an Englishman who asked directions as he had lost his way. After some thought the Irishman replied: 'If it was meself that was going to Letterfrack, faith, I wouldn't start from here'.[29]

The ramifications of rethinking criticism as practice are legion. Definitions become the outcome of articulatory practices made under particular conditions. Is there then an essence that distinguishes criticism from argument, discussion or commentary? Taken at face value, Mark Anthony's speech in the opening quotation praises Brutus. Repeated four times, it invites listeners to question and criticize Brutus's motives. Analysis of practice gets in the way of convenient closure around a privileged interpretation. Similarly concepts that assume system and structure, explicitly or implicitly, come into question. So, important as they are, distinctions of class, race, gender and so on can no longer be regarded as written in stone, because they too are articulations. Insofar as criticism is considered language-based, distinctions such as literacy *versus* orality become fuzzy when reviewed as practices in particular situations. Nor, academic prejudice apart, are there grounds for dismissing visual and other non-verbal commentative practices. Criticism is as criticism does. Carping critics might complain that my approach lets anything act as critical. The conclusion is erroneous. For a start, two assemblages of practices narrow down what counts as critical in any instance: the participants' and the analyst's styles of discriminating. Critics are correct though in concluding that this makes life more complicated. My riposte is that life is. Championing convenience is a paltry excuse for spurning actuality.

Just so I am clear, let me reiterate what is entailed by rejecting representation as a transcendentally underwritten relationship between a state of affairs and its mental counterpart. Phrased as practice, someone represents something *as* criticism to someone on some occasion for some purpose. Claims of fidelity to an original are disingenuous because representing

[29] The first written version of this old joke appears to be from 1924 in *The Hibbert Journal*, 22: 417.

necessarily transforms what it addresses. This formulation should hardly be threatening, except that it seems to ruffle birds of all sorts of feather. The accounts of criticism above take on a new significance. They are about intellectuals representing criticism *as* authoritative judgement to other intellectuals or a wider public in writing or other formal setting, fairly uncontroversially to assert that they are singularly or uniquely qualified to do so. If we consider Gramsci's remark that 'All men are intellectuals…but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals' (1971: 9),[30] the issue becomes more interesting, if more complicated.

How we are to address cultural differences without unnecessarily imposing European criteria?[31] If we gloss criticizing as practices of differentiating, discriminating and judging,[32] then these seem to occur in all societies. What differences in modes of judgement and evaluation might we expect? Writing on the history of argument and rhetoric, Kennedy suggested that

> writing greatly facilitated the possibility of conscious creation, analysis, and criticism of discourse, thus conceptualization, abstract thinking, and complex reasoning. Metarhetoric, or a theory of rhetoric, is a product of writing and is first to be found in early literate societies… In China and in India a considerable number of rhetorical terms came into use in the last centuries BCE and eventually detailed systems of literary criticism were developed (1998: 4-5).[33]

It seems then that we have to examine the potential relevance of writing and rhetoric.

For present purposes, Ong's well-known review of orality and literacy is useful. He lists a whole series of characteristics of oral as against written thought and expression. He lists nine features, sometimes with the antitheses to writing stated, which I review briefly.

(i) *Additive rather than subordinate*	Written discourse develops more elaborate and fixed grammar than oral discourse does because to provide meaning it is more dependent simply upon linguistic structure, since it lacks the normal full existential contexts which surround oral discourse and help determine meaning in oral discourse somewhat independently of grammar (2002: 37).
(ii) *Aggregative not analytic*	Oral expression thus carries a load of epithets and other formulary baggage which high literacy rejects as cumbersome and tiresomely redundant because of its aggregative weight (2002: 38).
(iii) *Redundant or 'copious'*	Since redundancy characterizes oral thought and speech, it is in a profound sense more natural to thought and speech than is sparse linearity (2002: 39).
(iv) *Conservative or traditionalist*	This need establishes a highly traditionalist or conservative set of mind that with good reason inhibits intellectual experimentation (2002: 41).

[30] For my purposes, 'men' here is obviously 'humans'. How Gramsci's attitude to either women or 'ordinary people' squares with contemporary Gender or Cultural Studies, I leave to those better qualified to comment. His footnote to this famous quotation is telling. 'Thus, because it can happen that everyone at some time fries a couple of eggs or sews up a tear in a jacket, we do not necessarily say that everyone is a cook or a tailor'. After eight years of intensive ethnography, I prefer a strong reading.

[31] *Kritērion*, means of judging, is from the same Greek root, here *kritēs*, critic,

[32] See above *krínō*: to differentiate, select, judge, decide; to appraise. The relevant OED definition is the action of 'passing judgement upon the qualities or merits of anything'.

[33] With an appropriate nod to the implicit hegemony, he adds: 'These terms, however, are unfamiliar to most Western readers and to try to use them as a basis of analysis of discourse in other cultures would be confusing' (1998: 5).

(v) *Close to the human lifeworld*	In the absence of elaborate analytic categories that depend on writing to structure knowledge at a distance from lived experience, oral cultures must conceptualize and verbalize all their knowledge with more or less close reference to the human lifeworld, assimilating the alien, objective world to the more immediate, familiar interaction of human beings (2002: 42).
(vi) *Agonistically toned*	Writing fosters abstractions that disengage knowledge from the arena where human beings struggle with one another. It separates the knower from the known. By keeping knowledge embedded in the human lifeworld, orality situates knowledge within a context of struggle (2002: 43).
(vii) *Empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced*	For an oral culture learning or knowing means achieving close, empathetic, communal identification with the known (Havelock 1963, pp. 145-6), 'getting with it'. Writing separates the knower from the known and thus sets up conditions for 'objectivity', in the sense of personal disengagement or distancing (2002: 45).
(viii) *Homeostatic*	The forces governing homeostasis can be sensed by reflection on the condition of words in a primary oral setting. Print cultures have invented dictionaries in which the various meanings of a word as it occurs in datable texts can be recorded in formal definitions (2002: 46).
(ix) *Situational rather than abstract*	Oral cultures tend to use concepts in situational, operational frames of reference that are minimally abstract in the sense that they remain close to the living human lifeworld (2002: 48-9).

Revealingly, Ong treats criticism exclusively as a practice of literary intellectual reflection.

How might the characteristics of oral as against written expression affect criticism? The dependence of meaning on linguistic structure, the lack of formulae or redundancy, 'objectivity', formal definition and detachment from lived situations might affect the style, but not necessarily the impact, of criticism. The absence of elaborate analytical categories would presumably bear on classifying types of argument, but not directly on the ability to be critical. That leaves two distinctions. 'Conservative or traditionalist' are evaluative, and relative, terms. Behind these lurks an evolutionary narrative: from closed tradition to open modernity, modernity being identified with writing. Ong makes minimal concession to the risks: 'Writing is of course conservative in its own ways'. However he goes on: 'But by taking conservative functions on itself, the text frees the mind of conservative tasks' (2002: 41). Far from tradition being an 'objective' phenomenon, it is invented—by highly literate societies (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). If literary fundamentalism, for instance in strict Biblical adherence in the USA, constitutes freeing the mind, then we should all be afraid.

An important issue, too extensive to discuss here, is the relative significance of literacy as against other considerations such as degrees of social hierarchy, notably divisions by class, ethnicity and gender or cultural differences. Societies are not homogeneous entities nor, considered as practices, are they uniform. So, another major topic would be the examination of the different discursive contexts in which critical argument is found in any instance. These would obviously include political, legal and other decision-making fora, as well as all the settings and occasions where economic, social and personal interests are argued out. The topic is so extensive that I am loth to pre-empt empirical inquiry.

One theme raised by Ong goes far beyond an issue of orality because it bears on social conflict more generally, namely agonism. There are too many considerations for there to be a simple correlation between how serious the issues are and how aggressive or combative the criticism. It is not just that styles of criticism may be more or less formalized (Bloch 1975) but, when criticizing, what someone actually says (a locutionary act) may be quite different from how the speaker intends it to be taken (its illocutionary force) or what its consequences are (its perlocutionary effect, Austin 1962). Much depends therefore on both context and participants' understandings. While they are incomparably easier, formalist readings are not just uninformative but often fundamentally misleading.

Even in such clearly defined situations as public deliberative debate, styles of argument and criticism cannot easily be fixed by correlation with social structures but vary greatly. For example, the ancient Greeks were notoriously combative. According to Kennedy

> the most distinctive feature of Greek public address in contrast to that of many other cultures is its eristic qualities... Differences are usually politely or indirectly stated. In Egypt, Palestine, India, and China there are injunctions to turn away wrath with a soft answer, or even to be silent; this was not the attitude of the Greeks... In all societies calm deliberation sometimes breaks down, but generally speaking, throughout the non-Western world, rhetoric has been used for purposes of agreement and conciliation, and emotionalism, except in the case of lamentation for the dead, is regarded as in poor taste. There is also often an accompanying disapproval of blatant flattery, though flattery of those in power easily develops in autocratic societies. The Greeks were contentious from the beginning, and acceptance and indulgence of open contention and rivalry has remained a characteristic of Western society except when suppressed by powerful authority of church or state (1998: 197-8).

This broad-brush approach runs into equal difficulties. According to whom 'throughout the non-Western world, rhetoric is used for purposes of agreement and conciliation'? The claim pays no attention to how people evaluate what is going on. And can we ignore issues of hierarchy which *prima facie* might affect how direct criticism is?

Comparing different Indonesian societies is interesting. Writing about the egalitarian Wana in Central Sulawesi, Atkinson notes that they use 'wrapped words' to 'encapsulate a state of affairs in a fitting image, express opinions or sentiments, pose questions, or propose a course of action' (1984: 40). Although they are indirect and often elegant, everyone knows what their intended reference is. Elsewhere in the archipelago, Balinese not only use similar elegant and indirect forms, but even use the same expression 'raos makulit' (wrapped speech). In contrast to the Wana, Balinese society is highly hierarchical except in local village corporate groups which proclaim an egalitarian ethos. Despite the marked contrast, in both kinds of context indirection is the default style of public speaking—here criticism. That makes it no less effective. Mature adults and the targets of criticism fully appreciate what is going on. We need to rephrase Kennedy's generalization.

> In native egalitarian societies, where personal autonomy is valued, speakers generally avoid direct attack on other individuals, politeness prevails on the surface, and criticism tends to take the form of indirect and allusive speech with ambiguous references... The West has inherited from the Greeks an acceptance of confrontation and personal invective (and, I might add, a tolerance of flattery) that has been rare in the rest of the world (1998: 63).

If most of the world opts for good reasons for what Rossetti called 'the stealthy school of criticism' and eschews needless confrontation and invective, judging the Western exception to be the rule now seems quaint.

The accounts of criticism we have considered are shot through with residual unresolved positivism.[34] They also tend to closure around Western élite intellectual preconceptions. Two kinds of realization would upset this comfortable state of affairs. The first is to recognize the significance of the lived worlds of other peoples, the study of which is hived off to specialized institutions like SOAS. The second is to appreciate the full implications of the practices in which people everywhere manifestly engage.[35]

It took a French intellectual of peasant stock to highlight and celebrate how the 'silent majorities' subvert and mock the political order that imagines it holds them subject (Baudrillard 1983, 1988). The point has been fleshed out in Ariel Heryanto's neat adumbration of 'hyper-obedience', by which the powerless overdo obedience to whatever were the last dictates, here of a military régime, to the point of absurdity. In 1992 under the New Order,

> elections were never about contesting and winning the majority of votes. The final result was always already predictable. Nonetheless, there was usually a collective make-believe that the elections were about the sovereign people giving a mandate to the existing regime through competition with rival parties. There was always nation-wide mass mobilization during the so-called campaign weeks.
>
> The elaborate festivities during the so-called campaign weeks that the government sponsored to gloss over the whole event was not lost on the general mass who took it for what it was. There were street parades, parties, open-door concerts, and occasionally free lunches and T-shirt distribution. When the government encouraged the masses to participate in formal politics, obviously it meant a mobilization that did not go beyond street festivities and mass entertainment once every five years. The masses took the invitation and pushed it to its limits… In 1992 'mass enthusiasm' for the election campaign was so wild that security officers had to suspend some of these merry-making events. Once again, in a hyper-obedient response to the restrictions, the masses took it to the extreme by a complete withdrawal from the public festivities that threatened the intended celebration and credibility of the elections (1999: 163-4).

