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When is Indonesia?

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Abstract
This paper argues that existing approaches to Indonesian media hypostatise what may be more imaginatively understood as a rapidly changing assemblage of arguments and practices. A series of intellectual manoeuvres creates the appearance of a relatively stable, knowable and measurable system. These include confusion over the precise object of study, omission of anything that does not fit the theory and rigid techniques of closure that prevent these weaknesses being evident. Critiques of Eurocentrism raise broader questions of processes of power/knowledge by which the discourse of Indonesians is culturally translated into the hegemonic language of an élite of experts, producers and politicians. The paper proposes instead to approach Indonesian media as assemblages of practices of production, distribution, engagement and use by different people in different situations. Such practices constitute performances, which may be differently articulated by different participants on different occasions. The paper concludes by rethinking key genres of Indonesian television broadcasting as performances. Indonesia emerges less as a stable, coherent entity than as the shifting object of antagonistic representations.

Keywords
Indonesia, media, performance, practice, critique

Why rethink Indonesian media? I suggest that a fundamental review is overdue. Existing approaches are confused about their objects of study and concepts. They survive only by marginalising much of their subject matter, such as the participants' divergent understandings and those elusive subjects — audiences. They require all manner of closure to conceal epistemological naïveté and ethnocentrism. If the mass media's function is to articulate otherwise discrepant elements as a coherent whole, what is then disarticulated or silenced? And should we accept existing enunciations about Indonesia as self-evident, rather than the contentious object of antagonistic representations? To address such questions, I attempt to rethink media production, use and commentary as assemblages of practices that make up discourse.

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What's Wrong Anyway?

If Indonesian media cannot be described apart from some frame of reference (Goodman, 1978: 1–22), what is wrong with existing accounts? After all, have we not amassed a vast body of knowledge about the media and about Indonesia? Media studies as an academic discipline lacks, however, a coherent theoretical framework. Proponents of sundry disciplines within media studies — from Political Economy, Sociology, Mass Communications, Law, Psychology, Cultural Studies,[1] Literary Studies and Anthropology — each claim privileged knowledge. As each discipline assumes different criteria for what comprises theory, objects of study, evidence, methods and procedures, what looks like lively debate actually disguises endemic incoherence. The problems are only made worse outside the Euro-American world, where Eurocentrism is naturalised under the aegis of modernisation.

Knowledge, being abstract, generally requires depicting through unacknowledged metaphor. Consider the capitalist (and, ironically, socialist) image of knowledge, as a cumulative, quantifiable quasi-object (for example "symbolic capital"). So, whatever their other differences, it is hardly surprising that media corporations, mass communications departments and their socialist critics find such a metaphor and its mythologising natural and congenial. Such cumulative scientific knowledge presupposes its antithesis of knowledge as traditional, unscientific, regressive, destructive, even apocalyptic. Examples include South East Asian governments' portrayals of radical Islam or the concerns of those disarticulated by the triumph of modern capitalism as an atavistic return to traditionality. By contrast, I invoke a model of knowledge as discursive, as the shifting outcome of dialogue between different agents, instruments and patients,[2] always open, unfinalisable and under-determined.

As the mass media at once enunciate and disseminate selective "information", opinions or attitudes and exclude alternatives or trivialise them as "entertainment", my concern is with discourse about knowledge. By discourse, I do

[1] Both communication and cultural studies are protean, composite, ambiguous (at times deliberately) and contested. For present purposes, I take communication studies to have as its main subject matter the communication industry. By contrast, paradigmatically, the subject of cultural studies consists of intellectuals speaking for the working class and other oppressed minorities. As my aim is to outline a radical approach to Indonesian media, given the tight word limit my criticism of existing theories is not intended as comprehensive, but as illustrative of why we need to explore alternatives. Many of the criticisms are developed further in Khiabany and Sreberny's paper in this collection.

[2] My usage follows Collingwood (1942) and Inden (1990). Much agency is complex and only in the limiting case is it identifiable with individuals. I use dialogue in Volosinov's and Bakhtin's sense (Morson and Emerson, 1990). I would like to thank Ron Inden for the many discussions that lay behind this piece and for comments on the drafts.

not mean purely what is verbal or written, but also actions, sounds, spectacles and events. Following Deleuze, the later Foucault and Laclau, I understand "discourse" as an assemblage (*agencement*, Deleuze and Guattari, 1988) of performances and their constitutive practices, variously articulated and understood, which are neither clearly bounded, nor systematic.[3] It is not a simple positivity, because any assemblage and its constituents continually change and are themselves subject to disagreement. Discourse in this sense includes not just silences, exclusions and closures, but also unspoken presuppositions in which scholars, critics and media producers are implicated. On this account, social structures and institutions are the ever-changing sedimentations of previous practices. Studying, measuring and representing such positivities involves representing these *as* institutions or structures through contending articulatory practices.

