

**The end of the world news:
television and a problem of articulation in Bali.**

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A singular expression was being mooted about in Bali in the summer of 1997: *gumi suba wayah*, 'the world is old'. Slipped into conversations, it elicited responses from quiet recognition to enthusiastic endorsement. Balinese had not developed a genteel passion for geology, nor suddenly appreciated their past as a step to the fulfilment of modernity.¹ The expression itself ('the world is old') is not new. It seems to have gained particular currency after the general elections in early 1997, because of people's sense of political stagnation. While the phrase mostly made sense in context, it is fairly evidently *raos wayah*, 'mature speech', or 'indirect speech', as opposed to *raos nguda*, 'immature speech', where the reference is fully transparent (see below). Such idioms are much used by maturer men and women when discussing complex or sensitive issues, the listener being required to be active, intelligent and knowledgeable. So, one evening I idly asked my companions what was the significance of people using this phrase. The ensuing discussion forms the substance of this piece. 'The world is old' turned out to be at once a diagnosis of the terminal, and irreversible, condition of society and a premonition of impending catastrophe. And television is deeply implicated.

Preamble

This article is then about how Balinese engage with television in their lives and so with the local, regional and global, however vague, incoherent, and indeed mutually defining, the referents of these terms are. It would be inappropriate though to categorize this study as simply one of 'audience response'. Such approaches reify media and divorce them from the situations in which they impinge and are used. Second, such categories turn audiences into imaginary objects (Ang 1991; Hartley 1992a), whose workings are in principle fully determinate and determinable. As what audiences make of what they watch is arguably underdetermined, much work with audiences involves the multiple displacement of inferring the producers' intentions, imposing meanings upon programmes and imputing your reactions to others - steps which are even more questionable if you are working with people whose language, backgrounds and viewing habits may differ radically from your own. Third, such categorizing abstracts what viewers may be thinking or feeling (or otherwise) from the circumstances under which they do so.

In other words, I am interested in media such as television as practices. 'Practice' has become a buzz-word. Its main use these days is to supplement the palpable inadequacies of theory. By contrast I prefer to treat social life, following the later Foucault, as practices (Hobart 1996). Apart from the often relatively untaxing activity of gawping at television programmes, there are more active practices. Among these, notably, are commenting on, and theorizing, other practices, including watching television itself. Like other Indonesians, many Balinese I know both enjoy and are highly skilled at commenting and reflecting critically on what is happening about them in the world.

¹ Like many other Indonesians, Balinese are struggling to articulate contemporary economic and social transformations, using the imagery and vocabulary of modernization and globalization in distinctive ways (Vickers ed. 1996).

Before I turn to what was said, let me explain where I was, what I was doing, and who I was talking to that night. Since 1970, I have worked in a large settlement, known pseudonymously as Tengahpadang, in South Central Bali. Once a remote mountainous backwater, mass tourism and a boom in handicrafts have brought varying degrees of prosperity, the lure of wealth, new aspirations and uncertainty. In 1980, as far as I know, no one in the village knew how to carve wood. By the late 1980s Tengahpadang was hailed in the guide books as 'a traditional village of carvers'. By then, apart from thirty or more daily tourist buses hurtling past the 'art-shops' which had sprung up, television had begun to have a major impact. More than eighty percent of theatre companies (many casual or seasonal) in Bali disappeared during the 1980s, as audiences demanded the best theatre troupes on the island as seen on TV. I have heard reflective Balinese argue that television has transformed life for the majority of people in Bali more than tourism and other, more ostensible, forms of modernization.

Almost every household in Tengahpadang now has at least one radio and a television set. Poorer families own black-and-white sets which receive only the state television channel (TVRI), but more people now own colour sets which can also receive five terrestrial commercial channels, as well as over twelve satellite stations (although only three families have so far bought satellite dishes in the settlement itself). Such sets cost over US \$ 200 or more, and the dishes \$ 500. Quite how the less well-off pay for these is a question which exercises Balinese themselves. Much work, whether carving, sanding and painting statues, or making offerings and cooking, is compatible with watching, or at least listening to, television which is increasingly turned on from morning to late at night.

My interest in television was aroused during a year's field research in 1988-89, because people preferred to stay at home and watch television rather than drop in for a drink and a chat as they had in the past. When I could catch them however, they would muse about television, a topic of immediate concern. My appreciation of the growing importance of mass media in Indonesia continued for some time in an equally contingent fashion. During the 1988-89 field trip, a major topic of conversation was when a reputedly superb theatre piece performed and videotaped at the annual Balinese Arts Festival would be serialized on television. Eventually, one day I dropped into the local station of Indonesian State Television (TVRI) to ask about this, only to discover that the tape had been recorded over, the station having neither the funds nor facilities to store or preserve such broadcasts.

By a roundabout route, this led to a collaborative project, BHISMA (The Balinese Historical and Instructional Study Material Archive), between the College of Indonesian Performing Arts (STSI) in Bali and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London, which has been running continuously since 1990. Its purpose has been to record, transcribe and make available for their use television programmes which Balinese themselves consider valuable as a record of their changing artistic and cultural activities. Television has become an increasingly important medium, as Balinese come to define themselves self-

consciously within Indonesia in terms of their 'art' and 'culture' (Hough 1992; Picard 1990, 1996).²

Such engagement runs counter to the ideal of the neutral scientific observer, who remains aloof from, and has no effect upon, the people she studies. In running the Balinese Television Project, I am both affecting the object of study and the people who are directly and indirectly caught up in it, even if how this actually works is less than clear. However the 'neutral observer' thesis always was a rather self-serving fantasy and singularly inappropriate to a post-colonial era. As John Hartley remarked of media studies, it is far from evident what an objective, academic account would look like, for scholars judge and intervene in the very nature of their activity, most certainly in media studies (1992b).

If we are untidily implicated in the lives of the people we work with and study, perhaps we should start from the recognition of the inescapability of this implication. For example, not only does the family where I stay receive a significant part of its income from working for the project but, by being there for at least two months each year over the last decade, it has altered in complex ways my relationship to the people I work with and (partly the same thing) my object of study. Sporadic visiting academics remain in a world apart, because they always can - and indeed do - disengage at will. Quite how being more engaged in various people's lives affects how I am treated and how I participate in discussions like that outlined below is hard for me to judge. Obviously there are both drawbacks and advantages of having known many of the people I work with for over twenty years.

A key part of the research on television consists in working with a changing group of villagers, whose main criterion of (self-)selection is that they like talking about the issues I am interested in and often do so among themselves when I am not there. Among the central figures are 'Gung' Kak (Anak Agung Pekak Oka), a well known local actor, related to the local court and still flourishing at 91. His intellectual protagonist and spokesman is an ex-long distance truck driver, ex-village headman, ex-hitman (occasionally my bodyguard) and part-time actor who, as his curriculum vitae suggests, is a man of many parts - the anthropologist's well-informed informant. These two were abetted by two close neighbours, a wealthy farmer (a devotee of shadow theatre) and a poor flower-seller (and wordsmith). Among the other regulars was the ex-headman's daughter-in-law, an actress-dancer who has just graduated with distinction from the College of Indonesian Performing Arts and the only one to have more than elementary school education. We meet after dinner, when the day's work is over. Separately, I also work with three generations of women from one family: the young dancer mentioned

² The project has been run jointly with Professor Madé Bandem and Dr Wayan Dibia, successively the directors of STSI (The Indonesian College of Performing Arts), and in collaboration with the Centre of Documentation of Balinese Culture and the Faculty of Arts, Udayana University, Bali. We now have over 1,500 hours of mostly very high quality broadcasts recorded on S-VHS tape in a small, special dehumidified studio, built in Tengahpadang. In recognition of its educational importance, Indonesian State Television has granted us permission to digitize and reproduce the collection's materials for research and teaching purposes. I am grateful to the British Academy Committee for Southeast Asian Studies and to SOAS for providing much of the funding for this project between 1990 and 1995 and to Felicia Hughes-Freeland, University College, Swansea, and Alan Bicker and John Bousfield, University of Kent at Canterbury for their help and support at different stages of the project.

above, her mother (who runs a small general grocery shop and was a fine singer in her day) and her grandmother, who still goes to market to trade in agricultural produce every day. How and where I work with them is determined by, and interpolated into, the demanding routine of women in Bali.³ On the evening in question, just the old actor, the ex-headman and the dancer had turned up.