There is something reminiscent of Bakhtin's carnivalesque (1984). Breaking boundaries is not confined to being festive but may be cheerfully destructive. In October 1999, in the Indonesian presidential elections, when Megawati Sukarnoputri failed to win, rioters in Bali's capital, to the dismay of the middle classes, proceeded to cut down many of the large and sometimes ancient trees that were one of the city's more attractive features, quite apart from providing welcome shade. The villagers I spoke to were not unsympathetic. It was a criticism of how out of touch the political élite was with ordinary people. If those in power could destroy the country for their own ends, the poor deserved their moment too.

Silence entails neither consent nor the lack of criticism. An account of 'ordinary people' is notably absent. So James Scott's *The weapons of the weak* (1985) is a useful reminder of how the vast majority of the world's population is silenced. Although they may be relatively powerless, Malay peasants of whom he writes are skilled critics. However, like poor people elsewhere, lacking the correct status, wealth or position, styles of presentation, they are expediently excised from the relevant arenas and occasions of decision-making That does not mean people are uncritical. It is just that they are unheard. As a distinguished local actor and intellectual in Bali questioned whether 'the poor could succeed in speaking. Even if they did…they are worth nothing, no one is listening' (Hobart 2000: 84). His point is that there is a formidable apparatus to ensure the poor are unable to talk about their circumstances and, even

[34] RUP, Residual Unresolved Positivism, is a useful phrase made famous by Owen Barfield.

[35] The role of anthropologists mostly is to offer ethnographic examples used to set the boundaries of these neatly structured worlds rather than to upend these worlds.

if they were, no one would listen. In a neat instance of weapons of the weak, the words '*Koh Ngomong*?', 'What's the point in talking?, started to appear on the mud flaps of trucks in Bali in the early 1990s.

Criticism need not be verbal. Nor are they mere 'paper bullets of the brain'.[36] That is why the more despotic régimes dislike or fear cartoonists. The Guardian's cartoonist, Steve Bell, portraying that the British Prime Minister, John Major as superman, whose underpants grew progressively larger and saggier as his political fortunes waned. I am told—I cannot vouch for its reliability—that his cabinet colleagues found the image haunting during meetings. It was also Steve Bell who depicted a subsequent Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, simply as a pair of buttocks topped with a mop of blond hair. When asked, Bell remarked: 'I don't even bother to draw him'.[37]

Lest readers should think that I am scratching around for examples, although it had happened nearly thirty years earlier, people in the research village in Bali often regaled me with the story (for a fuller account, see Hobart 2015b: 23-4).

> The Japanese occupation of Bali led to great material hardship. Where I worked, this was exacerbated by the village head, who was the client of the local aristocratic court, ensuring a small coterie of high castes and rich villagers monopolized the rations. Items in short supply included cotton. So ordinary villagers were forced to rely on bark cloth, while a privileged few had a surplus.
>
> One villager, Ketut Mara, found bark cloth underpants irritating—literally and metaphorically. He raised the matter in the village assembly to no avail. So he visited an old

[36] The quotation is from Shakespeare, Much ado about nothing ii, Sc 3 l. 249.

[37] Although there are entirely wordless cartoons, I have chosen a selection that make the criticism clear. As with Bell's other representations, there is often a quite complex history which adds layers of connotations. When Johnson switched from pro-European to favouring Brexit, Bell drew him as John Bull mooning at the EU express train. My reading, and I suspect I am not alone, is that Bell is intimating that Johnson is speaking through his fundament.

> friend who was responsible for issuing licenses. Armed with a ration of fifteen metres of cotton cloth purchasable in Ubud to the south, without telling anyone. The first that anyone knew was early one afternoon a strange figure entered the village, festooned with five metres each of red, white and blue fabric trailing on the ground behind him. As crowds gathered, Ketut Mara processed to the central square before stopping in front of the court at a coffee stall where he ordered a drink. The furious headman found his authority had been challenged. The incident crystallized opposition to the clique centred on the court and against its wishes, villagers proposed their own candidate for village head and won.

Ketut Mara's *coup d'éclat* was an elegant criticism with several strands. His choice of three colours was a reference to the high castes, *triwangsa* or *triwarna*, and how a few families linked to the court families had hogged the whole village's cloth allowance. The implication was that they had breached their caste duty, *darma*, to redistribute surplus not keep it all for themselves. They had lost the right to respect and subservience. As a criticism it was effective. Thereafter the village heads were neither clients of, nor chosen by, the court. That Ketut Mara's attack was wordless neatly reiterates the judgement that, even if poor villagers could speak, no one is listening.

Media and articulation

> Unmediated expression is a philosophical impossibility (de Man 1983: 9).

Media matter to crisis and criticism. In the contemporary world almost everything we know—or think we know—is mass or electronically mediated. We happily give our opinions about political leaders, public figures, celebrities and so on. Yet very rarely have we ever met them, let alone have sufficient acquaintance to judge. A vast edifice of commentary and criticism rests on the most tenuous and questionable foundations. Not only do we lack evidence, but even cursory reflection suggests what we are regaled with is partial, skewed, often vacuous, if not downright false. When events are hailed as a crisis, we are largely dependent on selected evidence. Often cries of 'crisis' aim at an emotive response with little or no pretence at argument. It is often remarkably hard to establish the evidence behind claims about the facts. 'Against that positivism which stops before phenomena, saying "there are only facts," I should say: no, it is precisely facts that do not exist, only interpretations' (Nietzsche Notes 1888 #481, cited in Kaufmann 1976: 458).

My earlier argument about representation may have appeared unnecessarily complicated or abstruse. However, I trust that trying to make sense, say, President Trump's assertions and the barrage of counter-assertions shows why we need to ask who represented what as what to whom, when and why. A strength of Cultural Studies is that it uses the concept of articulation to address some (but by no means all) of these issues. 'The concept of articulation is perhaps one of the most generative concepts in contemporary cultural studies' (Slack 1996: 112).[38] Articulation suggests

[38] Her opening two paragraphs are worth citing in full.

> The concept of articulation is perhaps one of the most generative concepts in contemporary cultural studies. It is critical for understanding how cultural theorists conceptualize the world, analyse it and participate in shaping it. For some, articulation has achieved the status of theory, as in 'the theory of articulation'. Theoretically, articulation can be understood as a way of characterizing a social formation without falling into the twin traps of reductionism and essentialism. It can be seen as transforming 'cultural studies from a model of communication (production-text-consumption; encoding-decoding) to a theory of contexts' (Grossberg, 1993: 4). But articulation can also be thought of as a method used in cultural analysis. On the one hand, articulation suggests a methodological framework for understanding what a cultural study does. On the other hand, it provides strategies for undertaking a cultural study, a way of 'contextualizing' the object of one's analysis.

> the form of the connection that *can* make a unity between two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. You have to ask, under what circumstances *can* a connection be forged or made? So the so-called 'unity' of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be rearticulated in different ways because they have no necessary 'belongingness'. The 'unity' which matters is a linkage between that articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions, but need not necessarily, be connected (Hall 1996: 141).

Thought-provoking as it is as a way of cracking the rigidities of structure and system, it is what happens when articulation is applied to the mass media that has proven revelatory.

Developing Althusser's account of how societies disseminate ideology through institutions like modern media, in a piece that proved seminal for the development of Media Studies Hall outlined how articulation worked in mass media like television which at the time was the mass medium *par excellence*.

> Any society or culture tends, with varying degrees of closure, to impose its classifications of the social and cultural and political world. These constitute a *dominant cultural order,* though it is neither univocal nor uncontested. This question of the 'structure of discourses in dominance' is a crucial point. The different areas of social life appear to be mapped out into discursive domains, hierarchically organised into *dominant or preferred meanings.* New, problematic or troubling events, which breach our expectancies and run counter to our 'commonsense constructs', to our 'taken-for-granted' knowledge of social structures, must be assigned to their discursive domains before they can be said to 'make sense'. The most common way of 'mapping' them is to assign the new to some domain or other of the existing 'maps of problematic social reality'. We say *dominant,* not 'determined', because it is always possible to order, classify, assign and decode an event within more than one 'mapping'. But we say 'dominant' because there exists a pattern of 'preferred readings'; and these both have the institutional/political/ideological order imprinted in them and have themselves become institutionalised. The domains of 'preferred meanings' have the whole social order embedded in them as a set of meanings, practices and beliefs: the everyday knowledge of social structures, of 'how things work for all practical purposes in this culture', the rank order of power and interest and the structure of legitimations, limits and sanctions (Hall 1980: 134).

At once, we are introduced to articulations, which are neither 'univocal nor uncontested', yet they are effectively and forcefully circumscribed through patterns of 'preferred readings' by which producers inflect events to fit a pre-existing interpretive matrix.

That leaves the question of how people, here television viewers, relate to such preferred readings. Hall suggests there are three ideal types of engagement.

> The first hypothetical position is that of the *dominant-hegemonic position.* When the viewer takes the connoted meaning from, say, a television newscast or current affairs programme full and straight, and decodes the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded, we might say that the viewer is *operating inside the dominant code* (Hall 1980: 136)

The second position is negotiated.

> Majority audiences probably understand quite adequately what has been dominantly defined and professionally signified… The definition of a hegemonic viewpoint is, first, that it defines within its terms the mental horizon, the universe, of possible meanings, of a whole sector of relations in a society or culture; and, second, that it carries with it the stamp of legitimacy—

However, articulation works at additional levels: at the levels of the epistemological, the political and the strategic. Epistemologically, articulation is a way of thinking the structures of what we know as a play of correspondences, non-correspondences and contradictions, as fragments in the constitution of what we take to be unities. Politically, articulation is a way of foregrounding the structure and play of power that entail in relations of dominance and subordination. Strategically, articulation provides a mechanism for shaping intervention within a particular social formation, conjuncture or context (Slack 1996: 112).

> it appears coterminous with what is 'natural', 'inevitable', 'taken for granted' about the social order. Decoding within the *negotiated version* contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules—it operates with exceptions to the rule (Hall 1980: 137).

Finally, there is an oppositional position

> it is possible for a viewer perfectly to understand both the literal and the connotative inflection given by a discourse but to decode the message in a *globally* contrary way. He or she detotalises the message in the preferred code in order to retotalise the message within some alternative framework of reference… He or she is operating with what we must call an *oppositional code* (Hall 1980: 137-8).

Only in this last, 'the "politics of signification"—the struggle in discourse—is joined' (Hall 1980: 138).

If social life is structured into 'discursive domains, hierarchically organized into *dominant or preferred meanings*', then adopting a dominant-hegemonic reading effectively restricts criticism to the options that the code permits. Criticism is not eliminated. Far more effectively, it is defanged, domesticated and twiddled to give the impression of freedom to make up your own mind, but within the pre-set institutional/ political/ideological order. Negotiated readings, as the term suggests, mix adaptive and oppositional elements. Here criticism is quite possible, but without challenging the fundamental legitimacy of the overarching system. For that to happen, you have to know what the preferred reading is saying and trying to do to you, then reject the code and set about a contrary totalization, root and branch. Quite apart from the analysis of how mass—and indeed much social—media work, Encoding/Decoding indirectly suggested a way to crack the almost exclusive focus on producers as the source of meaning by pointing out that these arguments had taken audiences, readers and so for granted as effectively passive. Perhaps the most significant result was a flowering of audience and reader studies. However, another offshoot has proven intriguing.

The literary cavalry to the rescue

John Fiske, who brought his background in literature to retool Hall's approach by applying the work of Roland Barthes to how the media worked. In particular, Fiske turned Barthes's analysis of contemporary bourgeois myth to show how television programming relies on a range of manoeuvres 'that hides its discursive nature and presents itself as natural rather than cultural, that is, as an unmediated product of, or reflection of, an innocent reality' (1987: 40). There are sophisticated mechanisms

> by which potentially disruptive events are mediated into the dominant value system without losing their authenticity. This authenticity guarantees the 'truth' of the interpretation that this mediating involves and thus allows, paradoxically, that which has been interpreted to present itself as objective. Objectivity is the 'unauthored' voice of the bourgeoisie… The impersonal objectivity of this discourse 'guarantees' its truth: it is an example of the ideological practice that Barthes (1973) calls 'exnomination'. Exnomination is the evacuation of a concept from the linguistic system with its structure of difference and alternatives. That which is exnominated appears to have no alternative and is thus granted the status of the natural, the universal, or that-which-cannot-be challenged (1987: 289-290).

For Barthes, exnomination is the means by which powerful interests disguise themselves by avoiding being named.[39] Where Fiske excels is in applying these insights to genres like

[39] Barthes laid out the argument neatly.

television news so that viewers are given the impression of being presented with an objective reality, so anticipating and forestalling the possibility of criticism. Yet more widespread than exnomination is the sleight of hand by which we are expected to accept 'an innocent reality' for what is deftly discursively mediated. Even otherwise sceptical scholars often fall for it.