This approach invites rethinking culture, the subject — and so the mass media — not simply as sites of struggle (Chen, 1996), but as notions that are themselves contested. Suppose we think of culture as an assemblage of discursive practices that people argue over, not an imaginary whole or abstract concept. A pragmatist reading would avoid reifying culture or media by asking who represented what *as* what to whom on which occasions for what purposes (Goodman, 1968: 27–31). Doing so enables us to inquire into the circumstances and contending practices of articulating including how these disarticulate alternative accounts. Culture's semblance of coherence emerges through reiterating "procedures for delimiting and controlling discourse" (Foucault, 1971: 23). Cultural difference is not given, but arises out of argument about the discursive practices of others. Such a pragmatist approach interrogates the conditions under which enunciating happens. As Goodman asked not "What is Art?" but "When is Art?" (1978: 57–70), asking "When is Indonesia?" invites inquiry into the antagonistic practices through which Indonesia is differently articulated through the mass media.

Here I review three kinds of difficulty with our current knowledge of Indonesian media: These are confusions over the object of study; the omission of

[3] "Any structural system is limited, that it is always surrounded by an 'excess of meaning' [i.e., discourse] which it is unable to master and that, consequently, 'society' as a unitary and intelligible object which grounds its own partial processes is an impossibility" (Laclau, 1990: 90, my parentheses). Enunciations about structure are often ideal representations, which ignore how things actually work. Such working practices do not emerge through cursory study, because the participants themselves rarely frame them publicly or self-reflectively. The shift to practice attempts to address the "so-called crisis of representation, in which an essentially realistic epistemology, which conceives of representation as the reproduction, for subjectivity, of an objectivity that lies outside it — projects a mirror theory of knowledge and art, whose fundamental evaluative categories are those of adequacy, accuracy, and Truth itself" (Jameson, 1984: viii).

whatever does not fit the theory; and a rigid closure that prevents the shortcomings being apparent.

Confusion

> What exactly are the mass media? And what do they do? Television … is a medium of dissemination of a powerful message which can affect the structure of thought and social order. (*Kompas*, 26 August 2004. *Let's get rid of trashy shows*, citing Ratna Sarumpaet, theatre and film director)[4]
>
> The mass media *confer* status on public issues, persons, organizations, and social movements. (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1948: 18, 20)

If two of the great early theorists of mass media manage to conflate a medium with an agent, we cannot blame Indonesian producers decades later for doing the same. Sadly, such elementary confusions are so rife that you can claim almost anything about the mass media while contributing little of intellectual significance. Assertions about the mass media, television or the Internet sound impressive. But the terms are so ambiguous, what, if anything, do they mean? What is the precise object of media studies? Depending on the discipline and the specific approach, the referents of media or mass media are conceived differently.[5]

A working assumption of mass communications is that modern societies depend upon communication and mediation, conceived as transparent and isolable from social relationships. Cultural studies recognises mediation as problematic, but effectively treats culture as significant insofar as it articulates differences of class, ethnicity and gender. However, communicating and mediating are constitutive of social life. So, to create an ostensibly viable object, the study of the mass media requires excising or negating both the circumstances of their use and how different participants understand and articulate them. Added to which the key terms of media studies are so vague as to be emptied and refilled signifiers, which liberates them to be used any which way. Not very originally, Indonesian broadsheets dwell on the fear that the ignorant masses

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[4] Popular usage emulates scholars in attributing agency to the media. In August 2011, a Metropolitan Police spokesman stated that social media were responsible for the riots in London. The translations from the Indonesian broadsheet *Kompas* are mine.

[5] English usage involves ambiguity, reification and synecdoche. "Medium" has many senses, which give the term "the media" its richness, ostensible tangibility and imprecision. Conversely, when we talk about the media, something seemingly definite refers to processes and practices so broad that in modern societies they are part of most aspects of life. Much argument about "the media" consists simply in flitting between different senses and related terms like identity, globalisation, civil society and the public sphere.

(*rakyat yang masih bodoh*) swallow indiscriminately whatever the media pump out, especially television and the Internet. An evident trend remains undiscussed namely that, far from being lulled by the diet of opiates, the masses may ignore, mock, parody, pretend hyper-obedience and otherwise refuse to participate as required (Baudrillard, 1983, 1988; Heryanto, 1999). In the absence of a coherent object, experts and commentators can claim whatever they like.