If theatrical links seem to be a leitmotif, it is because, in this neck in the woods, actors have tended to be the local intellectuals, priests being thought primarily fit for ceremonial matters. Anthropology hinges more than most practitioners would like to admit upon engagement with local intellectuals and their practices. As a critical inquiry however, ethnography involves its own distinctive interrogative and disciplinary practices. The result all too easily is that the ethnographer produces a world, peopled by subjects which are largely the products of these practices and bear precious little relation to the practices of the interlocutors. In Bali these latter are often highly dialogic and involve forms of complex agency (Hobart in press [a]). This is why I almost always work with groups of people. In the first instance, my interest is not in how Balinese answer my questions, but what kinds of questions they think to ask one another, what issues they consider important, how they talk and argue matters out, and when and why they agree or come to differ. When possible, only after having a chance to reflect on what transpired, do I start to interrogate them to try to clarify the presuppositions which they have made.

The end of the world news

On the evening of 3rd. July 1997, in the ex-headman's house after dinner, with a cassette recorder running I asked what exactly was at issue when people said that the world was old. It led to an animated conversation, lasting for about an hour and a half. What follows are key passages from the discussions. The following night I returned to the theme and asked questions, to which I turn later in the chapter.⁴

³ The ex-headman's son (that is the dancer's husband), a high school teacher, is the main person employed by the project to record and transcribe broadcasts, although both the ex-headman and the dancer have been paid at various times to oversee the project and to help with transcription of specialized theatrical language and idioms. You could argue that the people who were there that evening were not typical; that, despite the young woman's presence, this was about elderly males ideologizing; that my presence and the fact that they knew me well and were responding to what they thought I expected of them made them articulate in a way they would not otherwise have done. There is obviously something in these observations from sociology of knowledge. Reducing people to functions of their subject positions, however, is a familiar form of essentializing and determinism, which treats them as producers of behaviour to be explained and not as thinkers in their own right. Over the last three years in different parts of Bali, I have heard almost all the points made by the discussants being put forward to me or to others by women and men of different ages and social backgrounds.

⁴ I have tidied up the text in two important respects. First, I have extrapolated sections from the discussion (breaks are indicated by horizontal lines in the transcript). Second, such conversations are so dialogic that they are hard to read. I have omitted many interjections, reiterations by other people and so on in the English. The Balinese original can be found in an earlier version of this article, published as a chapter in *Staying local in the global village: Bali in the twentieth century*. eds. L. Connor & R. Rubinstein, Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 1999.

Extract 1

- Ex-Head: If you ask my opinion, if things carry on for a long time like this. Our grandchildren will be in difficulties, if there isn't - what do you call it?
- Actor: Turmoil.
- Ex-Head: Yes, that's it.
- Actor: If there isn't turmoil, so that everything starts afresh.
- Self: What do you mean by 'turmoil'?
- Ex-Head: 'Turmoil' means war.
- Actor: War.
- Self: Could you explain a bit more? I haven't fully understood.
- Actor: It is everything turned upside down, destruction.
- Dancer: Lots of people killed.
- Self: But what's the use of a war?
- Ex-Head: Its use is that everything starts all over again. After a fresh beginning things are ordered again... You can't get, as you do now, people 'buffaloing'.
- Self: What's 'buffaloing'?
- Ex-Head: It's a proverb: those who are already too big just get bigger.
- Actor: It's already too late.
- Ex-Head: Ordinary people can do nothing.
- Actor: They can't lift a finger.
- Ex-Head: For example, they're like tiny insects, they count for nothing. Even if I spoke up and said this or that, no one would pay any attention.
- Actor: They have no worth, those who are called 'the poor'. They are useless. No one believes them.
- Self: Would the rich agree with you that it would be a good idea to have a war?
- Ex-Head: Heavens, No. They'd be terrified.
- Dancer: They'd be frightened, if there were a war.
- Actor: They'd try to make sure that it wouldn't happen.
- Ex-Head: Sure. The rich have never had it so good.

I then turned to an issue which various people had remarked about a year before: that there was an overwhelming preponderance of programmes and films celebrating the lifestyle of the wealthy. I asked why the lives of the poor were not shown much of television.⁵

⁵ The poor appear, of course, in television in stereotyped roles, as caricatures rather than characters (reminiscent of Stuart Hall's remarks about the roles permitted to blacks in Britain and America, 1990).

Extract 2

- Actor: As for the poor, they are of no use. The rich never think of actually talking with the poor. If possible, they keep as far away from them as they can, where the rich can talk among themselves about whatever. I don't think that the poor could succeed in speaking. Even if they did, as was said earlier, they are worth nothing, no one is listening.
- Ex-Head: They show the good life on television. They provide images of beautiful things, so that those without will strive for them. The only problem is that they can't succeed.
- Actor: They haven't the wherewithal.
- Ex-Head: Yes, it's hard. Why? You can say people these days, it's like advertisements. Why should government promote television the whole time and only broadcast what comes across as good? But what's bad is not, or is rarely, shown. I think you can say it's theory *versus* practice. The theory is fine...
- Actor: But the practice is a very far cry from that.
- Ex-Head: The practice is rotten. It is tantalizing the masses, goading them on, so that they will want to slave away.
- Actor: So that they'll be joyful, for example so that they will do what they're told is right.
- Ex-Head: Yes. But afterwards there is the practice, which is different. For example, consider people going on transmigration. They never show transmigrants starving. It's always people who...
- Actor: Who are happy.
- Dancer: 'Successful'!
- Ex-Head: Just the ones who have made it. A lot of people have been duped that way.

They then turned to some of the 'success stories', such as the growth of Indonesian car manufacturing capacity (run at that time by President Soeharto's son) and monumental projects.

Extract 3

- Ex-Head: Now they keep on putting up these big buildings, don't they 'Gung 'Kak? So that the masses feel good. Now if you ask me what do the masses get out of this, it's feeling - not what lies behind it. It's done like this so they feel happy, but the real good is for others. The feeling you get is sadness - you don't feel happy.
- Dancer: The feelings are close. Now I feel happy if I get to watch television. I enjoy watching the programmes. But the next day when you've got a kid who nags that he has got to have it just like on TV, then you're sad again.

What did they think about the range of programmes broadcast?

Extract 4

- Ex-Head: If television is important, as it was just said to be, it is so that people don't think too much.
- Actor: About problems.
- Ex-Head: About being angry. So they give you entertainment, don't they? You won't be confused and undecided. Watch television and very soon you'll stop feeling pissed off. Isn't that so, 'Gung 'Kak?
- Actor: That's how it's used.
- Ex-Head: It's used to divert people's minds. So that they don't long for - so that they don't think about - anything else. So that you won't remember, you'll just forget yourself the whole time.