One reason for the popularity of Hall's piece is that, while it makes selective use of the idea of articulation, it rests upon the solid, safe grounding of familiar, indeed conservative, concepts like social structure, order, domination, politics, ideology and codes. Question them and the entire argument becomes distinctly bockety. To give his case intellectual gravitas, Hall invokes precisely that notion of structure that articulation set out to question. Having told us that the dominant cultural order is neither univocal nor uncontested, he proceeds as if it were, while confining the possibility of criticism to alternative readings of codes, itself a dexterous form of closure. While the approach works well for Hall's political activist interests, how coherent is it theoretically? Indeed, what is its ancestry?

Totalities and explanation

The approach draws heavily on Althusser's analysis of ideology (1984) which, ground-breaking as it was, insisted on imposing system.

> Structuralist theories of reproduction present the dominant ideology (under which culture is subsumed) as impenetrable. Everything fits too neatly. Ideology always pre-exists and pre-empts any authentic criticism. There are no cracks in the billiard ball smoothness of process. All specific contradictions are smoothed away in the universal reproductive functions of ideology. . . [on the contrary] there are deep disfunctions and desperate tensions within social and cultural reproduction (Willis 1977: 175).

More remarkably, Hall's adopted his account from Althusser's former student, Ernesto Laclau, who set about undermining the reliance on structure and all the other much-loved concepts of the *ancien régime*. So Hall had to backpedal furiously to retain the *status quo ante* (see 1996), as he wanted articulation without the troublesome entailments.

Laclau drew on French theorists from the 1960s who reacted to the overblown structuralist claims of Lévi-Strauss and Althusser.

> The ambition of all holistic approaches had been to fix the meaning of any element or social process *outside* itself, that is, in a *system of relations* with other elements… More importantly structural totality was to present itself as an object having a positivity of its own, which it was possible to describe and to define. In this sense, this totality operated as an underlying principle of intelligibility of the social order. The status of this totality was that of an essence of the social order which had to be *recognized* behind the empirical variations expressed at the surface of social life. (Note that what is at stake here is not the opposition, structuralism, vs. historicism. It does not matter if the totality is synchronic or diachronic; the important point is that in both cases it is a *founding totality* which presents itself as an intelligible object of 'knowledge' *[cognitio]* conceived as a process or re-cognition.) 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 particular processes is an impossibility (Laclau 1990a: 90).

As a political fact, the bourgeoisie has some difficulty in acknowledging itself: there are no 'bourgeois' parties in the Chamber. As an ideological fact, it completely disappears: the bourgeoisie has obliterated its name in passing from reality to representation… It makes its status undergo a real *exnominating* operation: the bourgeoisie is defined as *the social class which does not want to be named*. 'Bourgeois', 'petit-bourgeois', 'capitalism', 'proletariat' are the locus of an unceasing haemorrhage: meaning flows out of them until their very name becomes unnecessary' (1973: 137).

When scholars discover systems of immaculate order and structural elegance, they mistake the world for a hall of mirrors and end up admiring themselves and their own ingenuity.

The difficulty of tinkering with structure is that, once you let go of its explanatory function, if it no longer determines, what exactly is left? As a philosopher, Laclau is rigorous in following through the implications.

> If we maintain the relational character of any identity and if, at the same time, we renounce the *fixation* of those identities in a system, then the social must be identified with the infinite play of differences, that is, with what in the strictest sense of the term we can call *discourse*—on the condition, of course, that we liberate the concept of discourse from its restrictive meaning as speech and writing (Laclau 1990a: 90).

What holds for structure applies equally to its explanatory counterpart—individuals—and with them consciousness as a unitary, coherent explanans.

> the identity and homogeneity of social agents was an illusion, that any social subject is essentially decentred, that his/her identity is nothing but the unstable articulation of constantly changing positionalities. The same excess of meaning, the same precarious character of any structuration that we find in the domain of the social order, is also to be found in the domain of subjectivity. But if any social agent is a decentred subject, if when attempting to determine his/her identity we find nothing else but the kaleidoscopic movement of differences, in what sense can we say that subjects misrecognize themselves? The theoretical ground that made sense of the concept of 'false consciousness' has evidently dissolved (Laclau 1990a: 92).

Some readers may feel that all this is a little too risqué as it throws out the commonsensical baby with the epistemological bathwater. Hall's thesis in Encoding/Decoding has proven very popular with scholars in Media Studies and beyond, because it offers a degree of flexibility missing from more rigid approaches using structure. Theoretically, however, it is inelegant. It is expository not explanatory. As a framework for a Marxist critique of capitalism and ideology it serves neatly, but at the expense of becoming pick 'n' mix. If structure 'influences', but does not determine, then you are effectively reduced to analytical description at the expense of the more difficult task of formulating a logically coherent argument with any serious philosophical rigour.[40]

For these reasons, although they both use the same terminology, Laclau's and Hall's usage of articulation and hegemony go in antithetical directions.[41] Whereas for Hall hegemony was a deeply entrenched set of articulations, Laclau stressed their openness and indeterminacy. After all, the idea that hegemony is virtually monolithic is itself an articulation. To Laclau articulation is one step towards developing a fully-fledged account of discourse. So it is

> any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call *discourse*... A discursive formation is not unified in the logical coherence

[40] 'Influence' is a weasel word. It purports to establish a relationship but refuses to specify the kind or degree. Appropriately, the terms origin is astrological and referred to the workings of the planets on human affairs. Academic invoking of 'influence' usually betokens a similar portentousness.
Exploring the wider significance of Quine's account of translational models, which under another description are explanatory schemes, Hesse notes that the co-existence of multiple schemes is easily overlooked because other criteria are invoked, often not consciously (1978). Some schemes are elegant in a mathematical or philosophical sense of being logically coherent, minimizing unnecessary presuppositions and is part of a tight lineage of argument. Others function practically, like applied metallurgy for predicting the life of car parts. Yet others underwrite a political or religious stance, even if their presuppositions are untidy or contradictory. Laclau's approach is sophisticated; Hall's political.

[41] For a detailed discussion of the differences, see the unpublished version of *The end of the world news* (2000) with *An afterthought on articulation* that contrasts the two accounts. Ernesto Laclau approved my analysis as a fair account of his thinking.

> of its elements, or in the a priori of a transcendental subject, or in a meaning-giving subject à la Husserl, or in the unity of an experience (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 105).[42]

By way of contrast:

> Discourses are ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice: a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society (Hall 1997: 6).

Hall offers an intellectual buffet: and one that looks and tastes remarkably like another gallimaufry: culture. It is a definition without rationale, without intellectual genealogy, without reference to the sophisticated debates around the concept.[43]

In Encoding/ Decoding, the only way that you can criticize the assumptions of the dominant articulation is through an alternative totalized oppositional code. Totalization can only be countered by totalization: one monolith by another. While that might be how society looks from empyrean sociological heights, ethnographically it is nonsense. In most places, much social life is about trying to cope, muddling through despite uncertainty or confusion; but it is also marked by semi-incessant arguing, disagreeing, complaining, commenting and criticizing. If we situate Hall's model within daily social activity, television watching is only a small part of a rich and diverse assemblage of media-related practices that include engaging, commenting, gossiping, using, adapting, complaining, rejecting etc.[44] I prefer Laclau's approach. It rephrases the totalities of structure, ideology and so on in terms of observable practice. Laclau was quite clear that a philosophical account of articulation was uncomplete and needed complementing and rethinking as practices: that being the task for an ethnography of media.[45]

What has all this to do with criticism? Releasing the tight reins on what counts as criticism might seem to make inquiry impossibly open and vague. To any articulation, however compelling, there are always in principle and practice counter-articulations. Any representation of events *as* something is open to other ways of representing them *as* something else. Equally important, but overlooked, a successful representation effectively disarticulates alternatives and silences its protagonists. That is what the Balinese villagers were sadly, if perceptively, saying. Spurred on by the transmission model of communication, it is easy to make the mistake of assuming that mediation is transparent and a way of conveying a message. It is anything but. There are powerful, vested interests in closing down articulations to preferred readings—all the while protesting veracity, openness, transparency. While, to media professionals, politicians and many academics, this may be how media production looks (or how they would like to think it is) the more ethnographic studies there are of audiences, the more they contradict

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[42] Laclau seems subsequently to have moved to an engagement with the work of Derrida (e.g. Laclau 1990a; 1996b) which, as Hall notes, took him further away from the problems of practice.

[43] Hall was quite explicit in his dislike of philosophy. So he had difficulties in particular with scholars like Foucault (for example on discourse, 1981), let alone Derrida, Deleuze or Baudrillard, despite the broad similarity of their political sympathies.

[44] During ten years' ethnography of television watching in a Balinese village, the only person who appeared to adopt the dominant hegemonic position was a notoriously two-faced schoolteacher. While in public meetings people kept their own counsel for the reasons the old actor outlined, otherwise precious few holds were barred in commenting and thoroughgoing criticism.

On the evidence from my own research in Indonesia on media production, the tightly controlled imprinting of the institutional/political/ideological order was often hard to discern as it was overwhelmed by a mixture of accepted procedures and flying by the seat of your pants that did not reduce comfortably to the outworking of a totalizing ideology.

[45] On one of the occasions that I invited Laclau to talk at SOAS, I asked whether his account of articulation did not require working out ethnographically. His response was that of course it did. He understood (correctly) that was a reason I had moved from Anthropology to Media Studies.

this vision. It is hard not to conclude that the gamut of preferred readings, ideology and so on are a story that élites need to tell themselves.

Coded confusions

We saw that a crucial element in creating the appearance of totality was the concept of code, which has a weighty semiological task. On the hegemonic structuralist reading, it is nothing less than imposing order on the riot of actual utterances. Even way back when, there were dissenting voices to Structuralism's predecessor, Russian Formalism.

> Dialogue and dialectics. Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness—and that's how you get dialectics.
>
> Context and code: A context is potentially unfinalized; a code must be finalized. A code is only a technical means of transmitting information; it does not have cognitive, creative significance. A code is a deliberately established, killed context (Bakhtin 1986: 147).

The difference matters. If there is no strict code governing what counts as criticism, and if it depends on context, then a formal approach is less than useless: it is positively misleading.

That this is not obvious is due in no small part to the hold on human scientists' imagination that an idealized model has which derives from Shannon and Weaver's mathematical theory of communication. Two elements concern me here: information and code. The grip of this theory is extraordinary and worthy of Alice in Wonderland. Now the authors of the theoretical statement go to great lengths to emphasize that the mathematical concept of information is quite different from its usual social or semantic sense.[46] As Baudrillard put it succinctly:

> We are in a universe where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning (1983: 95).

Although it is the popular stance on models of social information, it is only tenable so long as several conditions pertain. It presupposes that information is valid either as it corresponds to a state of the world or is meaningful, neither of which conditions hold for formal models of communication. Further it presupposes that items of information are not only independent of some framework of reference or knowledge, but that they are unaffected by the circumstances of communication, including the diverse contexts and interests of both communicators and recipients. The argument precludes the possibility that people represent something *as* something to someone in some situation for some purpose. The Latin etymology is pertinent: *informātiō* is literally 'shaping', 'giving form to' and so the OED definition as 'the action of informing; formation or moulding of the mind or character, training, instruction, teaching; communication of instructive knowledge'. The idea that information is neutral and does not affect the parties communicating presumes individuals as atoms engaged in transacting, if possible to their benefit but, being indivisible, without being affected directly in themselves.[47]

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[46] A propos communication

> the *semantic problems* are concerned with the identity, or satisfactorily close approximation, in the interpretation of meaning by the receiver, as compared with the intended meaning of the sender. This is a very deep and involved situation, even when one deals only with the relatively simpler problems of communicating through speech.
>
> The word *information*, in this theory, is used in a special sense that must not be confused with its ordinary usage. In particular, information must not be confused with meaning... To be sure, this word information in communication theory relates not so much to what you *do* say, as to what you *could* say. That is, information is a measure of one's freedom of choice when one selects a message (Shannon & Weaver 1949: 4, 8-9).

[47] The exception would be unmediated divine revelation. However this cannot be represented or even talked about without being mediated.

So it is little surprise that these assumptions are enshrined in the transmission model formalized most notably by Roman Jakobsen, its underlying unity is based on the following sequence:

TRANSMITTER—MESSAGE—RECEIVER (ENCODER—MESSAGE—DECODER)

It appears neat, commonsensical, even 'scientific', but it beggars belief.