Omission

> There exists a pattern of "preferred readings"; and these both have the institutional/political/ideological order imprinted in them and have themselves become institutionalised. (Hall, 1980: 134)
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> Our thinking is going to regress by several centuries. Faced with students who have been stuffed with mystical ideas, teachers will find it difficult to explain natural phenomena or chemical reactions using logic. ("Supernatural programmes on television stunt logic", *Kompas*, 26 August 2003, citing the mass communications' scholar, Dr Effendi Gazali)

Stuart Hall's notion of preferred readings depends on what it excludes. How are such readings reached? For whom are they preferred, under what conditions and according to whom? The elegant formulation postulates an imaginary entity that conveniently transcends the innumerable practices and contingencies of which production consists and the myriad, largely unknowable, circumstances of reception and use. Seemingly material, yet highly abstract, concepts like production or audience work by omission. Do ethnographies of mass media "micro-practices" redress the deficiency? If only matters were so straightforward (Hobart, 2005, 2006a). In effect, such practices have to be treated as supplementing or qualifying system or structure as "resistance" or whatever (see Jenkins, 1992: 66–102 on Bourdieu) or, more radically, they comprise an alternative epistemology, which would require dissolving and reformulating all these concepts (Hobart, 2010a). Trying to mix the two merely creates a model with two antagonistic explanatory frameworks.

The problems are evident in the study of audiences. If television viewers are so easily knowable and tractable, why do media corporations continue to spend large sums of money "desperately seeking the audience"? "The 'television audience' is a nonsensical category, for there is only the dispersed, indefinitely proliferating chain of situations in which television audiencehood is practised and experienced" (Ang, 1991: 164). The problem is "the shifty character of 'audience' — sometimes defined as an object, sometimes as a relation, but always represented — knowable only through the power of the analogies we use to describe it and to generate information about it" (Nightingale, 1996: 126).

We admire our own imagination, but confuse it with actuality. As suits our interests, we represent something elusive as tangible and measurable: as markets; as a commodity sold to advertisers; as publics; as tokens of types such as class, race, gender; as sovereign consciousnesses; as a field of unconsciousness; as subjects of interpellation; and more. Far from inhibiting the political and industrial manufacture of audiences, indeterminacy of representation is its enabling condition.

Matters are compounded by selective omission surrounding how media work on audiences. Leaving aside casual reference to audiences having collective minds, the main possibilities — that the media produce effects or confer meaning — are both problematic. Cause is everywhere and invoked promiscuously. That is why studies are so contradictory about the correlation, say, between exposure to violence on television and subsequent behaviour.[6] Conversely recourse to meaning leads to the nightmare of unending and contradictory interpretation.

> There is nothing absolutely primary to interpret because at bottom everything is already interpretation … Words themselves are nothing other than interpretations … one interprets, fundamentally, *who* has posed the interpretation. (Foucault, 1990: 64–66)

Assertions about how media work and what audiences think are mostly prejudice masquerading as explanation. Audiences, a necessary condition of communication, have been neatly omitted and reduced to signs.

For instance, Indonesia was the primary research site of Benedict Anderson, author of *Imagined Communities*. There he argued that "print-as-commodity" made possible "new ideas of simultaneity" and so the nation as an "imagined political community" (2006: 37, 6). However, at the time Indonesian nationalism arose, most Indonesians were illiterate and beyond the effective reach of print media. So Anderson was talking about a tiny privileged élite and, by omission, dismissed the vast majority of Indonesians as irrelevant — remarkable for someone on the intellectual left.[7] Anderson engages in a fascinating and widely

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[6] Although human subjects as citizens are often considered as resistant to the effects of the mass media, paradoxically as consumers they are assumed to be vulnerable. Ishadi, the former head of TVRI, then CEO of TransTV, replying in the broadsheet *Kompas* (8 September 2003) to criticisms that commercial channels commissioned exploitative materials aimed at the masses, pointed out that television is driven by advertisers' need to attract social economic status groups A and B. Audiences' persuasibility is the unquestioned coinage of commercial media.

[7] Radio and television with its pictures potentially engage a broader range of people. While state and commercial television claim to "target" (note the military metaphor) different social groups, producers' working assumptions are more complex and whether the imagined audiences

imitated exclusion. People, audiences, the masses are absent from almost all accounts of mass media. And when they engage with the media, in what capacity? Are we to presume that when they read or watch the news, they are citizens, but consumers when they watch advertisements, and workers when they divert themselves with entertainment (*cf.* Dyer, 1992: 13)? And who constitutes the audience as what on what occasion? Members of the élite imagine and speak not only for themselves, but also for the masses of which they know little. They replace them by signs, which can be counted, surveyed and measured without fear of contradiction. Ingeniously, mass communications has virtualised, and come close to dispensing with the masses in favour of simulation.

Closure

> The media are systems for the production, distribution, and consumption of symbolic forms which necessarily require the mobilisation of scarce social resources — both material and cultural. (Garnham, 2000: 39)
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> The amount of time the inhabitants of Yogyakarta spend watching television daily averages 3.5 hours. Their level of attention while watching television is also classified as high, from which it can be proved that the frequency of watching television has an influence on the deviation in values and behaviour of Yogyakarta society. (*Kompas*, 26 July 2002).