I then turned to a favourite theme in Bali, the 'influence' of television.⁶

Extract 5

- Self: Can you oppose what's on television?
- Ex-Head: As for opposing, there's no opportunity.
- Actor: You can't.
- Dancer: It's difficult.
- Actor: Because you can't, there is no opportunity to do so.
- Ex-Head: What would you use?
- Actor: What would you use?
- Dancer: Against whom?
- Ex-Head: Whom am I going to oppose? That is why we beg for uproar now. I don't know who would bring it about. It would just explode, just be war.
- Actor: Apocalypse.
- Ex-Head: That's why there's no point in opposing.⁷
- Actor: Oppose it, I couldn't succeed. Let me use an analogy...
- Dancer: It isn't that we can't succeed, we're reluctant
- Actor: Reluctant? What's behind that is that we wouldn't succeed. It isn't reluctance. We'd fail, for example suppose I translated my opposition into action, it would fail. Really, it's like preparing rice, isn't it? If you're going

⁶ I put the word in quotes for two reasons. First, it is an Indonesian word which is often used to split off Indonesian 'influence' as bad. Second, in English the word is a fudge. It conveniently bypasses the need to think critically about the relationship in question.

⁷ The expression *ngakoh* is a poignant one. It suggests the pointlessness of doing anything. At the Third International Balinese Studies workshop held in Sydney in 1995, Anak Agung Gedé Santikarma delivered a paper entitled *Kok Ngomong* ('What's the point in saying anything?'), which is now - as someone pointed out to me with delight - the name painted on the side of a local bus in Bali.

to cook, you winnow the padi to get the hulled rice. But how do you get clean rice, if the unhulled rice gathers into a pile?⁸ Now, if were just hulled rice, it would be easy. It would be fine for porridge, you could use it for cooking, couldn't you?

Self: You can't oppose what's happening? Can you explain?

Ex-Head: What's on television contains nothing to think about. It has no exemplary use. What can you emulate in it? There is nothing worth imitating. How do you set about opposing it?

Actor: You can't.

Ex-Head: There are no ideas you can use to help formulate criticism. If people do evil, there is nothing upon which to build a counter-argument.

A few universals

The analysis in this discussion is remarkably subtle, sustained and penetrating. It made me wonder quite what it is that academics actually add apart from pontification, codification, polysyllables and monographs. In anthropology at least, more theoretical sophistication is appropriated from their subjects than scholars care to admit.

From what little I know of media studies, what the commentators had to say echoes the approach favoured by centre-left academics. On one reading you might think the villagers had mugged up on their media imperialism theory beforehand. We have a classic statement of the irreversible momentum and logic of capital with the reduction of most humans to units of labour, a class in, and not for, itself. This is complemented by the bourgeoisie's fear of threats to its pre-eminence and of the breakdown of reciprocal, or moral, relations between members of classes. Crucially the proletariat are alienated and silenced through the ideological use of mass media as opiates. Television emerges as the medium *par excellence* of domination, not least by depriving the masses of the means to criticize their fate. Finally there is the recognition of the impossibility of structural change without revolution.

A less dogmatic interpretation might note that the older speakers are traditional intellectuals, whose former importance as opinion-makers and the brains behind the pre-modern order, has been irreversibly eroded by new kinds of organic intellectuals. New forms of good sense fit ill with traditional forms of common sense. Such an interpretation might elaborate on the extent to which the commentators lament the loss of an earlier hegemonic order and question how far the new order (ironically the régime of President Suharto, which was in power at the time, was known as 'The New Order') manages to make itself hegemonic at all, by stressing the degree to which it relies on domination and ideological manipulation.

⁸ What can decent people do, if scum are on top? There is a further implied image, which harks back to the previous theme. The broken grains which move centrifugally outwards are little valued and are thrown to chickens for fodder. That is the fate of ordinary decent people these days.

The problem with all such academic accounts is they apply so generally as to be rather uninformative and tend to tell us more about the preoccupations of their authors than of their subjects. The former analysis in particular rounds up all the usual suspects. Capital is organized, and like structure, is imbued with transcendental powers of agency and mind.⁹ Its metaphysics relies upon now-familiar dichotomies - traditional:modern, structure:ideology, determination:choice, matter:mind - as it does on the presumed superiority of the knower over the known. Contingency, indeterminacy, situatedness are articulated away. The central structures, forces, or agents, are autonomous and self-determining. Such essentializing ignores the degree to which such entities are continually constituted by what is outside them (Laclau 1990a, 1996a, after Staten (1986) after Derrida), a problem much time is devoted to denying, for instance through television.

Village Hamlets born to sing Unseen?

A favoured academic practice for dealing with indeterminacy and lack of closure is over-interpretation (Hobart in press [b]). Were the commentators anticipating class revolution? Or, given Balinese penchant for reiterating what we might call Saivite-style thinking (e.g. Teeuw *et al.* 1969), were they trying out familiar eschatological presuppositions on new kinds of events? They actually used not day-to-day Balinese expressions, but Sanskrit and *Kawi*¹⁰ words replete with connotations. For example, in the term *kaliyuga* translated as ‘apocalypse’ in the last of the translated passages above, *kali* is the final age, *yuga*, in which morality and order fall apart before destruction, *sengara*, especially the periodic destruction of the universe at the end of a cycle of ages, *kalpa* (Zoetmulder 1982: 1665).

Similarly, was the irreversibility of domination couched in the linear time of Euro-American (and Marxist) cosmology? Or was it part of a metaphysics of transformation (*matemahan*)? Prior to the extract above, the commentators had described the process of differentiation as *rodan pedati*, the turn of the cartwheel, by which what is up must go down and *vice versa*. Later they reviewed the reversal of family fortunes in the village over the last generations and concluded that cycles took about 50 years, spurred by disruptions such as the Dutch conquest, the Japanese Occupation, or the coup in 1965. Contrary to determinate explanations (be these infrastructural, processual or psychic), the commentators argued for *ganti*, ‘contingency’.¹¹

Fortunately this is not a problem - according to Spivak. The subaltern cannot speak because of the constraints on her discursive positioning (1988), a point the commentators argued on

⁹ The trouble is capital keeps on changing its mind. For a long time it used to be mind driven by the pure reason of the market. In 1998 it suddenly turned out it had been nothing of the sort, but corruption, collusion, nepotism and cronyism (to use the phrase popular among Indonesian reformers). Subsequently the IMF tells us that the problem is that the rationality was not pure enough.

¹⁰ *Kawi* is a Balinese term that designates various distinct, but interrelated, literary idioms.

¹¹ So much for Lévi-Strauss’s thesis (1966) of pre-modern thought as over-deterministic. How are we to decide between interpretations?

almost diametrically opposed grounds.¹² In fact it was precisely the *a priori* dismissal of anything that they might say, without bothering to listen to it first: that exercised them. What the commentators had to say challenges élite claims to epistemic superiority, especially when these claims require the refusal to engage with those they purport to speak of (an example itself of denying the constitutive outside). In fact the villagers' stress upon contingency, disjuncture and antagonism is arguably more theoretically subtle than the approaches which purport to explain them.