> The message itself is structured by the code and determined by the context. A specific function corresponds to each of these 'concepts': the referential, poetic, phatic, etc. Each communication process is thus vectorized into a single meaning, from the transmitter to the receiver: the latter can become transmitter in its turn, and the same schema is reproduced. Thus communication can always be reduced to this simple unity in which the two polar terms are mutually exclusive. This structure is given as objective and scientific, since it follows the methodological rule of decomposing its object into simple elements (Baudrillard 1981: 178).

It is worth examining how this neat system is conjured up.

> This structure is based on the same arbitrariness as that of signification (i.e., the arbitrariness of the sign): two terms are artificially isolated and artificially reunited by an objectified content called a message. There is neither reciprocal relation nor simultaneous mutual presence of the two terms, since each determines itself in its relation to the message or code… It excludes, from its inception, the reciprocity and antagonism of interlocutors, and the ambivalence of their exchange. What really circulates is information, a semantic content that is assumed to be legible and univocal (Baudrillard 1981: 179).

We have a 'scientific realism' that ruthlessly strips out everything that is not deemed essential to operations. There is more at work. In the process of articulation 'phenomena constituting an overcoding are produced, phenomena of centering, unification, totalization, integration, hierarchization, and finalization' (Deleuze & Guattari 1988: 41).[48] Unfortunately we are dealing with social relationships that have not been cryogenized or artificially isolated in test tubes, but happen in complex social contexts involving more or less reflective participants. They are characters who 'possess *degrees of being* in proportion to the variety of perspectives from which they can with justice be perceived' (Burke 1969: 504).

The argument appears to work because code becomes an agent.

> The agency of the code guarantees this univocality, and by the same token the respective positions of encoder and decoder. So far so good: the formula has a formal coherence that assures it as the only *possible* schema of communication But as soon as one posits ambivalent relations, it all collapses. There is no code for ambivalence; and without a code, no more encoder, no more decoder: the extras flee the stage. Even a message becomes impossible, since it would, after all, have to be defined as 'emitted' and 'received.' It is as if the entire formalization exists only to avert this catastrophe. And therein resides its 'scientific' status. What it underpins, in fact, is the terrorism of the code. In this guiding schema, the code becomes the only agency that speaks, that exchanges itself and reproduces through the dissociation of the two terms and the univocality (or equivocality, or multivocality—it hardly matters: through the non-ambivalence) of the message (Baudrillard 1981: 179).

The basic encoding/decoding model seems so simple and useful that the urge to dismiss Baudrillard's arguments as Gallic intellectual acrobatics is powerful. Shortly we shall see why this would be unwise.

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[48] Perhaps the most striking feature of transmission models, coding etc. is how they attempt to close down what on other accounts is open, under-determined and unfinalizable.

> Perhaps to ask code and coders to think again about the way in which they see the world, to move from objects to things, and practice code as poetry (poeisis). Rather than code as ordering the world, fixing and overcoding. Code as a craft, 'bringing-forth' through a showing or revealing that is not about turning the world into resources to be assembled, and reassembled forever (Berry & Pawlik 2005).

Criticism and commentary

If criticism is not marked by formal and essential properties, but in most instances must be inferred analytically in context, what participants consider criticism is most unlikely to be uniform. Equally it probably differs from what observers with different interests conclude. So attempting a formal classification of criticism would be a waste of time. Instead I wish to peruse several mediated events which may reasonably be construed as critical.

Mediated events involve discursive closure, because one articulation is privileged over others, even if its recipients choose counter-readings. An extreme is censorship, when those responsible block whatever they aim to suppress. At its crudest, this consists of disseminating messages that those in power wish people to hear. The old joke about the former Soviet Union runs that, whenever the authorities announced a bumper harvest on the radio, listeners immediately assumed that the crops had failed. The drawback of message manipulation is that audiences are not fools and, in the light of experience, move to 'oppositional readings' as a matter of course. So it is more effective to try to limit or inflect the entire context of articulation, so that audiences have restricted access to alternative sources of information.[49] Somewhat paradoxically, social media encourage precisely this restriction, because people search out what fits their preconceptions aided nowadays by sophisticated algorithms. The claims of social media to be open are disingenuous. However, in practice, censorship does not always work as neatly as planned. In her analysis of Singaporean television production, Fong Siao Yuong showed clearly how the supposedly draconian censorship was as much a public performance as an effective mechanism. It is unwise to accept anything to do with media reception at face value (Fong 2016).

The passive mood

Techniques of directing how audiences or readers interpret events need to be fairly sophisticated to avoid people becoming aware of the skew. Barthes showed how simple linguistic procedures such as exnomination could produce surprisingly effective. Fiske used this to analyze television coverage of an industrial dispute between electricity workers and management.[50]

> Visually, the union spokespersons are shown as individuals… The management point of view, however, is exnominated. There is no spokesperson, instead it is the 'objective' voice of the news reader which speaks the management sense… The difference between the two social voices is embodied in the difference between the grammatical voices of active and passive. The active voice has a nominated subject and is thus appropriately used for union actions… On the other hand, management never appears as an agent in the conflict, its actions are described in the passive voice or impersonal mode… The nomination of the union voice admits that alternative viewpoints are possible and thus discredits its status: the exnominated management voice, however, is given the status of truth… Nominating discourses places them low in the hierarchy and thus licenses them to speak oppositionally or radically. The exnominated metadiscourse, however, speaks the final 'truth,' against which the partiality of the subordinated discourses can be assessed. Nominating disruptive discourses and exnominating that of social control is a common tactic of semiotic and ideological containment (1987: 290).

[49] North Korea seems to be the most successful example of censorship of this kind. Otherwise, some viewers or listeners seek out alternative sources, such as in the UK, where family members of ethnic minorities in particular use online sources to frame and criticize mainstream media outlets, print, broadcast or electronic.

[50] These examples are addressed in more detail in the Appendix.

Exnomination makes the workers seem unreasonable as 'the union appears the agent of disruption. The restorative event is the act of a government agency. Conflict of interest is implied to be a union invention: the power of the bourgeoisie is said to work through compromise/consensus' (1987: 300).

Little is left to chance. Exnomination is backed by other semantic steps. The first is to establish what is normality: the default—if imaginary—stance is that things run smoothly unless there is disruption, like a strike. Crises do not happen of their own accord. Someone causes them. The situation is further inflected by invoking metaphor: in this instance of war. The strike is 'crippling', leading to blackouts. The victims being construed as ordinary consumers. War is intimated not only by 'blackouts', but the announcer spoke of 'staff battled to keep the power generators turning' (1987: 298). Meanwhile we are told that 'the union executive was mapping out strategy' (1987: 298). Throughout viewers are treated as having identical interests to management in 'defeating' the unions who are 'emotional, dangerous ideologues', although the majority of audience members are themselves workers. Through exnomination a state of affairs is presented as normal, reasonable and objective rather than as criticism.

Criticism under censorship

Many societies live with some form of more or less explicit censorship. That does not however entail an absence of criticism. Rather it has to be phrased indirectly or draw on understandings that a significant part of the audience appreciates. I consider two examples, both during what was in effect a military dictatorship in Indonesia when fairly tough censorship was in place and state television (TVRI) was the 'propaganda arm of government'.[51] The first was a television film about development. The second was an episode from the Indian epic the Mahabharata, well known in Java and Bali.

A feature length film, *Payung Hitam* (Black Umbrella) was broadcast by the Balinese station of state television.[52] Briefly it dealt with the rise in agro-tourism in Bali as part of the multi-billion dollar local tourism industry. Set in the notoriously wet Balinese highlands, the local headman whose village stood to make a great deal of money was frustrated by the semi-incessant rain which discouraged tourists. So he hired a famous, but arrogant and greedy, magician to stop the rain. As a result the rain ceased for months to the delight and remuneration of the headman and the project, but to the consternation of small boys who made pocket money by providing umbrellas (as in the title) for visiting tourists. In desperation one of the boys suggests going to see his grandfather who has retired to a hermit's life in a nearby cave. After hearing the case, the hermit says: 'As a matter of fact hindering other people in the course of their work is forbidden in my view. We are not permitted to make things difficult for others'. He then engages the magician in a battle of magical power and sends the latter into a deep coma. Learning what has happened, the headman sends for police to arrest the hermit for failing to live in a house like normal people. The hermit retorts that the cave is beyond village jurisdiction and he can do as he wishes there. He has intervened on the boys' behalf because their parents have failed to do so.

> Hermit: And what's more you, as Village Head, have failed in your responsibility to your subjects. Without paying attention, you have violated these children's rights to earn a livelihood in this village.

[51] *Vista-TV*, No 023, 17th. August 1996, 24-25.

[52] I give a detailed analysis of the plot and viewers' commentaries in Hobart (ref).

Head: These are only children's concerns, only a few people. But the development of agro-tourism (*wisata agro*) is in the interests of the many.

Hermit: That does not mean that the weak must be crushed, does it? Even though they are children, they still have the right to make a livelihood in their village

Meanwhile a team of university researchers have turned up to study the project's success. Their leader intervenes upon which everyone defers to him. He points out that the children are their heirs; and nothing should be done to damage their future. Also a continued lack of rain will destroy the farmers' livelihoods as they grow rain-dependent crops. And anyway tropical rain is authentic!

At first sight this example is trivial, even infantile, compared to coverage of the union strike. But it is worth considering more carefully. A salient feature of the strike coverage as it was interpreted is that it cannot distinguish between polar opposites: an excuse for a politically motivated strike, intolerable behaviour management or other possibilities. The code on Fiske's analysis structures all possibilities into a monologue. The question of what proportion of news items globally over the years in which countries reduce (or can be reduced) to a single formula omits both the alternatives available and how viewers engage with such stories. The local Indonesian story by contrast already juxtaposes several scenarios: central government's development agenda, local knowledge about agricultural conditions (drought might encourage tourism but would destroy peasants' crops), the venality of local officials under the guise of 'helping the community', the recognition of different interests of different groups in society, balancing immediate gain against responsibility for future generations, an indigenous moral voice and modern 'scientific' authority (the last two being neatly complementary). We have at the very least six codes.

Matters become muddier if we consider what viewers made of the film. During discussion with a group of villagers, a landless labourer said that he liked its portrayal of how poor people lost out in development projects. However discussion soon turned to its weaknesses. The characters were badly delineated; acting was poor; the dialogue was stiff and unnatural; the point of the film confused and contradictory. The film had little redeeming merit. There was nothing further worth talking about.

To return to code: if a straightforward little film involves several irreducible and incommensurate codes, in order to retain the concept there must be a meta-code that codes codes. Even so, codes manifestly fail to account for viewers' assessments. We need to review approaches to understanding complex events that include spoken, visual and auditory aspects. So the choice of code is curious: it precludes appreciation of more sophisticated kinds of analysis. Code is axiomatic to a Saussurean approach, which is the simplest and most rigid. Its constitutive elements, the signifier and signified, comprise a system of mental entities, which can in theory be imposed on virtually anything, as we saw with ideas of preferred readings, exemplified in the union strike. Codes function independent of context, so reference (as against denotation) and practice.[53] Sticking to semiotics/semiology, C.S. Peirce's alternative theory

[53] A close reading of Barthes shows that his handling of code is careful.