Closure takes many forms. It may comprise vacuous quantification and classification, or incoherent induction. It may work by dichotomising (e.g., material:cultural; production:consumption), by essentialising or hypostatising diverse processes and practices or by suturing fundamentally contested issues into false positivities — confusions about signification and symbolism being particularly popular. A favourite is reducing the complex, under-determined openness of discourse to the persuasive selectivity of narrative. More subtle and pervasive is an unacknowledged epistemological hegemony. There is a taken-for-granted superiority of the knower over the known, which is grounded in the presupposition that the only true and effective knowledge of Indonesia is European, mediated through universities, consumer capitalism and "Western" media.[8] But what, and for whom, is this knowledge? And how sufficient is it to the demands placed on it?

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engage with it as is presumed is quite another matter. Research on local television and radio suggests a popular penchant for, and skill in playing with, interactive programming of a quite different order from the oft-hyped social media (Jurriëns, 2009; Putra, 2009).

[8] As with witch beliefs, the system is unfalsifiable. Compensating for defects simply shows how superb and self-rectifying the assemblage is. Significantly, Frankfurt Critical Theory addresses the

Some idea of the difficulties emerges if we ask where does our knowledge of Indonesian mass media come from. Researchers cannot be everywhere. What can they know of the practices of production, reception and use of even a single edition of a magazine or television broadcast? The conventional means is by privileging producers' accounts. But whose version do we rely on? Different people involved in production give different descriptions. Intensive ethnographic research shows practice deviates wildly and in unexpected ways from the participants' own understandings (Kwek, 2010). The more detailed the study of practice, the more diverse and contradictory the producers' accounts. So we should be sceptical about how researchers reach their interpretations. Their preferred reading draws heavily on the corporate account, which is conveniently couched in the language of mass communications. It is a masculine narrative about communication and information presented disingenuously, which understates how thoroughly social, how culturally and semantically articulated, how under-determined and contingent media production, reception and use are in practice. Each version selects, enunciates and sutures the facts to create workable or transactable explanations, almost everything else being carefully excluded.

Turning to the notional addressees, how do producers imagine what audiences are up to? Surveys and focus groups are arguably about disguising and suturing unknowability in order to transform audiences into the quantifiable currency of the industry. The discursive problem remains of what audiences make of, and do with, what they watch. Stepping outside the safe ambit of Anglophone television production presents a serious challenge to cultural studies. For example, Indonesian talent quests, travel programmes and Reality TV show the inadequacy of treating them as simple exercises in modernisation or globalisation (Barkin, 2006; Coutas, 2006; Hobart, 2006b). And ethnographic studies of audiences often have surprising results. To Balinese viewers, game shows — whether knowledge-, talent- or luck-based — dramatised something quite different: they were not about who is going to win a prize or gain celebrity, but contests of *karma pala*, the consequences of previous actions. Celebrations of modernity or capitalist consumerism became performances in eschatology (Hobart, 2010b). If media studies is condemned to reiterate *a priori* interpretations, it becomes arid, ethnocentric and hegemonic.

The problems emerge in a recent article by Hollander *et al.* (2009), which evaluates the performance of Indonesian television using an "assessment framework" designed for European public broadcasting, comprising details of

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social conditions of knowledge of the subjects of study, but not of the critics themselves, whose knowledge is above critical interrogation.

ownership, management organisation, legal basis and so on, using models of Western broadcasting. The audience is effectively pre-articulated by the kinds of questions asked.

Audience Perspective

1. Reach audience groups:
   a. To what extent are the targets in terms of audience shares being realised?
2. Aims with regard to audience groups:
   a. To what extent does the programme supply respond to the mission of the TV channel? (if applicable: confronting, informing, amusing, learning, surprising, etc.)
   b. To what extent the audience does experience (sic) this likewise? . . .
3. Structure and management:
   a. In what way does the management contribute to efficiency and co-ordination?
4. Innovation:
   a. To what extent and in what way are innovative ambitions being formulated at the level of the overall station? (Hollander *et al.*, 2009: 57–8)

The authors have reduced Indonesian discourse to their own formulations and summaries; while Indonesians disappear entirely. "Performance" here presupposes a mechanical metaphor of effectiveness. If the aim is to measure the efficiency of Indonesian television against Euro-American criteria, maybe the study is informative. If we wish to know almost anything else, including how Indonesians — whether politicians, producers, intellectuals or public — judge, talk about, experience, use or relate television to their lives, we learn nothing. An impenetrable wall of expert knowledge stands in the way.