Not only are these approaches incommensurable with, and antagonistic to, other kinds of practices, they are condemned largely to ignore these. The old actor's remark about the rich not thinking about actually talking to the poor was not just an observation of social mores. As he made clear later, it is a determination *not* to inquire, *not* to know. Even more fundamentally, it is the denial of the dialogic nature of social life. The old actor was engaging in a philosophical critique of the nature of society and knowledge. Similarly the reference to images of beautiful things presupposes an acquaintance with Balinese ideas about how desire is fomented and how it is disciplined, if humans are to achieve a measure of agency and not be totally subject to others and their own appetites,¹³ exemplified for instance in the widespread sale of productive land to purchase consumer goods, such as television sets, in Bali.

It is against this background that the repeated statements about how worthless the poor are make sense. As the old actor remarked: even rubbish can be burnt as firewood. In earlier political formations, you might be politically insignificant subjects (*panjak, kaula, semut barak*), but that did not encompass your other skills, abilities or intelligence. The refusal to listen to, and so recognize and engage, others is far more serious than treating people as mere labour power (something Balinese have been familiar with for a long time). It is to treat people not as agents or even subjects, but as objects. Television epitomizes the mutual disenchantment. People do not believe what the élite tell them, nor do the élite believe it themselves. It is mere manipulation.

Let me give two brief examples of the subtlety of the discussion. The ex-village head remarked that all that the masses get from grand projects is 'a good feeling'. The word he uses for what others get is *suksema*, one of the hardest words to gloss, even in Balinese. It connotes subtle, immaterial, refined and so the feeling on accomplishing or being offered something good. It is deliberately ambiguous (*ngèmpèlin*). If listeners wish to infer material advantage, that

¹² If you look at Spivak's practice, not her rather tendentious theoretical claims (on which see Ram 1993), a quite different picture emerges. Her analysis of Indian Hindu *sati* is embarrassingly simple-minded and ill-informed. Happily 'the subaltern' is a sufficiently elastic category in Spivak's hands, as to eliminate anyone who might disagree. Interestingly, the actor and ex-headman in Tengahpadang could be viewed as subalterns, if you make a rather different reading of Gramsci's distinction between the masses and subalterns, whose task precisely is to articulate the hegemony of the dominant group to the masses.

¹³ If Foucault thought it necessary to devote two volumes of *History of Sexuality* to exploring radical discursive differences in earlier European eras, perhaps we should not unthinkingly impose our own common sense ideas on others' good sense.

is up to them. The reference is slightly veiled (*makulit*). Indeed it is an exercise in ‘mature speech’, *raos wayah*, which the indiscriminating listener or reader, like our imaginary leftist media studies’ expert, takes as it appears, instead of rethinking it critically. Remember the ex-village head’s complaint about television programmes - that they was nothing to think about, or with.

Another point which may have struck you is the complexity of the ‘subject position’ from which the older commentators speak. There is a refusal to unify, centre or essentialize oneself as an enunciating ‘subject’, or universalize this into objective class interests. (The ‘you’ I have inserted into the translation to avoid clumsiness was as absent as were references to ‘we’ or ‘I’, except as illocutionary modifiers.) There is an ironic distance by which the subject starts to elide with the object of its own knowledge. Rather evidently this is not a disavowal. Before using these extracts here, I showed them to the commentators. They were actually rather pleased at what I had chosen. I asked if they felt it was harsh or could be construed as deprecatory (*nyacadin*). The ex-village head replied that it was so, not a matter of personal opinion. As he truly felt this to be the case, they could not be deprecatory. Balinese categories of truth and slander are as distinctive as they are widely ignored by scholars.

Subjects or agents?

A crucial section comes at the end of the last passage. The ex-village head criticized much television programming for there being nothing to emulate. Then he added: ‘How do you set about resisting?’. Without much twisting and turning, this is not a world which is appreciable only through the categories and mental processes of a universalizable knowing subject, whether unified or split - the ghost in the television. Without something on which someone else has already started work, you cannot think or act. In emulating it, you change yourself. What you think, what you think with and what you think about are not predetermined, but are the result of endless engagement. If you are flung into a world in which people do evil, you need the means - the thinking of others before you - to enable you to think at all, let alone to be able to pass the results of your thinking on.

In short the commentators spoke of themselves as agents, or as victims, not as subjects. That is, they stressed action, its responsibilities and consequences, where you may command, go along with, or have action inflicted on you. They avoided talking about a consciousness, pure or otherwise, as the source or object of actions, which transcended actions and events. Yet at the same time the commentators presented people like themselves as subject to economic, political and social forces over which they have little command. There is more at stake here than the ambiguity in the word ‘subject’ (see Henriques *et al.* 1984: 3, Williams 1983: 308-12.)

To address this issue requires me to refer to a series of discussions about television which I held with a larger and partly different group of people three years earlier. The drift of the argument was that watching television was like standing near a water spout at a bathing place:

you get whatever is about. (The term used was *kena*, to be the recipient of someone else's actions.) This may be for good or ill, but affects who you become. (The law of *karma pala*, the effects of actions, being general, you are the products of your actions and what is done to you.) If you are not to be swept along passively, you have to be disciplined (*tegeg*) and learn from past example how to avoid what is bad and to exercise self-restraint. This is no spartan or puritan code though. I found Balinese open about their sexual arousal over attractive actors and actresses on television. Humans, after all, are comprised of antagonistic drives and dispositions (*triguna, triwarga*, Hobart 1986), not harmonious wholes.

What was particularly interesting was how people would talk in terms of different kinds and degrees of engagement with television. These tended to a rough order: each stage commonly being a necessary, but by no means sufficient, condition for the next. First, you knew something (e.g. the news). You might also enjoy it (*seneng*). Most engagement with television stops there. Sometimes though you feel for the characters or find yourself gripped by your own feelings (*marasa*). Only then are you likely to understand or appreciate what is at issue. The word is *ngaresep* - at once active and passive, to penetrate or infiltrate into, and to be penetrated or infiltrated. To appreciate is not only to be changed, but to change. Finally, you may decide to act upon (*nelebang*) whatever is the outcome for you. In use, these distinctions are obviously deployed much more flexibly and subtly than a bald list suggests. Media theorists tend to put much emphasis upon television news as a hegemonic device (e.g. Fiske 1989: 289-308). Not only is the sort of knowledge involved relatively superficial on this account, but most Balinese are deeply sceptical about its accuracy even as far as it goes.

The relationship presupposed between persons and images (indeed the lived world as a whole) seems quite different from some media theorists' stress on 'identification' as the necessary mode of mediation. It is also arguably both more complicated and subtler than the idea that viewers implicate and extricate themselves at will (Fiske 1989: 174-190) or than simple degrees of engagement and emulation (Smith 1995).¹⁴

It is at this point that television-viewing practices in rural Bali begin to have wider implications. One of the serious intellectual battlegrounds of the twentieth century is over the nature of the human subject and its epistemological implications. It is hard to imagine what media studies would look like without some more - or less - coherent set of presuppositions about the subject. What would link production with purpose, programmes with meaning, images with content, or define viewing? An account of the subject though has in effect to be universal (ahistorical and acultural) and a priori - and so the plaything of ethnocentric fantasy. This seems to me to be one of the most vexed issues facing critical media studies. Such approaches are caught, as Foucault pointed out in the circularity common to the human sciences of being both

¹⁴ There is now a vast academic suturing industry, driven especially by an idealist union of textual studies with idiosyncratic readings of Lacan, which is in the business of textualizing action and universalizing the imaginary viewer. The questions 'what is all this effort attempting to articulate?' or, less often considered, 'what is being disarticulated here?' are arguably more interesting than the results of their theorizings.

its own subject and object (1970; cf. Habermas 1987).¹⁵ An analysis of how people appreciated television in Bali offers a radical solution. It is not simply the familiar anthropological move of decentring the western subject by positing another. It is to dispense with the subject entirely.