> Is it possible to identify the language with the code and the speech with the message? This identification is impossible according to Hjelmslev's theory. P. Guiraud refuses it for, he says, the conventions of the code are explicit, and those of the language implicit; but it is certainly acceptable in the Saussurean framework (1967: 18-19).
>
> A Frenchman (unless he is abroad) cannot classify French faces; doubtless he perceives faces in common, but the abstraction of these repeated faces (which is the class to which they belong) escapes him. The body of his compatriots, invisible by its quotidian situation, is a language he can attach to no code; the *déjà vu* of faces has for him no intellectual value; beauty, if he encounters it, is never for him an essence, the summit or the fulfilment of a research, the fruit of an intelligible maturation of the species, but only a piece of luck, a protuberance from platitude, a departure from repetition. Conversely, this same Frenchman, if he sees a Japanese in Paris, perceives him in the pure abstraction of his race (1982: 95).

treats signifying as a contextual act resulting in an outcome, an interpretant, that becomes the starting point for a potentially unending sequence of further situated practices of signifying or interpreting. For semiotics, the concept of code is irrelevant, indeed meaningless and retrograde, to a pragmatic approach.[54]

This is only the beginning. The concept of code is only possible if you are intransigently myopic. As Ricoeur noted, signs are in effect one-dimensional (1976). Even simple units like sentences involve a relationship of predication by which a potentially infinite set of predicates can be attributed to a subject. There is no encompassing code for predication. Sentences rarely occur alone, but as part of a text—a notion that has been fetishized desperately by semiologists, who are trying to wrestle the complexities of human representations (*as*) into manageable form. Put simply, it has to reduce the myriad aspects of any represented set of events to what semiologists can handle, namely the written word. The Balinese viewers mentioned evaluated a gamut of insights from the film that were not reducible to text to draw their conclusions. In pragmatist terms, we are dealing not with texts but with practices of textualizing. Most serious of all, an entire school of thought deals with the sophisticated products of human thinking, namely hermeneutics in which, for obvious reasons, code has little place.[55]

Significantly Hall and Fiske avoid reference to the more sophisticated post-Saussurean approaches. This might be fine were it not for the glaring gaps. The code imposes such a rigid frame on interpretation that it cannot distinguish between the circumstances and motivations surrounding strikes: the difference between, say, politically motivated deliberate disruption and gross exploitation by management. One size fits all. Baudrillard's questioning of code starts to make sense. The ambiguities, overcoding, failure to fit observable events and practice are so rife as to be virtually omnipresent. For code to appear to work, there must be legerdemain such that the interpreter disguises their agency by pretending it is the code that decides, when there are always alternative interpretations. Baudrillard's 'the agency of the code' neatly dissects the deflection. In a game of smoke and mirrors, interpreters hide behind 'code' when they dissimulate and distance their involvement in the 'violence that they do to things' (cf. Foucault

[54] Deleuze and Guattari have fun playing with the concept of code by noting immediately that it is characteristically used in arborescent—not rhizomatic—schemes, where it tends to overcoding (1988: 9-10), as it works best in putatively stable systems, which are always open to leakage and deterritorialization. However, if you adopt a subtler model of language (such as Hjelmslev's), matters become complicated, more so the moment you allow for practice.

> The theory of the performative sphere, and the broader sphere of the illocutionary, has had three important and immediate consequences: (1) It has made it impossible to conceive of language as a code, since a code is the condition of possibility for all explanation. It has also made it impossible to conceive of speech as the communication of information: to order, question, promise, or affirm is not to inform some- one about a command, doubt, engagement, or assertion but to effectuate these specific, immanent, and necessarily implicit acts. Pragmatics ceases to be a 'trash heap,' pragmatic determinations cease to be subject to the alternative: fall outside language, or answer to explicit conditions that syntacticize and semanticize pragmatic determinations. Instead, pragmatics becomes the presupposition behind all of the other dimensions and insinuates itself into everything. (3) It makes it impossible to maintain the distinction between language and speech because speech can no longer be defined simply as the extrinsic and individual use of a primary signification, or the variable application of a preexisting syntax. Quite the opposite, the meaning and syntax of language can no longer be defined independently of the speech acts they presuppose (Deleuze & Guattari 1988: 77-78).

[55] So Barthes for instance avoids 'code' in all his interpretations in *Mythology*, keeping the notion for his semiological work, which can be read as an attempt to Gallicize a broadly German approach. This leads him to the curious position of treating the hermeneutic as one code among several (1974: ix).

1981: 127).[56] As Donoghue once remarked: 'The single, true interpretation is an autocrat's dream of power' (1981: 199).

Caveat auditor

There is an annual International Arts Festival in Bali, usually opened amid great fanfare and processions by the President of Indonesia. Among the night-time performances, also broadcast on state television, was a mass ballet, *Sendratari*, Pandawa Asrama, an episode from the Mahabharata when the Pandawa brothers are condemned to exile in the forest.[57] In a long speech, the sage Begawan Byasa explains the principles of good governance and warned against various kinds of misrule. Here is an extract from the speech.

> If you are the leader of a people, if you rule over them, you cannot live too well. You must not have too luxurious a life-style, but should live simply. You are such a leader. Now none of your subjects should be allowed to be corrupt—that is what you must command. But this must be seriously observed in practice. It should not just take the form of words: you order the masses to obey, but then it turns out that you did not do so yourself. That is the difficulty of becoming a ruler. It is easy to give orders; it is hard to put them into practice. That is the first thing to grasp.
>
> When a ruler is not honest, the world goes to rot. No way may you do that. This is what it is to be just. You have to strive to be fair and just to all of your subjects. On what do you base fairness? On the Four Kinds of Circumspection: Even-handedness (*Sama*), Discrimination (*Béda*), Generosity (*Dana*) and Strictness (*Danda*). Even-handedness: you should give to your subjects equally. The Kingdom of Indraprasta flourishes—who is responsible? All the subjects, all the officials, are the reason. All the armed forces are the reason. Because the ruler treated them all equally. If people should perhaps struggle to make a living, give those more—that's called *Sama*.

Begawan Byasa then turned to the arts and urged good leaders not to favour one group of artists over another. Otherwise those neglected will be angry; gossip will run rife and the ruler will be discredited. He then remarked that generosity and punishment should be judged by worth, not by family or favour.[58]

At first sight this excerpt might seem a fairly straightforward homily from a familiar story. That is not how people in the research village understood it nor, as I subsequently learned, did others. They regarded it as a blistering, but carefully modulated, criticism not just of President

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[56] Baudrillard sums up succinctly the thaumaturgy of the transmission model.

> So, this basic communication formula succeeds in giving us, as a reduced model, a perfect epitome of social exchange *such as it is*—such as, at any rate, the abstraction of the code, the forced rationality and terrorism of separation regulate it. So much for scientific objectivity… To repeat, in the symbolic exchange relation, there is a simultaneous response. There is no transmitter or receiver on both sides of a message: nor, for that matter, is there any longer any 'message,' any corpus of information to decode univocally under the aegis of a code. The symbolic consists precisely in breaching the univocality of the 'message,' in restoring the ambivalence of meaning and in demolishing in the same stroke the agency of the code (1981: 179, 183).

[57] I have published a short discussion of this in an article on commentary (Hobart 2006). The use of theatre as a means of social and political criticism is well known in Java and Bali. My point here is to consider how this might count as argument.

[58] As with the *balian*, the effectiveness of Déwa Madé Sayang's exposition depends on breaching the Laws of Thought (specifically the Law of Contradiction and the Law of Identity). Begawan Byasa is mythical (or historical, according to some Balinese) with the attendant limitations on his speaking. Moreover at once it is Begawan Byasa and the *dalang* speaking. Equally the addressees are the Pandawa, the audience and, *in absentia*, the President of Indonesia, the Governor of Bali and the Rektor of STSI.

Suharto and his family, but also of the Governor of Bali, Ida Bagus Oka.[59] *Sendratari* are an art form, curiously well suited to an autocratic régime, because the mass of actors on stage are mute and voiced as in shadow-theatre through a single speaker, *dalang.* Nothing untoward was said. Yet everyone I spoke to thought that the *dalang* Déwa Madé Sayang had carried off a most elegant and extended *sesimbing*, that is an indirect criticism in which the ostensible and intended targets are quite different. The criticism lay not in ethical or other codes, but in context. Juxtaposing two contexts—the Pandawa as victims of unscrupulous political rivals and the behaviour of senior Indonesian office-holders—created a third: the inferences that spectators could choose to draw according to their own understandings (a fourth context). The speech's success lay in a singular rhetorical step. It made no attempt to persuade through stylistic or emotional effect, but the opposite. By presenting the issue dispassionately the *dalang* left it to each spectator to judge for themselves. Whether something was criticism or not depended on how people chose to understand it.

Criticizing by reframing: Parody

Live theatre, which has long been a means for criticizing abuses of power, under the New Order régime took on attributes of guerrilla warfare, most notably in Butèt Kartaredjasa's elegant mocking parodies of President Suharto's tendency to lengthy monotonous monologues.[60] In the subsequent Reform Period more accessible targets for political posturing, pretension, evasion and corruption abounded. One series was about a *Dream Republic* (*Republik Mimpi*) eerily parallel to Indonesia where Butèt's talent for mimicry found new expression. The hour-long television episodes stoked such outrage among some politicians depicted that intense pressure was brought on the channel (MetroTV) to cancel a second series. The attempt backfired disastrously. The series was so popular with such high ratings that it metastasized into three separate series on other channels. Through parodic exaggeration of leading figures' publicly known attributes, the actors questioned deference to authority and mocked notionally imaginary political incumbents for their perceived failures, duplicity and corruption.

It was novel for actors to hold officials up to scrutiny before a mass audience. Being partly ad-libbed, their involvement was personal and correspondingly dangerous. When actors memorized scripts, it was only to cast them aside during performance. Private suspicions about the failings of politicians and officials was aired publicly. It is hard to determine quite how far such programmes impacted on brute power. One series, *Negeri Impian* (Fantasy Country) however is worth mentioning because it used actors to mimic their 'real' counterparts. Using transparent pseudonyms, the participants enacted recent events and questioned political double-dealing, lies and corruption. A very senior civil servant told me confidentially that the then President, Yudhoyono, insisted on watching *Negeri Impian* to get a sense of what was being aired publicly. Public life as performance was so successful that the head of state felt he needed to watch to be able to govern. Here appearance enacted reality. Actors represented frauds, who represented themselves as genuine, as the frauds they were, so subverting the dichotomy of information *versus* entertainment.

Does the concept of code work here? At first sight, we have political self-presentations using tight codes. But what is the code for mimicry or disenchantment? Such careful engineering however overcodes: it attempts to fix, totalize, hierarchize and finalize, to remove the 'as' in representing *as*. Parody plays with this overcoding by reiterating it in a different

[59] A further reference to the arts suggested the Rektor of the prestigious Institute of Arts, Professor Madé Bandem, was a third target.

[60] Monolog is the name given to these original parodies and sometimes to the television series that followed.

context, which subverts the premises on which the original rests. It is not just the preferred reading that is thrown into question, but the criteria of the code itself are exposed. Hall's oppositional reading is about detotalizing then retotalizing. Parody, as here, dismantles the totality of the code but refuses to engage in creating a new totality and so hierarchy and closure.[61] In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, when you deterritorialize coded and overcoded representations and reterritorialize them in a new context, they are transformed.

Why media matter

A sceptic might reasonably question whether I am not making much ado about nothing in claiming mediation and its practices require us to rethink how we engage in academic inquiry. So let me review some of the more obvious points. A conventional approach requires several assumptions—or rather abnegations. First is a general observation, but one pertinent in its own peculiar way to mediation. 1) Scholarly or expert knowledge is certain, superior to and differs in kind and degree from that of participants or casual observers. That is the foundation for the growth of knowledge. 2) Signs form coherent systems that guarantee meaning independent of history, context and usage. 3) Argument presupposes statements and images represent something, tangible or otherwise. 4) Things are what they are represented as being. Ideology is a Marxist distraction. 5) Articulation and representing *as* are embellishments designed to confuse. The human sciences involve interpretation which presupposes minimally 4) the transmission of meaning, 5) the unambiguous decipherability of codes, 6) the perfect communicability of messages and 7) mutual understanding between senders and receivers. Demonstrate one to be questionable and the paradigm is shaky; demonstrate all to be and, like Alice, you have entered Wonderland. It matters because that is where scholars find themselves if they fail to pay attention to the implications of mediation.

What do I mean by a 'critical approach'?

At this point I should make my usage of 'criticism' explicit. It is broadly of two kinds: of an object or of the conditions of thinking. My concern is the latter—what Kant called critique (2002)—which are reflective practices of addressing what is normally assumed, unconscious or dismissed as irrelevant. Properly such strictures should apply to the analyst's own thinking. So criticism requires self-criticism and the possibility of self-transformation. Otherwise it risks becoming derogatory, self-aggrandizing, hierarchical and of course (often deliberately) hegemonic. As it is hard to reflect on your own categories, criticism is dialogic: others see closure where you do not. It works by rigorous questioning of taken-for-granted presuppositions: here what comprises knowledge or understanding; what we hold to exist; how we know about it (through signs, language etc.); how we represent the objects of inquiry; and who constitutes the 'we'.[62] For the human sciences, the added issue is: What and how can we know about others without imposing our own categories? The particular arguments are hardly new; but I hope pulling the strands together may be more so.

Several themes are well known. Any system of knowledge has limits, is closed and self-validating, whether you prefer to think of these as conceptual schemes (Quine 1953, 1960),

[61] Examples from Negri Impian can be viewed at: https://youtu.be/-7-c_v_5j8c. Sukarno's daughter Megawati is portrayed making the famous, endlessly repeated, revolutionary salute 'Merdeka' (Freedom), so undermining the overcoding. The clips also include the vice-President, Jusuf Kalla, who was notoriously corrupt playing with keys to a new car he was given (by implication as a bribe), then the fourth President, Habibie, a technophile is shown as playing the saxophone.