The criticisms of Eurocentrism (Shohat and Stam, 1994; Chen, 2010; Wang, 2011) and the appreciation "that all cultures, civilizations and historical experiences must be regarded as sources of ideas" (Alatas, 2011: 241) are dismissible as left-liberal dreams in the face of the iron laws of practical reason, at least according to the narrative machine of the mass media industry, sometimes with mass communications' experts as their apologists. Unfortunately the argument on both sides is couched in terms defined by the hegemonic discourse.

In "Television performance in Indonesia", Indonesians do not translate themselves. Assuming an uncritical realism, the authors act as superior knowing subjects who command the rules, codes and procedures through which

to explain Indonesians to the world and to themselves. A critical analysis, by contrast, starts from the mutual irreducibility and entanglement of different discourses, and the conditions of violence and power under which people represent and act on one another. Increasingly the mass media becomes an important instrument in rival attempts to constitute and contest not just subjects as human or as categories — Us *vs.* Them; Asia *vs.* the West — but also the objects with which we think, be it the state, society or culture.

> The social only exists as the vain attempt to institute that impossible object: society. Utopia is the essence of any communication and social practice. (Laclau, 1990: 92)

Towards Performance

On this account, Indonesia as an imaginary community is the ceaseless activity of instituting an impossible object. While this might appear counter-factual, Indonesia is the colonial division of a far-flung archipelago, which merges into Malaysia and Thailand at one end and the Philippines, Melanesia and Polynesia at the other.[9] For decades after Independence a significant proportion of the populace did not fully appreciate that they were Indonesian. Suharto's New Order régime launched the television satellite Palapa in 1976 and placed sets in every village to reach and address people *as* Indonesians. In a sense, Indonesia is the residue of many performances; and many public figures, including two presidents, have been adept performers. The Presidency, party politics and public affairs would be vestigial without the mass media, because virtually no-one would know what was happening or whether, or when, Indonesia existed.

This sense of performance requires us to get away from the dualism by which representations are mental reflections of the world and to examine the practices through which the world is variously articulated. "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' " (Hall, 1996: 141). Performance does not represent the world: it creates or articulates it. So judging performance as inauthentic or fake is a category mistake. The question is whether it convinces and is effective. The mass media

[9] Sukarno is supposed to have remarked 20 years after Independence that Indonesia's greatest achievement was that it still existed. The Suharto régime's recognition that several provinces were effectively "colonies of Malaysian and Singapore television" was instrumental in licensing private channels in "a scramble to woo the national audience back to a national media space" (Sen and Hill, 2000: 118–19).

articulate discrepant practices by disseminating and naturalising particular representations of events. The more successful an articulation, the more effectively it silences or disarticulates other possible accounts. While some are piecemeal, media articulations are often strategic, carefully engineered and part of a public performance.

"Performance" is both slippery and adhesive. Its English connotations of artifice and appearance as against truth and essence easily colour analysis. By contrast, Javanese and Balinese actors and spectators widely consider theatre not as make-believe or mere entertainment (Hobart, 2006), but as demonstrating and bringing to life — or bringing about — circumstances that deserves musing over and explicating to some audience. If, according to Austin (1975), words do something, then how much more can full-blown theatre, television show or film do? Also, it is unclear why enacting or demonstrating should be less efficacious than enunciating. Foucault's *dispositif* was about visibility and demonstration as much as about enunciation (Deleuze, 1989: 186). Here I wish to distinguish two senses. The first is the performative as "that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (Butler, 1993: 2), which suggests how the mass media materialises representations by reiterating and citing. Second, performance also has a social sense of carrying out an organised spectacle or event aimed at inducing a specific response in an audience, as part of a broader dialogue within discourse.[10] If presenting, enacting and demonstrating are performative, are not representing, articulating and enunciating also? And assemblages of such practices comprise a performance, however imagined. As mass mediation increases, politics and public life seem likely to become more performative.

Indonesia then emerges as an assemblage of performances — by Indonesians and others. These represent it variously as a nation that is uniquely religiously tolerant, part of an emerging caliphate or a hotbed of Islamism; as a chaotic Third World country or an emerging Asian Tiger and so on. Imagining

[10] Although most performances nowadays have a strong visual element, Sukarno's speeches, say, broadcast by radio need including. Dialogue, in Bakhtin's sense, implies that a performance responds to a previous performance and anticipates a retort. The larger the audience and the more powerful the response, the grander the performance. Approached thus, the attack on the twin Trade Towers was a magnificent performance, thanks to its global mass mediation. The massacres of supposed communists in Indonesia in 1965–1966 had aspects of performance in that the terror it disseminated enabled Suharto to rule for 32 years thereafter. My use of performance differs sharply from Clifford Geertz's depiction of Bali as a "theatre state" (1980). Geertz imposed a contemporary European metaphor of theatre without bothering to inquire into Balinese practices and understandings, which are highly developed and quite different (Hobart, 2010b). Recognising that Euro-American, analytical and participants' frameworks are partly incommensurate helps to inhibit hegemonising.