As I have indicated, the commentators worked with quite different presuppositions. First, the knower is neither superior to, nor radically ontologically different from, the known. Humans are the products of past practices: both what has been done to them and what they do. Television, as a major source of representations, is therefore important.¹⁶ As people are continually interacting with their environment, notably other humans often in groups, it makes little sense to postulate a atomized subject, whether as pre-social homunculus, as unitary consciousness or fractured ideal state.¹⁷ It follows that humans are not the only, or even the most important, agents. In fact, the stress on agency in academic writings instantiates an élitist bias: most humans and groups spend more time being at least partly instruments or subjects of the decisions and actions of others a point which the commentators elaborated on at length. An analysis of television-viewing is therefore as much an account of patency as of agency.¹⁸

Are there not though differences between what Balinese had to say about television in the summer of 1997 and three years previously? The latter seemed less pessimistic about the scope for agency or, perhaps better, active patency: You could not by and large determine broadcasting schedules or content - although in their own way, people like the young dancer (who has featured in various broadcasts of theatre and textual reading) did - but you could affect how they impacted on you, your family and friends. The later account resonated more of abject patency and objectivation. Against this the commentators were aware in varying degree that their arguments reached a wider audience through me and were interested to see what I had selected for this chapter.

The next night I switched to direct interrogation about the differences between the two accounts. While this is part - or better one phase - of anthropological inquiry, it runs of course the familiar risk of presuming the commentators to be unitary subjects striving accurately to represent a stable world, independent of the circumstances of the questioning - precisely the abstraction the commentators challenged as theory divorced from practice. The differences turned out to be in significant part situational, to depend on what had been discussed earlier and what was going on in society at large.

¹⁵ Here, any knowledge about the human subject presupposes the subject who does the knowing.

¹⁶ But less important than lived events, according to most Balinese I have talked to.

¹⁷ Henriques *et al.* in *Changing the subject*, 1984, provide an excellent critique of the first two options and their variants. I do not know of a really good critique of the Lacanian rescension of the subject. Williamson (1992) is useful on the narrative teleology of the Lacanian account. Fink, as a Lacanian analyst, undermines much of the *a priori* of grand theorizing using extrapolations from selected texts of Lacan as the springboard to universalistic claims (1995). He points out that theory in psychoanalysis is an aid to, and revisable through, therapeutic *practice*.

¹⁸ The word patient and patency, borrowed from Collingwood (1942), has an unfamiliar ring to modern ears. It has the advantage however of being part of the vocabulary of action and avoids the massive ambiguities of the term subject in English (see Williams 1983).

Can you avoid the ‘influence’ of television? Yes, if you do not just believe what you hear and see.¹⁹ If you have begun to feel (*marasa*, which precedes intellection), then you can avoid ill effects; just as if you warn a child and it is sensitive to what you say, it will pay heed. Does that not contradict the hopelessness of resistance? No, you can resist in your thoughts and feelings but, if whatever you are resisting doesn’t know about it, the effects are rather limited! Like a grasshopper in a matchbox it makes a lot of noise, but doesn’t achieve much.

What about advertisements? You can resist those by not buying the product. It is much easier to resist commercial companies than government, because the latter imposes and enforces law. If you fall for the blandishments of advertisers, it is your own fault! But doesn’t the effectiveness of television wear off with time? The commentators agreed it was largely entertainment. What required lengthy discussion was the relationship of two contrary, and partly irreconcilable, ways in which Balinese talk about television. On the one hand, television could not be all that important in the end because it was just an image (*lawat*, on the significance of which see Hobart in press [a]). On the other, its effects depended on the quality of thought behind the presentation and so what you could make of it.

Isn’t refusing to engage - just enjoying - a form of resistance? This drew laughter. Of course it is. Television is like a parent telling off a child. The child just keeps quiet. What can you do? Turning off the set or switching channels is a form of resistance. Most people turn off both local and national news (*Berita Daerah* and *Berita Nasional*). If you want to try and find out what is actually going on, it is better to rely on the world news broadcasts (*Dunia Dalam Berita*), because at least the foreign news reports are likely to dissimulate less. With much hilarity, they started recounting recent occasions when they had switched off during speeches by senior government figures.²⁰ By contrast, during the Gulf War and before the Indonesian general election, people had watched eagerly, trying to discern what was really going on.

Why then, I asked, was the tone of their account so different? It is because nothing has changed for a long time. Like a new kind of food, at first it is great fun. But if you eat the same thing day in day out for years, you grow sick of it. After a long period of no change, without any explosion of activity (*makebiahan*, related to *kebiar*, the style of gamelan music) to follow, people conclude that what they are told is worthless (*tanpa guna*). I suggested therefore that an implicit symmetry emerges. The rich and powerful consider what ordinary people have to say of no interest, while ordinary people come to dismiss what their leaders say as of no value. They agreed this was so.

¹⁹ A point which runs counter to Eipper’s somewhat Ricoeurian appeal for trust in authority to counter the hermeneutics of suspicion (1996). The commentators have, I think, adequately addressed his arguments.

²⁰ Because commercial channels are required to broadcast simultaneously the news put out by state television, which is part of the Indonesian Ministry of Information, you cannot simply switch channels, but must either put up with it or turn the set off. That the families I know tended to leave the set on during Muslim or Christian religious broadcasts, but either switch the news off or the sound down, may be more informative than the news itself.

Finally, the old actor made a passing remark, which led to me intervening more directly still. He noted that, in the past, people had firmly believed their leaders (*Bapak kapracayain pisan dumun*). I almost missed it, but the word they had used before for ‘believe’ was *ngega*, not *pracaya*. *Ngega* implies both different truth conditions and an emotive relationship to the speaker’s statement. *Ngega* suggests the speaker has demonstrable evidence for what she asserts; whereas *pracaya* implies something closer to an act of blind faith. In other words, the commentators were saying no one believed the poor, although what they said was demonstrably true; but previously they had had faith in their leaders.

I asked if television had reduced people’s trust in their leaders, because they were now visible and the relationship of their words and deeds could be monitored. Could it be, I suggested, that leaders had been more like the gods, powerful yet remote. The old actor was particularly delighted with the analogy. Of course. ‘If Divinity were manifest, you would believe in It much less. If you can’t encounter It, you believe that much more fervently.’ Perhaps de-deifying their leaders has been one of television’s most perduring effects in Bali.

An afterthought on articulation (strictly for masochists)

The Balinese commentators’ discussion raises more general issues. What was it though that they actually said and did not say? It is seductively easy to read into their conversation the instantiation of the structural forces of Asian crony capitalism and to imagine that we are dealing with ignorant rustics, who use folksy practical expressions because they do not understand the idioms of structure, institutions and causation. Balinese society has long been so highly organized around corporate groups however that people are versed in a parallel terminology of explanation²¹, even were they not exposed daily through television to the scientific imagery of economic development, which is the hallmark of the New Order régime. The commentators were talking quite explicitly about practice.²² While translation is always problematic, fairly evidently the commentators were not speaking primarily in structural terms. As experienced speakers with other registers available to them, if they used the language of practice, it may be because they wished to make a point.