[62] In other words, roughly epistemology; ontology; semiotics, semantics; representation, mediation; identity, perdurance respectively.

paradigms (Kuhn 1970) or *épistémè* (Foucault 1970).[63] The function of critique is to interrogate their respective implications. Far from knowledge being neutral, it is inflected by people's social positions—notably class,[64] to which Cultural Studies added ethnicity and gender. Critique here aims to expose the kind of skew, closure and colouration that each entails. It follows therefore that Critical Theory, according to the Frankfurt School, has as its goal a degree of emancipation through understanding systems of domination under which humans labour. These systems are not evident because they are inflected through ideology, so that people appreciate themselves and their place in the world as articulated by apparatuses like the mass media (Althusser 1984). However, questioning the totalizing drift of such systems (in this instance Marxist) leads to even less comfortable possibilities, such as the conditions of knowledge, reason and understanding being historically and culturally particular assemblages (Foucault 1981).

It is perilously easy to accept as unproblematic the medium through which we know and its relationship to the world. A cornerstone of uncritical thinking is that signs form a system and usually correspond to something material or mental. If that does not hold—or if we do not know when it fails—all bets are off (Sperber 1975). If signs are not straightforward, predication, textuality and inter-textuality add successive orders of complexity. What is the system that governs interpretation? If signifying is a historically situated practice (Peirce 1931-58), if 'language already conceals within itself a developed mode of ideation', such that interpretation and understanding rest on unnoticed presuppositions (Heidegger *Sein und Zeit*, cited in Palmer 1969: 135), then discerning system is an exercise in circularity. If, in short, the world is always already there, then it would be more precise to talk of language games (Wittgenstein 1958). If it is not possible to ground reason objectively but it must be inferred from communicative action, then another intellectual pillar supporting rationality starts to crack (Habermas 1984, 1987). If you do things with words (Austin 1962) and have to choose between different ways of representing the world (Goodman 1968), imagining signs or language as a culturally neutral, coherent timeless system becomes deeply implausible.

If society, signs, language and communication are not, as they pretend, systematic or necessarily coherent, neither are human subjects. Short of crawling back into a pre-Freudian imaginary intellectual womb of the nineteenth-century, we are faced with the conscious mind upon which knowledge is founded being an epiphenomenon of a disorganized unconscious. In short, they are fragmented (Lacan). If human subjects are products of historically and culturally specific disciplinary and articulatory practices, the vision of integrated knowing subjects is not quite the unambiguous triumph of reason but is at best nuanced, complicated and contradictory, at worst disingenuous, nostalgic, recidivist and authoritarian.

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[63] Foucault's *épistémè* is far broader than Kuhn's paradigms, which are explicitly argued theoretical frameworks or models. By contrast *épistémè* indicates the largely unconscious conditions of possibility of knowledge. However Foucault's usage shifted from 1966 (in *Les mots et les choses*) as a relatively totalizing concept to 1977 ('Le jeu de Michel Foucault' *Ornicar?*) when multiple *épistémè* could co-exist.

> In any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one *episteme* that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice (1970: 168).
>
> I would define the episteme retrospectively as the strategic apparatus which permits of separating out from among all the statements which are possible those that will be acceptable within, I won't say a scientific theory, but a field of scientificity, and which it is possible to say are true or false. The episteme is the 'apparatus' which makes possible the separation, not of the true from the false, but of what may from what may not be characterised as scientific (1980: 197).

[64] The Frankfurt School's argument is exemplified in one of its founding texts.

> Since society is divided into groups and classes, it is understandable that theoretical structures should be related to the general activity of society in different ways according as the authors of such structures belong to one or other social class (Horkheimer 2002: 204).

For the humanities critical reflection stirs a hornet's nest, which is why so many scholars prefer to leave well alone. The starting problem is a pervasive ethnocentrism. Western (whatever that is) knowledge is widely held to be necessary and sufficient to understand everything and everyone. Other ways of thinking and arguing are optional strap-ons (Hollis 1970; Lukes 1970; Hollis & Lukes 1982 and Lukes). That this is not immediately obvious is because there is a major academic industry bent on naturalizing and normalizing what counts as proper knowledge and exnominating the expert knowing subjects (Barthes 1973). Also the criteria of judgement are set by what has been established, so downplaying the unexpected. As Francis Bacon observed:

> Discoveries have sometimes been made that would have been almost unthinkable in advance, and would have been written off as impossible. Men think about the *new* in terms of the *old*: to questions about what the future holds they bring an imagination indoctrinated and coloured by the past. This is a terrible way of forming opinions, because streams fed by nature's springs don't run along familiar channels (2007: 37).

The arguments in favour of universal criteria of reason (and perception, Hollis 1970) bolster the appearance of coherence by framing the issue in general terms that predictably eschews reference to context, practice and usage. If recourse to examples is needed, the neat trick is to collectivize the subjects—the Nuer, the Balinese. The implication is that 'All X think/say/do Y'. If you argued that all Americans, Brits, French or Germans think, say or do identically, you would meet derision. Happily, uncritical thinking prevails when encountering *Pensée Sauvage*. Sadly, the savages do not always agree. A well-known Indonesian proverb runs: *Seribu orang, seribu pendapat* (A thousand people, a thousand opinions). Worse, people often inflect their opinions according to circumstances. Matters become worse by far if you delve into how truths emerge from the murk of ethnographic practice (Hobart 1996).

Am I not being overly critical? I think not. Kant takes his opening motto in *The critique of pure reason* from Bacon who

> claims nothing infinite, and nothing beyond what is mortal; for in truth it prescribes only the end of infinite errors, and this is a legitimate end (1998: 91; citing Bacon).[65]

Setting aside infinite errors may be regarded not as obstructive but, on the contrary, as a useful, permissible, if not indispensable, undertaking. Nor does what might seem a counsel of perfection make research nigh impossible. Critical thinking merely highlights approaches that might seem obvious, attractive and rewarding but prove incoherent, flawed and plain wrong in the long run.[66] A strong critical approach that reflects on its own assumptions may be demanding but is neither impossible nor contradictory. Rather it is dialogic and aims to question lurking ethnocentrism.

Research relevance

This paper is intended as a research resource. Questioning familiar assumptions and axioms makes it possible to think in more imaginative, less Eurocentric and less predictable ways. As different scholars in different disciplines work on societies with different understandings of the

[65] This is the translation of Kant's reference to The Great Instauration in Bacon's *The advancement of learning*. The English version runs:

> Our requests are—that men…do not despair, as imagining our project for a grand restoration, or advancement of all kinds of knowledge, infinitely beyond the power of mortals to execute; while in reality, it is the genuine stop and prevention of infinite error 1901: 10).

[66] Collingwood elaborated a thorough-going critical approach (1940, 1946). How it might work for, say, non-Western history or anthropology, see Inden (1986, 1990) and Hobart (2013, 2015c) respectively.

world, it would be foolish and self-contradictory were I to anticipate or attempt to lay down guidelines. I leave it to each reader to make up their minds for themselves.

Summary

Crisis, criticism and media might seem odd bedfellows. My argument is that they are not. By setting preconceptions aside, three questions come to mind. On crisis, as system and order in the human sciences are ideals, what is the actuality? And what is seen to threaten that order?[67] So, to understand what we are presented with as a positivity, we need to understand its hidden underbelly. Thinking and arguing about how societies work tends to fall along a cline from defending and endorsing how things are to exploring weaknesses, confusions, aporia. Criticism is often treated negatively because the *status quo* is normalized and naturalized. Attacking it is therefore *ipso facto* suspicious and reprehensible. The counter-argument is that questioning entrenched power is liberating and creative. As Oscar Wilde is once supposed to have remarked: 'The Imagination imitates; it is the critical spirit that creates'. Imagine human life devoid of critical thinking. It would be Hobbesian. Once we let go of the conservative fantasy of inevitably partial representations as accurately depicting to world—what there is is what we tell you—life becomes far more interesting. The three issues go together: what there is, how we think about it and how we represent it. It is not often that we are confronted by what appears fairly clear choices. Either we broadly accept an ideological vision of the world as largely commonsensical or we have to be sceptically critical. A third possibility of tinkering with commonsense when it is manifestly wonky but not otherwise looks like having your cake and eating it. It is also intellectually incoherent, dissembling and lazy. At this point, failing to think critically becomes the comfortable *laissez-faire* option, summed up in the disingenuous enjoinder: 'Don't Panic'.

[67] Here I have concentrated on crisis. Other concerns like contingency, indeterminacy and undecidability are so potentially menacing that paradigms often go to great lengths to finesse, marginalize or render them unthinkable (Laclau 1990b: 18-19).

Media Criticism and Crisis Appendix 1

Case Study 1

By the 1990s, despite draconian censorship and intimidation of journalists, critics began openly to describe TVRI as the 'propaganda arm of government'[68] As the role of television under the New Order has already been documented (Kitley 2000), I wish to consider not how 'messages' about development were articulated by the producers, but how they were understood by viewers, the people whom this hegemony was supposed to embrace. Because space is limited, the issues can most effectively be highlighted through viewers' reactions to a feature length television film, *Payung Hitam* (Black Umbrella broadcast by TVRI Bali on 18th. July 1993), which was critical of certain aspects of development.[69] The results are surprising.

The plot consisted of two interwoven stories.

> The minor plot (with which the film starts) is about an expedition to the region by research students from the state university in Bali. They have seen an ancient man, but when they took photographs, there was nothing on the developed film. They report back to a sceptical Dean who, after persuasion, agrees to two staff members accompanying a second expedition to discover the truth. (The protagonists in the two stories meet coincidentally, but the plots remain separate until near the end.)
>
> The main story concerns the plan for a development project to attract tourists to the mountainous part of Bali in an area devoted to horticulture for the lowland market. The story starts with a small boy, Wayan Dod, aged about 13, being told he must leave school unless his father pays the fees. (His father is a gambler who later descends to raiding Dod's piggy-bank to fund his forays.) The father refuses. When Dod's mother urges his father to pay, he says he has no money.
>
> Mother: And what's the reason! Sell one of your fighting cocks.
>
> Father: What? Sell a cock? I've told you, we're not wealthy folk. The kids don't need to carry on in school anyway. What's the point of all that education, when they're just going to be unemployed after? You'd do better to get them work in the fields, tending strawberries like Pak Ariadi. You can earn that way.[70]
>
> Dod explains that the rainmaker is destroying their business and asks the hermit's help in thwarting him. The hermit replies: 'As a matter of fact hindering other people in the course of their work is forbidden in my view. We are not permitted to make things difficult for others'.
>
> The village head then turns up and orders the hermit's arrest for not living in a house like other people. The hermit retorts that the cave is beyond village jurisdiction and he can do as he wishes there. He has intervened on the boys' behalf because their parents have failed to do so.
>
> Hermit: And what's more you, as Village Head, have failed in your responsibility to your subjects. Without paying attention, you have violated these children's rights to earn a livelihood in this village.
>
> Head: These are only children's concerns, only a few people. But the development of agro-tourism (*wisata agro*) is in the interests of the many.

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[68] 'Stories behind the news: When will the rights come?' *Vista-TV*, No 023, 17th. August 1996, 24-25.

[69] I watched a video of the programme, which has been recorded as part of a long running project to monitor Balinese television with several Balinese, introduced below. Unfortunately the recording was cut before the final credits, so details of its provenance are unknown. The film was in Indonesian with occasional Balinese words.

[70] Dod's father was alluding to the fact that, education without contacts and money to buy position, does not ensure employment, a point the viewers agreed with.

Hermit: That does not mean that the weak must be crushed, does it? Even though they are children, they still have the right to make a livelihood in their village.

At this point the male lecturer introduces himself and intervenes. Everyone immediately defers to him. However Dod labours away in the marketplace, as one of several boys who provide an escort service with black umbrellas for visitors in this notoriously rainy part of Bali. There follow scenes of two officials from an unnamed, and rather mysterious, Indonesian development agency, who meet the village head to negotiate the planned arrival of coachloads of tourists to see authentic tropical horticulture (coffee and strawberries!) and animal husbandry. The village head and the 'peasants' whom the developers meet are rapturous at the prospect of tourists (i.e. income).One official however is concerned that when their boss comes from Jakarta, it might be raining, so he would not see the project in a good light. The other replies that the village head will see to that.