Indonesia as a community is a lazy, but convenient, ploy for politicians, government functionaries and newspaper editors. If in Speech Act Theory, saying or enacting is doing, the state is inextricable from its public manifestations. However, the executive, legislative and administrative apparatuses have often gone through the motions, while incumbents to office were busily pursing contrary agendas. To confuse the discursive products of articulation with straightforward representations of reality is misguided.

Rethinking Indonesian Media

Let us see how the previous discussion bears on television, which since the late 1970s has been the mass medium *par excellence*. The referent of "the masses" in Indonesia has, however, changed. Originally it was the colonised, then the people of a newly-independent nation. In a sense, the masses presuppose the mass media to interpellate them. If so, then the masses became widespread as radio and television became widespread.

Sinétron

As my purpose is a critical analysis, not a survey, the choice of genres is selective. One genre, *sinétron* (*sinéma éléktronik*) covers many TV series from loosely historical serials (owing much to Indian epics and Chinese mythology) to soap operas. The Asian financial crisis in 1997 obliged television stations to import fewer films and telenovelas, and spurred local, cheap mass production (Kitley, 2000: 146–77). While cultural studies might anticipate, say, housewives' response insofar as women accept their interpellation, they cannot easily address cultural differences, nor how people link soap operas to their lives (Nilan, 2001). Nonetheless media commentators are busy prejudging viewers' experiences. Indonesian intellectuals lament in broadsheets what *sinétron* do to the nation's viewers using images straight from American Effects Theory. The well-known film-maker, Garin Nugroho, dismissed soaps as "mere spectacle" (*sekadar tontonan*, 1994) and titled his study of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, *The SBY Soap Opera* (Riyanto, 2004). Soaps are, however, not so easily pigeonholed, as they were not designed as a political or cultural critique. But the soap opera has too many loose ends, too many byways, for its conclusions to be controllable by the institution of censorship — especially one designed for narrative films (Sen and Hill, 2000: 154).

Soap operas give character actresses scope to make a virtuoso performance of villainy and younger heroines to explore the abjection expected of the genre. Unlike telenovelas, Indonesian soaps deal virtually exclusively with

the lives of the very rich.[11] If these are intended as exercises in modernisation and bourgeoisification, for whose benefit? The assumption that the poor in Indonesia identify with the rich presupposes culturally specific ideas of society as meritocratic and as encouraging class mobility, which is at odds with quotidian experience. So how are the poor depicted in *sinétron*? Servants as exemplars of the working class are portrayed as ugly, clumsy, stupid, emotionally incontinent and cowardly, sometimes kind and loyal, sometimes unscrupulous or feckless. This is a striking bowdlerisation of their role in Javanese and Balinese theatre with its reversals, ironies and ambiguities, appreciation of which older viewers bring to bear to make sense of the world. Finally, how do soap operas imagine Indonesia? Far from being about everyday life, the archipelago is shrunk, domesticated and condensed to the metropolitan haute bourgeoisie, with agency confined to the hermetic unchanging world of women, idealised as motherhood (Nugroho, 1994).

News

Media scholars often presuppose a (gendered) dichotomy between information as factual, educative, serious and worth attention (exemplified by news broadcasting) and entertainment (typified by soap operas) which is at best palliative, at worst seductive and dangerous — and to be explained away. Unfortunately, someone forgot to tell Indonesian broadcasters. While early radio news, coinciding with anti-colonial nationalism and Sukarno's famous oratorical skills, might fit, subsequent coverage becomes increasingly problematic.[12] Suharto's rise to power signalled a sharp shift to long, televised monologues and a notionally depoliticised, ceremonial managerialism. Indonesian news became largely ritual as government newsmakers tightly controlled, mediated and voiced-over how events were represented (Kitley, 2000: 186–200). State television news (obligatorily relayed on commercial channels) was reminiscent of *tableaux vivants*, as the régime imitated Central Javanese courts, which centred around elaborate etiquette after the Dutch removed their effective power. Whereas Galtung and Ruge characterised a Euro-American newsworthy event as recent, about élite persons, surprising and negative (1965), especially under Suharto only the élite element really survived. Newness was narrated as ceremonial openings of development projects and meetings of ministers. In this

[11] The notable exception is the adaptation of Sjuman Djaja's 1973 film *Si Doel Anak Betawi* about a poor boy in Jakarta determined to go to school, remade with the same actor, now adult, in the title role of Si Doel as a commentary on the obstacles facing the poor, however well educated.