What the commentators actually said is interesting. They were arguing that the mass media, especially television in their case, were central to the problems of contemporary Indonesia. Mass media were not, as in much social science, reified, instrumentalized, and so marginalized, as the means to efficient communication or the efficient dissemination of ideas, information or policies. My Balinese companions were interested in the media as practices, in other words as mediation and its consequences. In Extract 2, the actor questioned whether ‘the poor could succeed in speaking. Even if they did...no one is listening’. It is not that government, public

²¹ When they wanted, the commentators spoke about government or the masses, *rakyat*, an Indonesian term replete with revolutionary and proletarian connotations among others.

²² The term they used was *prakték* (Dutch: praktijk), partly because they were contrasting it with theory (*téori*). On other occasions they used the contrast between what people said (*raos*) and their actions (*laksana*).

officials or the rich cannot hear. They choose not to, and when they are obliged to hear, they do not listen: a quite different point. More serious, the actor doubted that, in some sense, the poor could say anything at all. As poor people talk, complain, argue and even perform theatre, the actor is not speaking trivially.²³ They are subject to powerful articulations. They are unable to articulate back effectively. They are disarticulated. ‘There are no ideas you can use to help formulate criticism. If people do evil, there is nothing upon which to build a counter-argument’ (the ex-head in Extract 5). You could hardly put it more succinctly.²⁴ Mediation is not peripheral to, but constitutive of, power. Recursively articulation attains a new relevance when it becomes a way of framing practices of mediation.

We seem here to have here one of those satisfying, if perhaps fortuitous, matches. Articulation is a crucial concept in critical cultural and media studies. And at least some Balinese, indeed those whom we would expect to be disarticulated, seem to be talking in very similar terms. Before we get too excited, perhaps we should consider whom the commentators included in the category of the people who do not listen. In other conversations, they made it quite clear that they are not referring exclusively, or even primarily, to entrepreneurs who are merely doing what they do (making money), but to the higher echelons of state employees, *pegawai negeri*, civil servants, print, radio and television journalists, university and school teachers (organic intellectuals, if you will), who, by virtue of their education and position, not only are supposed to appreciate the problems but to speak for, to represent, the interests of society in a broader sense.²⁵ At this point we might ask, for all the claims of critical human scientists as to their disinterestedness, in what ways we might be similarly implicated?

Before we relate Balinese and media studies’ uses of the notion of articulation, we need to consider briefly the relationship between academic and indigenous intellectual practices. Conventionally the words and actions of subjects in the field are raw material for the academic analyst’s mind. This mind must add value, commonly by transcending and objectifying in some sense both subjects and events. In the human sciences, it is usually supposed to involve weeding out the subjective, contingent and inessential to reveal to objective, necessary and essential. Our subjects, because they live it, are unable fully to untangle the strands, or indeed realize the nature of the webs they are caught in. There is a largely unstated, but pervasive, hierarchy of thought with the great western thinkers, the Descartes, Humes, Kants and Foucaults, standing venerably at the apex. Below them come the leading figures in different disciplines, down through the serried ranks of lumpen-academics, to those whose humble job it is to grub up the

²³ What ‘Gung ‘Kak said in Balinese was: ‘*Sang Tiwas ‘ten ja wènten nyidang ngaraos napi-napi yèn tiang ngamanahin*’. It translates fairly literally as ‘The poor cannot succeed in saying anything at all, if I think (about it)’. You can read the stress as on the object (there is nothing that matters that they can talk about), or on the subject (in effect they cannot speak). ‘Gung ‘Kak is a very skilled and careful speaker and, from his other remarks that evening, the double sense seems to have been deliberate.

²⁴ And, as it happens, the term Balinese use is *ngadungang*, which catches rather nicely many of the English connotations of ‘articulate’ as at once to express and to link together. Evidently though it does not usually carry the philosophical overtones it has come to have in post-Gramscian media studies.

²⁵ Villagers widely assumed that officials were in cahoots with entrepreneurs, so they could be lumped together for the purposes of the present discussion.

facts, such as ethnographers. Even scholars of otherwise impeccable counter-hegemonic scruples usually assume the necessary and sufficient superiority of Euro-American academic paradigms.²⁶ It is as much an absolute presupposition as is the existence of Divinity to Balinese. Where local intellectuals are not reduced to a glowing sentence or two in later, footnoted acknowledgements, their thinking is not deemed fit to engage with, far less criticize, the received canon of knowledge.²⁷ It is eerily reminiscent of the Indonesian novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer's depiction in his *Buru Quartet* of novels of the intellectual superiority which the Dutch fondly imagined they had over their colonial subjects a hundred year ago – a superiority so total and unbridgeable as to be beyond question or consideration.²⁸

How then have scholars understood 'articulation'? And which senses, if any, are appropriate to understanding Balinese usage? Articulation suggests both uttering and linking. So it has been widely used, notably by post-Gramscian thinkers, in an attempt to break up the monoliths of infra-structure and ideology. As such it is caught up in the conflict between explanations in terms of structure as against agency: who articulates - or is articulated by - what? The term is closely associated with cultural and media studies in Britain and is perhaps best known through the work of Stuart Hall, who has used it to criticize and develop an alternative to explanations in terms of structural determinism. 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 (Hall 1996: 141).

Such an account, as Grossberg perhaps inadvertently points out, consists of a series of positivities, which verge on essences:

²⁶ When I question this at seminars, I almost always meet with an interesting split response. At once there is incomprehension (what on earth is the problem?) and the retort that recognition of others is what the human sciences are all about, which misses the point entirely. The contemporary preoccupation with dialogue and the dialogic is a neat articulation around its effective absence.

²⁷ I am grateful to Krishna Sen for pointing out to me the extent to which my taking Balinese seriously as intellectuals challenges this hierarchy. The conventional argument that there is an asymmetry between western theory and Balinese practice privileges theory as an abstract substance, detemporalized, but occupying mental space (see Lefebvre 1991). By contrast, I would argue that theory is simply what humans have actually thought on some occasion and therefore a matter of practice (following Collingwood 1938, 1942; metaphysics then is what they have presupposed in thinking and acting (1940). Such an approach, incidentally, saves this account of practice from the dangers of positivism.)

²⁸ The fact that Pramoedya Ananta Toer was for years in prison without trial and then under house arrest suggests that the difficulty of coming to terms with indigenous intellectuals may not be confined to metropolitan Euro-American élites, even if the latter increasingly have started to co-opt 'southern' intellectuals to keep going (for cultural studies and postmodernism, Appadurai, Bhabha and Spivak for example come immediately to mind).

Articulation is the production of identity on top of differences, of unities out of fragments, of structures across practices (1992: 54).

Hall continues

a theory of articulation is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures to certain political subjects. Let me put that the other way: the theory of articulation asks how an ideology discovers its subject rather than how the subject thinks the necessary and inevitable thoughts which belong to it (Hall 1996: 141-2).

Two points become clear. On this account at least, articulation is a new way of understanding ideology, not of rethinking or breaking with the dichotomies which constituted the notion in the first place. In neatly avoiding the trap of giving ontological priority to the subject, Hall slips however into allocating it, however cautiously, to structure to the point that you wonder where metaphor and abstractions begin to become agents ('ideology discovers its subject', 'ideology empowers people', Hall 1996: 142)

The question then arises: what relationship does articulation bear to the notion of structure it was invoked to finesse? Is it a supplement, strapped on to correct structure's weaknesses? Or does it supplant structure explanatorily? Whatever the elements,

since the combination is a structure (an articulated combination) and not a random association...there will be structured relations between its parts, i.e. relations of dominance and subordination (Hall 1980: 325).