The headman calls on Dod's father, Rugeg, to find the best rainmaker on the island and explains how much money is in it for them all. Rugeg duly obeys. The rain clouds clear. The boss from Jakarta is impressed and the project receives his blessing. Tourists turn up and express delight at everything. Everyone is quietly talking about how much money they are going to make. The rainmaker is called in so frequently to stop it raining that the village head offers to make a house available for him. (These scenes are cross-cut by shots of the expedition searching the same area for the ancient man. They encounter a figure dressed like a hermit in a loincloth, who brings a storm down on them before vanishing.)

Meanwhile the umbrella trade has dropped off completely because it rarely rains. The little boys discover who is responsible and confront the rainmaker with the problem. He says it is too late, he has signed a contract. If they have any complaints, they had better go to the village head. Shortly after the rainmaker meets Rugeg, whom he advises to look after his children properly, otherwise they will take to looking after themselves and will then be naughty and disobedient.

Meanwhile, the boys are in despair. One of them suggests they go and see his grandfather (who it transpires is in fact the hermit) who lives in a cave. However the boys are followed at a distance by two members of the expedition. The boys explain the development project. The project and the tourists are a good thing, the hermit says. Dod explains that the rainmaker is destroying their business and asks the hermit's help in thwarting him. The hermit replies: 'As a matter of fact hindering other people in the course of their work is forbidden in my view. We are not permitted to make things difficult for others'.

When the rainmaker next attempts to stop the rain, the hermit engages him in a spectacular battle of *sakti* (supernatural power). The rainmaker loses and falls into a coma. The boys return to the hermit's cave, but they are followed by the police, where they find the two academics in conversation with the hermit. At first the police try to arrest the boys, 'so that their parents shall know that their children have engaged in criminal activities. They have dared to interfere with the village development project'. The police then add that the rainmaker is ill. The hermit tells them it is the rainmaker's own fault for being arrogant and claiming to be the most *sakti* person in Bali. The village head then turns up and orders the hermit's arrest for not living in a house like other people. The hermit retorts that the cave is beyond village jurisdiction and he can do as he wishes there. He has intervened on the boys' behalf because their parents have failed to do so.

Hermit: And what's more you, as Village Head, have failed in your responsibility to your subjects. Without paying attention, you have violated these children's rights to earn a livelihood in this village.

Head: These are only children's concerns, only a few people. But the development of agro-tourism (*wisata agro*) is in the interests of the many.

Hermit: That does not mean that the weak must be crushed, does it? Even though they are children, they still have the right to make a livelihood in their village.[71]

At this point the male lecturer introduces himself and intervenes. Everyone immediately defers to him. He suggests they return to the village to discuss how to balance the rival interests and advises them to leave the hermit in peace. He was only protecting the children's interests. On the return journey, the lecturer reminds the officials that the children are their heirs and whatever is done must bear them in mind. He points out that the farmers will be in trouble if they change the rainfall (the hermit had pointed to the arrogance of his rival trying to change nature) and resolves the problem of rainfall by noting that it is 'authentic', that they can build regular shelters for tourists along the way and sell goods there, and the boys can make money from tourists for their umbrella services.

Almost everyone is now happy except the rainmaker who is still unconscious. The hermit goes to heal him and discovers it is his long-lost brother[72] whom he feared dead when his family were killed by a volcanic eruption. They are reconciled; the rain pours down; and the film ends with Dod happily running through it in search of customers with his black umbrella.

How the film reiterates the conventional labels of Indonesian development projects at the time is fairly clear. Several features may be worth noting however. Agency is remote. Even the project boss from Jakarta is presented as effectively part of a chain of instrumentality, which reach down to the rainmaker and the gambler. Ordinary Balinese are depicted as willing patients, who gratefully and uncritically accept the benefits of the project. The academic and the hermit are organic and traditional intellectuals respectively who, in seeing eye-to-eye, articulate seamlessly the desirability of modern development with traditional values. As the intellect representing the ultimate agency behind the project (something like 'government', certainly not the project boss, who failed to appreciate the damage caused), the academic is empowered to enunciate on what is right and is accepted by everyone unquestioningly. The film therefore not only labels[73] but reiterates a host of presuppositions which make the labelling possible, apposite and acceptable to the participants, and presumably audiences.

The disruption, the crisis which leads to the critical re-evaluation of what such development projects should be about, is attributed to a small boy, who is given two separate labels. First he is a child, therefore subject to others who may reasonably determine his fate without consultation. Second, however, he stands for the future –an appeal to Balinese ideas about descendants, who are vital to the continuity of the patriline. It is in this latter capacity, not the former, that his interests are deemed relevant. However it is two categories of people who are *not* labelled, but are backgrounded as if this were their natural place, which is significant. These are the 'ordinary' villagers and women. The film's thesis – that development should benefit everyone – does not extend to women, who are virtually absent from the film. When they do appear, they are confined to the classic New Order role of mothers and wives.[74] They are more infantilized than their own male offspring. While the film suggests the efficacy of labels in development, it also shows how large sections of society are made invisible and

[71] Interestingly this argument reiterates the classic distinction between utilitarian and Kantian approaches to morality. The village head argues for the greatest good of the greatest number, while the hermit defends the rights of all humans, no matter how they are categorized.

[72] This is a familiar narrative device and, once again, contains potentially irresolvable conflict between competing interests by providing an overarching frame of reference to which all should submit.

[73] The absurdity of labels is delightfully (but I think unintentionally) illustrated by the threat of arresting the hermit for not living in a house like everyone else!

[74] The polite designation of *Bapak*, Father, for men and *Ibu*, Mother, for women, which has survived the New Order, is not symmetrical, because Mother designates a purely domestic and supportive role, whereas Father articulates the family to the polity and the public sphere.

disarticulated. So the film indirectly highlights how the presuppositions behind labelling are themselves normalized through the mass media.

What did my fellow viewers make of the film though? Three were particularly vocal: an old actor in his eighties, an ex-village headman and a landless labourer (that evening all present were males). I asked if they had enjoyed it. The labourer was enthusiastic. It was very good, most appropriate. It was just like that in life: small people are ignored in development and lose out badly. The old actor broadly concurred. The ex-headman was less impressed. 'What was the *panglèmèk*?' he asked. (*Panglèmèk*, the moral point, is considered a crucial part of a performance, without which becomes pointless entertainment.) As the others argued it through, they became more confused as to the point. Where the film was useful, the ex-headman said was in its aim to reach development officials, to impress on them the need to think about the poor, not just the rich. If the rich getting a thousand Rupiah (then about £ 0.30) the poor should get one hundred. So everyone benefits.[75]

The old actor returned to the moral point. Was it somehow in the implications of stopping the rain? The moral part was poorly done, the ex-headman retorted. Look at how they showed the father stealing from the son's saving box. The film was all over the place. I returned to the actor's question. Was stopping the rain arrogant? Yes, it showed a grave lack of *panglokika* (appreciation of the diverse needs of those under your authority). You should not meddle unthinkingly with the environment. Consider what happened with the water flow when the government dammed rivers for new irrigated rice land.[76]

Throughout these exchanges I was slightly surprised that my fellow viewers were more muted than on other occasions, when they tended to dissect the apparatuses of power, wealth and development with forensic panache. It soon became clear why. The acting was bad. The characters were badly delineated, the speech was stiff and unnatural; no one looked the part. The film was in Indonesian – the language of development. But plays based on Balinese village life do not work in Indonesian. The result was ridiculous. Yes, the producers of the film had been sufficiently clever (literally 'slippery') in castigating the failings of government officials that it would be hard to bring legal charges against them. But most viewers would not get the point. Unless the acting is convincing and the point well made, who is going to notice? They should have used one of several Balinese theatre genres that audiences could relate to. It takes really first class and courageous performers (they named two famous figures) to bring off a piece like that.[77] The film's actors were frightened. If no one realized the point, it was a waste of time. That, as far as they were concerned, was that.

The commentaries on the film make several important points. Attributions of hegemony by scholars may themselves become hegemonic insofar as these do not reflect how people actually engage with the development going on around them. The recognition from critical media studies that knowing the conditions of production tells us little about the conditions of reception, use and commentary applies with equal force to development studies. On what grounds are we justified in labelling the peasant farmers who chose to remain silent after the Regent's peroration the subjects of hegemony? Here the researcher's relationship with her or

[75] As the viewers made clear, if the rich do not benefit substantially, they will not be interested.

[76] This was a sore topic throughout much of Bali, because it reduced the supply to existing fields. In fact, as part of Bali's 'development', the Suharto government planned to authorize permits for so many golf courses that they would, in effect, have absorbed almost the entire water requirements of the island, in which irrigated rice was the main crop.

[77] These two often featured in short, masked theatre pieces, *Bondrès*, usually sponsored by government development agencies. However, the actors were so skilled that they could elegantly satisfy their sponsors and excoriate them for corruption and the failed implementation of projects at the same time.

his subjects of study is crucial. Only by appreciating what went on after the officials had left and knowing how farmers related the speechifying and (largely inadequate) technical support to their daily practice would it be possible to question the vision of the compliant subjects of hegemony. Models of how the masses are interpellated remain ideal and top-down. How people actually engage with being labelled and addressed requires critical ethnographic studies of how – indeed whether – interpellation works in practice.

That is not to say that Balinese villagers always heroically resist hegemony. Rather, the clumsy attempts of officials and television producers alike to implicate them in the national discourse of development at best might convince the perpetrators. Under such circumstances, how effective is labelling in development policy-making? Evidently Balinese are implicated in development, but not under conditions of their own choosing. Not least, they are affected by the distribution of resources which flow from development aid. However, as these are largely organized along pre-existing lines of patronage, most people's implication into development is tangential or even antagonistic. Labelling takes place in a context of unstated presuppositions and a history of past practices of articulation.

Case Study 2: Public excoriation

When I arrived in Bali in July 1991, I was met by a vanload of villagers. We had barely exited the airport when they told me that, as soon as we reached Pisangkaja, I must watch a *Sendratari*, Pandawa Asrama, which had recently been performed at the International Bali Arts Festival and broadcast on TVRI. What excited them was that the *dalang*, Déwa Madé Sayang, had carried off an elegant and extended *sesimbing*, an indirect criticism in which the ostensible and intended targets are quite different. In the play, shortly before the Pandawa brothers were exiled to the forest, Begawan Byasa offered them advice on how to be good rulers and how to exercise circumspection. He warned against various kinds of misrule and its consequences.[78]

> If you are the leader of a people, if you rule over them, you cannot live too well. You must not have too luxurious a life-style, but should live simply. You are such a leader. Now none of your subjects should be allowed to be corrupt — that is what you must command. But this must be seriously observed in practice. It should not just take the form of words: you order the masses to obey, but then it turns out that you did not do so yourself. That is the difficulty of becoming a ruler. It is easy to give orders; it is hard to put them into practice. That is the first thing to grasp.
>
> When a ruler is not honest, the world goes to rot. No way may you do that. This is what it is to be just. You have to strive to be fair and just to all of your subjects. On what do you base fairness? On the Four Kinds of Circumspection: Even-handedness (Sama), Discrimination (Béda), Generosity (Dana) and Strictness (Danda). Even-handedness: you should give to your subjects equally. The Kingdom of Indraprasta flourishes — who is responsible? All the subjects, all the officials, are the reason. All the armed forces are the reason. Because the ruler treated them all equally. If people should perhaps struggle to make a living, give those more — that's called Sama.

Begawan Byasa then turned to the arts and urged good leaders not to favour one group of artists over another. Otherwise those neglected will be angry; gossip will start and the ruler will be

[78] I have published a short discussion of this in an article on commentary (Hobart 2006). The use of theatre as a means of social and political criticism is well known in Java and Bali. My point here is to consider how this might count as argument.

discredited. He then remarked that generosity and punishment should be judged by worth, not by family or favour.[79]

At first sight this might seem like a fairly straightforward homily as part of a familiar narrative. That is not how people in Pisangkaja understood it, nor, as I subsequently learned, did others. They treated it as a blistering, but carefully modulated, argument against President Suharto and family as well as the Governor of Bali, Ida Bagus Oka. The reference in the coda about the arts, suggested a further target was Professor Madé Bandem, then Rektor of STSI. By contrast to the *balian*, the facts were generally known, if still little aired in public. What Déwa Madé Sayang laid out was a *panglèmèk*, a moral case drawn from a respected and valued source but phrased entirely in his own words. The argument consisted in juxtaposing what should be the case with what was. The dalang 'carefully adhered to the proprieties of commentary on rulership in ancient India or Bali. At once he condemned a paternalistic corrupt régime, yet deferred to the audience as to how they chose to interpret his words' (Hobart 2006: 511). In short, whether something is adjudged argument or not depends in significant part on how it is understood by spectators or readers. The dalang did not try to persuade in the sense of sway the audience by rhetoric, but almost the opposite. He laid the issue out dispassionately, leaving it to them to decide for themselves. At about that time, Déwa Madé Sayang was starting to develop a name as one of the few people in Bali who would publicly voice criticisms, when almost everyone else from academics to journalists found it safer to keep their heads down. However it was this performance that did much to cement his reputation. Elsewhere in Indonesia, other actors, like Putu Wijaya and Butèt Kertaradjasa, were making similar arguments in more explicitly political fora (Hobart Beyond Words 18-19).