[12] Sukarno's speeches, which are supposed to have reached and mobilised the Indonesian masses, suggest the mythical nature of the imagined community. Wealthier urban households apart, few Indonesians then had radios and many that did could not afford batteries.

engineered world, surprises and ruptures were only permitted as occasions for demonstrating Suharto's, and derivatively his ministers', efficacy in resolving crises. Such a monologic "world does not recognise someone else's thought, someone else's idea, as an object of representation… Certain thoughts… strive to shape themselves in the purely semantic unity of a worldview; such thought is not represented, it is affirmed" (Bakhtin, 1984: 79–80).

Fiske summed up the inherent fictive nature of Western television news as "masculine soap opera" (1987: 308). Under Suharto, news was masculine in that it addressed primarily men. However, masculinity was differentiated hierarchically. Very few men and fewer women had agency, which was refined exemplified mastery over others, worked at a distance and induced terror. Enforcement was delegated, off camera and usually brutal. Think of East Timor. The vast spread of Indonesia was selectively shown, but its volatility, violence and corruption were carefully hidden. Poverty and unequal distribution of wealth were subordinated to the master narrative of development. In a curious reversal, television broadcasting, owned by Suharto's family and cronies, was a tightly controlled private sphere;[13] the public sphere being largely confined to more local media, like radio (where claims were more verifiable), rumour and gossip: a reminder that producers cannot control the social relationships of media use.

Producers of print and broadcast media generally hailed post-Suharto Reform as a move towards liberal democracy, decentralisation and transparency, exemplified in the openness of the Internet, social media and texting. So why, after endless coverage of commissions on reform, national and local politics and political chat shows, do so many Indonesians feel *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*? "In practice, however, the Internet in Indonesia seems to have failed the test of both mass-based and discursive democracy". At best, mediatised networks might "air local issues and, in the cacophony, drown out any possibility of the centralised voice from Jakarta" (Hill and Sen, 2008: 146, 147). Heryanto argued that Indonesia developed a discursive régime of "the politics of appearance" (1999: 167). As they were deeply implicated in it, the mass media have tended to leave old practices of particularism, patronage and corruption largely undisturbed. Public life remains a carefully arranged spectacle. However, the régime no longer has the same power to induce awe, fear or compliance. Others have the means to promote mass mediated performances,

[13] While there has been a proliferation of media outlets and diversification of ownership, especially locally, in the main broadcast and print media, this is less so. Indeed, as liberalization and the growing market-orientation of media have become part of the euphoria of democracy in Indonesia, the concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few people seems not to have attracted the attention of either the government or the media regulatory bodies (Ida 2011: 22).

such as renting demonstrators and organising public violence. When state procedures and regulations are so widely circumventable through cash or connections, we might ask what is the state apart from these public, increasingly mass mediated, performances?

The print and broadcast media's function, which still lingers on from the Suharto era, was to affirm an imaginary order, which vested the speaker with authority, not to inform or represent others' thoughts and ideas, but render them passive subjects. Indeed, who exactly was spoken to — and for what purpose? At times, it is as if the masses were just there, inert, present, but not fully qualified as spectators. Such determined monologism was, however, dialogic in distancing itself from Sukarno's vivid embracing style, then as a negation of others' voices and subsequently as a counter to perceived cacophony.

The Supernatural

The relaxation of rigid broadcasting constraints enabled a surprising genre of broadcasting to flourish — supernatural Reality TV — which framed Indonesia and its inhabitants very differently. Taking off from popular beliefs and horror films, soon almost every commercial station had peak hour programmes, *Mistik*, devoted to the Other World (*Dunia Lain*). *Mistik* varied from documentary or re-enactments to ordeals in haunted or magically dangerous places to plain parody. Among the most popular and longest-running was Lativi's live *Pemburu Hantu* (Ghost Hunters) when every week colourful *ustadz* (masters) would visit some location where the inhabitants had reported strange occurrences. In spectacular fights, the *ustadz* would battle with ghosts, *jinn* and other invisible beings before capturing them in soft drinks' bottles while another, heavily blindfolded, would paint their material likenesses.

Mistik programmes were democratic: a broad cross-section of society from wealthy householders to peasant farmers was equally susceptible to being disturbed or even possessed. Experts and studio anchors clawed back potentially disruptive events by framing and explaining them. *Mistik* redrew the geographical map of Indonesia by showing a parallel, non-manifest realm beyond most conventional religion, which was the source of great power. Before Suharto's death in January 2008, commercial channels aired a spate of programmes, which played down his one-time exhibition of Islamic piety, in favour of his adherence to *Kejawèn*, Javanese mystical practices. Behind the performance of development and modernisation was another kind of performance, so secret and powerful that the general public was allowed only a fleeting glimpse.