At this point, it looks as if Hall is trying to claw back articulation to the default metaphysics of social science. The logic is sharply binary (*either* there is structure *or* the associations are random) and substantialized. It is not a matter of degree or kind. Structure transcends practice. There is little sense here of different agents trying to bring about, imputing, denying or questioning degrees or kinds of structure, momentarily for different purposes under different circumstances.

To the extent that articulation is a way of addressing a contradiction, a disjuncture, an absence, is Hall's idea of articulation itself trying to articulate something? It may be the analysis of Hall's sometime mentor in matters of articulation, Ernesto Laclau. Now Laclau has been engaged in a progressively more radical attack on the unity of complex totalities, whether infra-structural or ideological.²⁹ The critique is both epistemological (against rationalism and other forms of necessitarianism) and ontological (idealism and materialism, although he would

²⁹ I am grateful to Ernesto Laclau for being kind enough to read the draft of this article. He thinks my account of his version of articulation, and my analysis of the differences between his intellectual position and Stuart Hall's, are a fair comment.

presumably reject the dichotomy between ontology and epistemology as Cartesian). If, as Laclau has argued, there are no necessary links between concepts, then no system can successfully form a closed totality (1977: 1-12), except by reference to something else, which the system or structure has to exclude.

In successive works (Laclau & Mouffe 1985, Laclau 1990a), Laclau has spelled out quite what dissolving the necessary links entails. He argues the impossibility of the closure, or ability to self-determine, not only of any structure (including, in a strict sense, society, Laclau 1990b), but also its necessary antithesis, the autonomous subject. This makes practices of determination (articulation, identification, decision) at once constitutive and political. If the necessary coherence of any system is ultimately impossible, such determinations can never be fully or indissolubly implemented. The vision of structure, the subject and coherence are myths, themselves designed to articulate dislocations, and to address or displace antagonisms. These latter are therefore a better starting point for the analysis of social action. Laclau's thinking being on the whole abstract, the issue arises of how articulation works in practice.

It might seem that this is just what Stuart Hall's writings consider. The differences between their work (on which see Hall 1996; Slack 1996; Smith 1998) are however more than a matter of intellectual temperament and concerns. Laclau's non-reductionist use of articulation leads Hall, for example, to protest that this is

to conceptualize *all* practices as nothing but discourses, and all historical agents as discursively constituted subjectivities, to talk about positionalities but never positions (1996: 146).³⁰

Hall here equates discourse with language (1996: 145), so reintroducing the dichotomy between ideology and material conditions, which Laclau tried to do away with. What Hall cannot cope with is discourse, following Foucault, embracing both utterances and actions and as lacking structure, coherence and closure - in other words discourse *as* practice. In contrast to Hall, Laclau and Mouffe draw heavily on Foucault in their definition of articulation, as

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 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 (1985: 105).³¹

³⁰ Hall's reading is unequivocal: to Laclau and Mouffe 'the world, social practice, is language, whereas I want to say that the social operates *like* a language' (1996: 146). By contrast they explicitly reject any simple 'distinction between what are usually called the linguistic and behaviour aspects of a social practice' or 'the assumption of the *mental* character of discourse. Against this, we will affirm the *material* character of every discursive structure (1985: 107, 108). A serious problem is that Laclau's critics engage in much the same manoeuvre that anthropologists (and media specialists?) do with their subjects. That is they translate the subject and dislocation unthinkingly back into their own comfortable metaphysics, so making nonsense of them.

³¹ Laclau seems subsequently to have moved to an engagement with the work of Derrida (e.g. Laclau 1990a; 1996b) which, as Hall notes, has taken him further away from the problems of practice.

Hall's account of articulation looks at times very like a social or political act of linking cultural elements and social forces into hierarchical structures. Laclau's version is quite antithetical. Articulation is not a positivity. 'Its "essence" depends entirely on that which it denies' (Laclau 1990a: 32). He is concerned with how exclusion, lack, absence are implicated in the objectification of momentary positivities, such as structure or the subject. Coherence lies instead in 'regularity in dispersion' (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 105). Articulation is made necessary by the impossibility of closure of any structure, as so society (1990b). Structure emerges from the attempts to articulate, to suture, what Laclau and Mouffe call 'antagonism', that 'is a relation wherein the limits of every objectivity are *shown* - in the sense in which Wittgenstein used to say that what cannot be *said* can be *shown*' (1985: 125).³² How sure can we be, when the commentators talk of the impossibility of speaking, of making a counter-argument, of the difficulty in opposing and so the need for apocalypse, that they are not speaking of issues of articulation and antagonism?

Structure on this account therefore is an impossibility, because it depends, contingently, on a constitutive outside. Television, as the Balinese commentators immediately noted, takes place amid dislocations and antagonisms. In a country like Indonesia, it is therefore perhaps not surprising that television emerges as one of the more sustained, successful yet desperate, attempts to articulate structure into existence. Repetition - whether in news broadcasts, soap operas or Hong Kong action films - is not just commercially convenient or chewing gum for the eyes. It detemporalizes and so negates the appreciation historically of the inevitable instability and lack in any structure. For 'dislocation', the inherent failure of any social structure,

is the very form of temporality. And temporality must be conceived as the exact opposite of space... The spatialization of the event's temporality takes place through repetition, through the reduction of its variation to an invariable nucleus which is an internal moment of the pre-given structure (Laclau 1990a: 41).

In trying to claw back 'concrete individuals' (an unfortunate expression), positions and subjects, Hall makes clear the differences between his and Laclau's project. Laclau's concern, on my reading, is to engage in a thorough-going review of the metaphysics of the human sciences, not to reinscribe it.³³ The implications are unsettling. The subject has no ontological priority over moments of decision or determination. 'The subject' is therefore simply the inability of structure to constitute its elements fully as objects (1990a: 44). It certainly flies in the face of our common sense.

³² As I understand it, their notion of antagonism has two aims. The first is to overcome the residual Cartesian overtones in the dichotomy inherent in the Marxist distinction between real oppositions and contradictions. The second is avoid inscribing oppositions/contradictions as new kinds of positivity.

³³ Consider Hall's difficulties with post-structuralism or postmodernism in any form, a theme nicely argued by Chen 1996. One problem of invoking a notion of culture, even as critically as does Hall, is that the concept is a glutton for supplementarity. So you find yourself strapping new ideas onto minorly modified old ones, rather than questioning the value of the concept in the first place. This is one reason that culture, whatever the radical pretensions of its proponents, has a tendency to eschew radicalism.

This decentring however makes philosophical good sense (Descombes 1991) and even common sense in many parts of the world (for India, see Inden 1976; Marriott 1976; for Bali see Hobart 1986). Am I though not in danger of crushing a Balinese nut with the sledgehammer of contemporary theory? Sāmkhya philosophers however engaged in a brilliant analysis of the relationship between consciousness and the subject, which effectively eliminates the latter by describing it as the site of antagonism (Larson 1987), being moments of partly conflicting material processes. A radical processual metaphysics fits how Balinese often talk about the world far better than a mind:body dualist account does. And, while Balinese do not walk around reading classical Sāmkhya works every day, they have more than ample examples to draw on from written and oral texts as well as local television.³⁴

Even so, am I not exoticizing the Balinese once again though by suggesting that they do not watch television like the rest of us? Am I not implying that they live their entire lives in some philosophically alternative universe? It is the presuppositions behind the question which are worrying. It implies there is some normal way of viewing television or thinking. As Hacking has argued, the normal is a particular 19th. century European invention behind which lurk authoritarian epistemological horrors (1990). Articulation is not just something sinister Gramscian élites do.