[79] As with the *balian*, the effectiveness of Déwa Madé Sayang's exposition depends on breaching the Laws of Thought. Begawan Byasa is mythical (or historical, according to some Balinese) with the attendant limitations on his speaking. Moreover at once it is Begawan Byasa and the *dalang* speaking. Equally the addressees are the Pandawa, the audience and, *in absentia*, the President of Indonesia, the Governor of Bali and the Rektor of STSI.

Case Study 3

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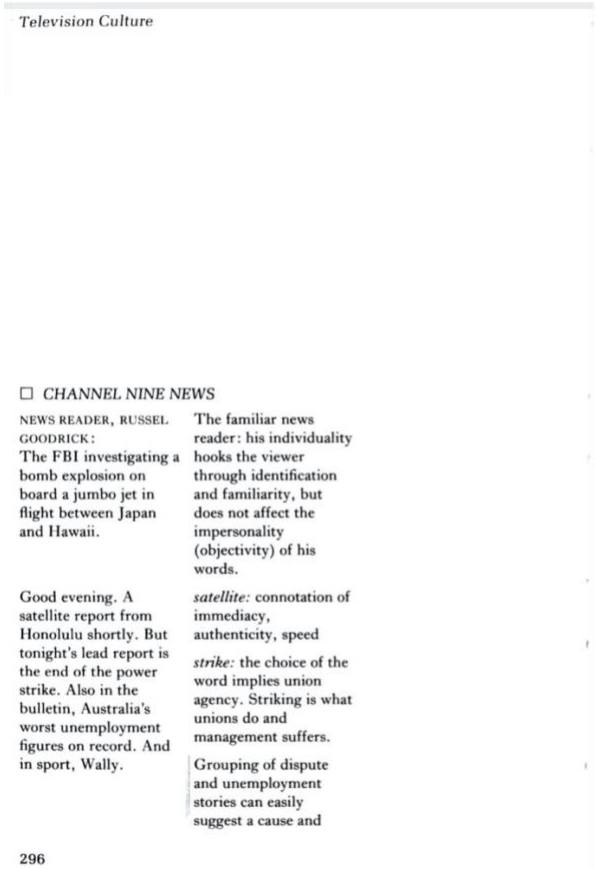

Television Culture

□ *CHANNEL NINE NEWS*

NEWS READER, RUSSEL GOODRICK: The FBI investigating a bomb explosion on board a jumbo jet in flight between Japan and Hawaii.	The familiar news reader: his individuality hooks the viewer through identification and familiarity, but does not affect the impersonality (objectivity) of his words.
Good evening. A satellite report from Honolulu shortly. But tonight's lead report is the end of the power strike. Also in the bulletin, Australia's worst unemployment figures on record. And in sport, Wally.	*satellite:* connotation of immediacy, authenticity, speed *strike:* the choice of the word implies union agency. Striking is what unions do and management suffers. Grouping of dispute and unemployment stories can easily suggest a cause and

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News readings, news readers

	effect relationship that imputes blame to the unions.
SPORTSCASTER, WALLY FORMAN: Thanks Russ. Well, Val Cominah will attempt to win her fifth state golf title at the Royal Fremantle tomorrow and we go hobie catting on Sydney harbour. Barry has the weather.	The "headlines" foreground the segmented nature of the news and the struggle required to contain its potential unruliness.
WEATHERMAN, BARRY BARKLA: Well, there'll still be a fair bit of cloud around, maybe one or two drops, but I wouldn't even worry about taking the umbrella. Russ.	The news "team" is an attempt to unify the fragmented news items. Hard news is disruptions to the norm – a bomb, a strike, and unemployment are equally disruptive. Soft news and sport reaffirm the norm.
NEWS READER, RUSSEL GOODRICK: The crippling statewide power strike will end at midnight and the threat of further blackouts tonight is receding as generating stations begin winding up to full capacity. The dispute, which cost millions of dollars in lost production, plunged one-third of the city into darkness and contributed to the death	*crippling:* the consumer constructed as victim *blackouts:* war metaphor Concentration on effects, not causes, of the strike, constructs the reader as consumer-victim, a hostile viewpoint from which to "understand" union activity (conventional news practice).

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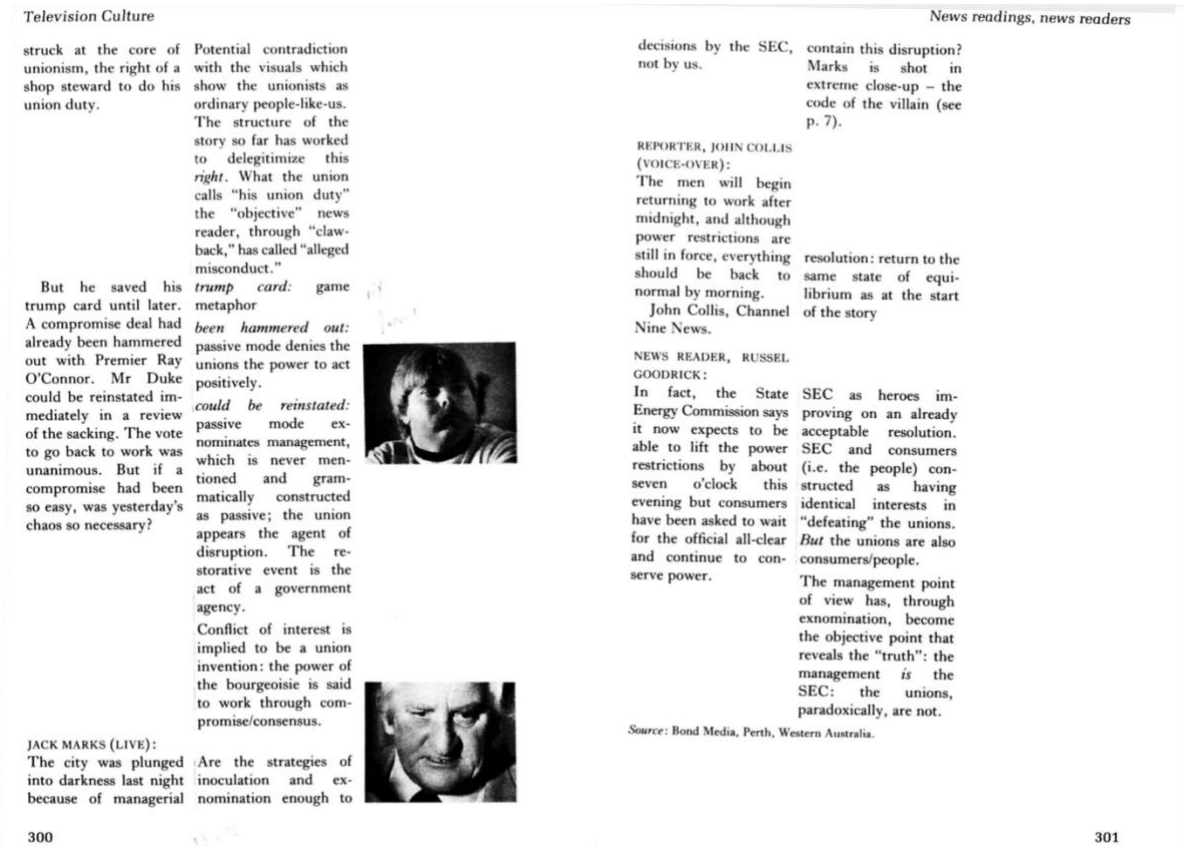

Television Culture

struck at the core of unionism, the right of a shop steward to do his union duty.

But he saved his trump card until later. A compromise deal had already been hammered out with Premier Ray O'Connor. Mr Duke could be reinstated immediately in a review of the sacking. The vote to go back to work was unanimous. But if a compromise had been so easy, was yesterday's chaos so necessary?

Potential contradiction with the visuals which show the unionists as ordinary people-like-us. The structure of the story so far has worked to delegitimize this *right*. What the union calls "his union duty" the "objective" news reader, through "claw-back," has called "alleged misconduct."

trump card: game metaphor

been hammered out: passive mode denies the unions the power to act positively.

could be reinstated: passive mode exnominates management, which is never mentioned and grammatically constructed as passive; the union appears the agent of disruption. The restorative event is the act of a government agency.

Conflict of interest is implied to be a union invention: the power of the bourgeoisie is said to work through compromise/consensus.

JACK MARKS (LIVE):
The city was plunged into darkness last night because of managerial

Are the strategies of inoculation and exnomination enough to

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News readings, news readers

decisions by the SEC, not by us.

contain this disruption? Marks is shot in extreme close-up – the code of the villain (see p. 7).

REPORTER, JOHN COLLIS (VOICE-OVER):
The men will begin returning to work after midnight, and although power restrictions are still in force, everything should be back to normal by morning.
John Collis, Channel Nine News.

resolution: return to the same state of equilibrium as at the start of the story

NEWS READER, RUSSEL GOODRICK:
In fact, the State Energy Commission says it now expects to be able to lift the power restrictions by about seven o'clock this evening but consumers have been asked to wait for the official all-clear and continue to conserve power.

SEC as heroes improving on an already acceptable resolution. SEC and consumers (i.e. the people) constructed as having identical interests in "defeating" the unions. *But* the unions are also consumers/people.

The management point of view has, through exnomination, become the objective point that reveals the "truth": the management *is* the SEC: the unions, paradoxically, are not.

Source: Bond Media, Perth, Western Australia.

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The forces of disruption

The strategies of containment are many, subtle, and tried and tested by time. They are essentially formal characteristics and thus bear the brunt of the ideological work. But the intense need that the news has for such strategies should not be seen merely as evidence of the desire of the dominant ideology to impose and naturalize itself, but also as evidence of the strength of the forces of disruption. By the forces of disruption I mean those aspects of the text, of the real, and of the audience, which threaten the sense that is used to contain oppositional, alternative, or unruly elements (Fiske 1987: 298-302).

Case Study 4 *Parody*

During the New Order, two actors in particular, Putu Wijaya and Butèt Kartaredjasa used live theatre as guerrilla warfare against the régime by creating elegantly mocking parodies, including of Suharto's monologues.[80] As the Reform Period ran into difficulties, Butèt's talent for mimicry found expression as President Si Butèt Yogyakarta of a Dream Republic (*Republik Mimpi*) parallel to Indonesia. The hour-long television episodes induced such outrage among some of the politicians depicted that intense pressure was brought on MetroTV to cancel a second series. So great was its popularity that the attempt to silence the actors backfired. It metastasized into three separate series on different channels: the original *Republik Mimpi*, *Negeri Impian* (Fantasy Country) and *Democrazy*. The actors questioned deference to authority and publicly mocked political incumbents for their perceived failures, duplicity and corruption. (see video link https://youtu.be/-7-c_v_5j8c)

[80] Monolog is the name given to these original parodies and sometimes to the television series that followed.

It was novel for actors to hold officials up to scrutiny before a mass audience. Being partly ad-libbed, their involvement was personal and correspondingly dangerous. When actors memorized scripts, it was only to cast them aside during performance. Arguably these series both changed Indonesia and did not. Private suspicion of the failings of politicians and officials was confirmed publicly. Little, if any, enchantment or trust remained in political leaders or the rich and powerful. Nonetheless those exposed and lampooned remained in power. The leading actors though had never claimed to be judges, but to articulate publicly the dire state of Indonesia. The three series differed somewhat. *Republik Mimpi* and Democrazy mixed parody with satire and explicit commentary about current affairs or interviews with politicians. *Negeri Impian* specialized in actors who were doubles of their 'real' counterparts. Using transparent pseudonyms, the participants enacted recent events and questioned political double-dealing, lies and corruption. Its mimicry seems to have been more dangerous than the more verbal series preferred by intellectuals. A very senior civil servant advised me that President Yudhoyono made a point of viewing *Negeri Impian* to know what issues were being aired. Television actors and producers framed public life as performance so successfully that the head of state felt he needed to watch to be able to govern. Here appearance enacts reality. Actors represent frauds, who represent themselves as genuine, as the frauds they are – and neatly subverted the dichotomy of information *versus* entertainment.

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