Significantly, educated, articulate, attractive young women in designer clothes introduced supernatural programmes, as they came to do in many others. Was it coincidence that the wish to maximise audience ratings

undermined gender stereotypes? Or is a process parallel with Europe emerging, as mass culture became "somehow associated with woman while real, authentic culture remains the prerogative of men" (Huyssen, 1986: 47)? From variety and talent shows to infotainment and celebrity gossip, television producers and advertisers have feminised presenters and participants alike in a performance of class and gender.

Two Inflections of Religion

Suharto's resignation gave Islamic groups opportunity to demand closer adherence to religion. *Mistik*, which instantiated what some Indonesian scholars of Islam call Sufi, was a serious affront. It celebrated seemingly widespread beliefs and presented religion as entertainment, even play (Heryanto, 2008). The response was Islamic *film religi*, to counter entertainment on television and in everyday life. Not everyone's idea of a relaxing evening, however, was watching religious broadcasting. So a genre of charity shows emerged, from house makeovers for the deserving poor to tests of generosity. In RCTI's *Minta Tolong* (Asking for Help) hidden cameras recorded actors playing mendicants desperately hawking some unsellable item for some urgent purpose. After endless rebuffs someone, usually women as poor as they, would help them only to be confronted by a television presenter and heaped with money. The programmes themselves were performances. They presented as immediate and intimate the difficulties of managing everyday life in Indonesia; but also potentially distanced the viewer as critical, voyeuristic, even cruel. What also emerges is the complex dialogue going on between programmes within and between genres, which feed off and comment on one another in ways inexplicable by linear models of feedback.

Television is an ideal medium to reach so dispersed a public. Whereas violence was previously denied coverage, with the riots and murders in 1998, it transmuted increasingly into a public performance. Groups like the hard-line Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembéla Islam) became adept at using broadcast media and the Internet. Between 2002 and 2008, Muslim political parties pushed for an anti-pornography act, which opponents saw as Sharīʿah law by stealth, but conducted in the media limelight. As Jennifer Lindsay noted:

> . . . restrictions drawn up for media censorship are now applied to behaviour. Performance 'both staged and unstaged' is treated *as though* it is media . . . Much of the Indonesian writing around the pornography issue at the time illustrates this tendency to define 'reality' or 'liveness' in media terms, as a Baudrillardian loop, enveloping the virtual and actual. Pornography of the live event or behaviour is defined in terms of what it is *not* (not media). (2011: 185)

Both implementing the legislation and blatantly flouting it were public performances. As life imitates art, so the mass media comes to define the real.

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.[14] 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 metastasised 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.

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 memorised 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 wished publicly to articulate 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* specialised 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

[14] So these original parodies and the subsequent television series were often dubbed "Monolog". Analytically, it is a complex example of "double-voiced" dialogue plays with "a semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original one" to create "an arena of battle between two voices" (Bakhtin, 1984: 193).

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.

Conclusion

Why rethink Indonesian media? I suggest that existing approaches have serious limits. They involve the reduction of discourse (*discours*) to narrative (*récit*). Suharto and his successors through the mass media have been effectively narrators of the nation, not their interlocutors.[15] Narratives determine and totalise, by articulating events as fixed in, or anticipated by, the past and unproblematic. Discourse, by contrast, is open, unfinalised, under-determined and subject to contestation. Unfortunately, the repertoire of social science concepts and procedures tends to work by abstracting from practices then reifying through metaphor such as system or structure. So they are ill-equipped to address discourse as practice and trivialise both terms or invoke them casually to plug palpable explanatory inadequacies. My aim, therefore, has been to sketch out an alternative, which recognises the double discursive nature of critical inquiry and takes as its object discursive practices and how these are articulated as performances.

To end on a pensive note: "performance" may be a means to rethink how practices are articulated. The term refers not only to analytical as against European popular senses of performance, but also to divergent Indonesian usage. How these various senses are used to represent what is happening *as* performance, by whom, when and for what purpose arguably merits inquiry. While participants may explicitly frame public events as performances, what they mean by this and how we are to understand performance in Indonesia remain largely unstudied. For example, how far, or when, does the ontology of theatre, dance and gamelan still hold? And under what circumstances has television led to new styles of interpretive practice? While there is no long history of the bourgeoisification of theatre, various interest groups are busy trying to standardise, reify, purify and commoditise art forms and public spectacles. This is not to imply the narrative triumph of structure. On the one hand audiences and spectators remain elusive, even feral. On the other, as Artaud stressed, the obsession with sticking to the text — and so the author's or director's intention — is often absent (1978). In contemporary Indonesia, instead of reducing many voices to one, the reverse also occurs. Even under the ostensibly

[15] As Heryanto showed (1999), Suharto's main interlocutors in this monologue, the communists, were invisible and dead.

controlled conditions of television production, polyphony is ineluctable, as is the question "When is Indonesia?"

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