Representing Balinese as ‘just like us’ is as power-laden as, and differs only slightly in kind from, declaring them different, and involves ‘a permanent dislocation...between the representative and the represented’ (Laclau 1990a: 39). The point of a sustained analysis in terms of practice is that practice is underdetermined. In other words, it depends on subsequent practices to make momentary determinations. There is no simple accessible truth about how Balinese watch television or what they think (what amazingly over-generalized categories) separable from articulations, by whomever.

There is a potential problem with the notion of articulation. It easily leads to imputing a double, and false, positivity. The more successfully you articulate something in a particular way, the more you disarticulate previous and other possible ways. However, articulation is not zero-sum. A powerful articulation, like the fantasy of a prosperous and relatively trouble-free bourgeoisie reiterated by Indonesian television, can dislocate, at least temporarily, an entire field of serious rivals.³⁵ The lure of the seemingly tangible (if not the attainable) distracts us from the silences which powerful articulations bring in their wake and from which they emerge.

³⁴ Balinese have available a wider range of Sāmkhya, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Buddhist and indigenous Indonesian philosophical sources, which find their way into daily usage in complicated ways.

³⁵ I would stress *relatively* trouble-free, because recent Indonesian soap operas put some of their protagonists (often women it seems) through terrible ordeals. An analysis of different genres of Indonesian television programmes and what light they throw on articulation is a project I have just begun.

Disarticulation is not just preventing people speaking,³⁶ nor pre-emptively dismissing the possibility that they could have anything worth saying. The commentators objected to the fact that in contemporary Indonesia they are recognized only as the passive subjects of others' power, not as knowing subjects. What they were remarking on was the crucial rôle of the mass media in this process. The poor appear on television in many guises: as the masses, as the source of social disruption, as criminals (so as mass to be disciplined), as a problem posed for development planning, as ignorant (so contradictorily both to be educated and left as a source of brute labour). They also feature as a nostalgic or repulsive contrast to the lives of the wealthy, folkloric or squalid backdrops to a metropolitan lifestyle, as servants to the rich, as comical (the servant-clown is a very old rôle).³⁷ This is what 'Gung' Kak elegantly drew attention to.

'I don't think that the poor could succeed in speaking. Even if they did, as was said earlier, they are worth nothing, no one is listening.'

However is Cultural Studies as emancipatory of such people as we are sometimes invited to believe? Consider the following quote. Forces of communication

at a certain moment, yield intelligible meanings, enter the circuits of culture - the field of social practices - that shape the understandings and conceptions of the world of men and women in their ordinary everyday social calculations, construct them as potential social subjects, and have the effect of organizing the ways in which they come to or form consciousness of the world (Hall 1989: 49)

The world is declared knowable through a reactionary, nostalgic and ethnocentric metaphysics. In this quotation alone, we have meaning, culture (terminally prejudiced despite its endless reworking), understanding, the construction of reality, the subject and consciousness. None of these survives the critical interrogation of Balinese practice in remotely the form we know them.³⁸ However the subjects in question cannot appreciate that they are being (dis)articulated. They live culture but, by definition, appreciate the world through - and so cannot properly see - their own culture. Such understanding is abrogated by those who speak for, write about and so authorize them (see Asad 1986; Hobart 1990). Cultural Studies manages to hierarchize the subjects it is supposed to understand or even help emancipate. So what Balinese (in this instance) have to say once again does not really matter. The commentators seem to have been

³⁶ What 'Gung' Kak left implicit on this occasion was that respect and age may be used subtly to disarticulate in obvious ways. Some years before he had been honoured by the provincial government, along with a number of other distinguished figures, for services to culture in a televised ceremony where they were co-opted as tokens of 'tradition', but were of course not allowed to speak.

³⁷ Significantly the programme which consistently receives the top viewing ratings (and how these are reached is another question) happens to be one of the very few which deals with ordinary poor people in a Jakarta slum, *Si Doel Anak Sekolah* (Si Doel the educated). Even here the protagonist, who drives a broken down jitney bus, was an engineering graduate before giving up his profession.

³⁸ A serious problem is that this quotation and its metaphors could almost have been written by Clifford Geertz, a figure whose politics is, on at least one account (Pecora 1989), diametrically opposed to Hall's. What both share is the presupposition of culture as a pre-articulation which transcends somehow the articulations, counter- and dis-articulations of daily life. This, as I understand it, is where Laclau parts company with them sharply.

quite percipient in recognizing that academics were as unlikely to bother to find out what they were actually saying as anyone else.

To try to sum up, I would go further still than many critical media studies' specialists (for example Ang 1991; Dyer 1992; Hartley 1992c; Morley 1992; Walkerdine 1990, 1996) in questioning assumptions about media as predicable entities (as opposed to more or less dispersed practices of mediation), about communication (with its *telos* of sharing, a community, a communion), or the idea that programmes are texts to be encoded and decoded (Hall 1980b; an argument forcefully dismissed by Bakhtin 1986), or about newspapers, radio or television as reified entities instead of the occasions of practices, or audiences as hard-to-grasp social objects rather than empty signifiers (see Laclau 1996c).

Laclau's account of articulation offers, I think, a more radically democratic approach to the analysis of what the Balinese commentators were talking about than many of the alternatives. It does not isolate and privilege a superior academic knowing subject. On the contrary, it complicates such a possibility by showing not only how contingent, partial and momentary such a subject is, but the degree to which it is an articulation of antagonisms in the academic's own society. The anthropological Other has been a regrettable necessity, as Foucault and others have noted, to suture the dislocations in that delightful Imaginary, the West.³⁹ Laclau's analysis remains however incomplete. It is unclear how we are to get from the abstract world of the logic of articulation to practice; or how we get there from practice in the first place. Either we are to assume transparency: that articulation may be read directly off and back onto practice. Granted Laclau's critique of representationism, would this even be a serious possibility? Or he might argue that propositions are real (e.g. Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 124), but without clarification that does not tell us much. In any event Laclau's analysis requires an account of mediation: indeed propositions-as-transparent or -as-real are both theses about the nature of mediation. As mediation, more or less by definition, is set in the untidy world of the particularity of practices, it exemplifies the contingency, dislocation and absence which are central to this account of articulation (e.g. Laclau 1990a: 38-39).

So the obvious question, 'what is the relationship of articulation and mediation?', is not then easily answerable, as it depends on clarifying the relationship of articulation and practice, and also on developing an account of mediation. It is left to some poor Balinese villagers to remind distinguished theorists that they have failed to address, and perhaps even imagine, crucial questions. It takes a neglected ninety-one year old actor and his neighbours to remind us that grand abstractions like culture, communication, articulation and hegemony without an account of practice are as shadowy as the images they watch and comment about on television. And if critical academic theorizing seems to have little to do, and fails to engage, with what villagers in mountain Bali have to say, it is because we choose to articulate it that way.

³⁹ Consider in Ben Anderson's celebrated piece *The Idea of Power in Javanese culture* (1972) how Java is necessary to give a semblance of plausibility to there being such a thing as the idea of western power.

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