Cultural Studies and Everyday Life: A Balinese Case

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Abstract

This article aims to bring the intellectual rigour of Cultural Studies to Balinese ideas about culture which confuse culture with ideology. Cultural Studies is not the study of culture, but its critique which deconstructs culture as misrepresenting actuality as an Imaginary convenient to regimes of power. The New Order articulated 'kebudayaan' to create a submissive populace happy to embrace global tourism. Culture is no longer how how people do things but marketable commodities posturing as 'ancient tradition'. Bali as paradise is a cliché. The island now fulfils Madame Suharto's dream of Disneyland. The capitalist fantasy of endless cost-free growth bears no resemblance to the sophisticated Balinese cosmology of Kali-Yuga, which ends in cataclysmic dissolution; or to popular ideas of the world as ceaseless transforming. Although kebudayaan dismisses ordinary people as stupid masses, they often escape the ideological straitjacket of kebudayaan by just getting on with culture as everyday life.

Keywords: cultural studies; ideology; simulacra; metaphysics; everyday life

1. Introduction

Bali is weighed down with culture. How appropriate Cultural Studies is as an analytical approach depends on what we mean by culture—and by Cultural Studies. Awkwardly 'culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language' (Williams 1985, p. 87). In Indonesia

> a highly articulated rhetoric of culture would serve the Suharto regime well, as constant appeals to 'traditional values', 'customary behavior', and similar expressions of social stability have greatly facilitated the maintenance of state security (Pemberton 1994, p. 244).

Culture in European languages has rich historical connotations, whereas the Indonesian state coopted the neologism *kebudayaan* ideologically. Nearly thirty years on, for Bali it is unclear how much has changed. 'Culture' in its

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Cultural Studies and anthropological senses differs so comprehensively from '*kebudayaan*' that to avoid confusion I reserve the latter for Indonesian usage. Cultural Studies dismisses the study of culture as an exercise in the Imaginary.[1]

How Balinese use *kebudayaan* has been discussed extensively (Picard 1996; Hobart 2000; Fox, 2011), but its persistence merits brief review. Also the term 'Cultural Studies' can be confusing. The intellectual movement which crystallized around the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies achieved such fame and academic chic that it metastacized so almost anything now calls itself Cultural Studies. In its intellectually rigorous form, what distinguished it? And how does this help in understanding Bali? The discussion requires reviewing Cultural Studies and its complex relationship to Post-Structuralism. How do both cope with the everyday, a notoriously intransigent notion? Culture as ordinary (Williams 1989) is antithetical to the concept of *kebudayaan*. And Foucault's analyses of discourse dismembered the processes of power and closure that hypostatize culture to reveal what they hid. This matters because Balinese proclamations about *kebudayaan* risk silencing or erasing the practices of daily social life.

2. What is culture?

Culture is so promiscuous as to verge on being meaningless or deliberately misleading.

> Cultural anthropology has been a science, not of emergence, but of disappearance. Culture…has always been an idea *post factum*, a notion oriented towards the past (to 'custom' and 'tradition'), descriptive of a state of affairs (and often of a status quo), a nostalgic idea at best (when it mixed the study of exotic societies with regret) and a reactionary ideologeme at worst (Fabian 1991: 193; stress and parentheses in the original unless otherwise stated).

Historically its senses range from cultivating nature and human minds to civilization expressed through cultivating the arts to the anthropological account as a 'form of life' (Winch 1958). A famous definition reads:

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[1]   A shorter version of this article was originally given as a guest lecture at the invitation of the Study Program Coordinator, I Nyoman Darma Putra. The lecture was delivered online on 15th. July for the Doctoral Study Program in Cultural Studies at Universitas Udayana as part of the 21st. Anniversary of the Study Program beginning on 11th. July 2022. Responsibility for the argument is my own. Encapsulating all Balinese usage of *kebudayaan* is impossible, so by the term I mean its deployment in public settings—official, tourist, mass media etc. How far academic discourse reiterates such ideological articulations I leave Balinese scholars to consider.
The aim is to encourage discussion. My impression from submissions to *Jurnal Kajian Bali* is that critical reflection on culture/*kebudayaan* is regrettably infrequent.

> Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Tylor 1871, p. 1).

Foreigners who admire Balinese arts or religion as evidence of their culture muddle several senses. Such a portmanteau definition includes everything. In speaking of a complex whole, by implication a coherent principle unites the disparate elements. If culture forms a totality, theoretically it admits of explanation. If culture is just a shifting assemblage of practices that people happen to engage in, then there is no uniting principle. If there are just conflicting and undecidable interpretations, a quite other style of analysis is called for.

Culture-as-totality differs from culture-as-assemblage. If culture is conceived as a complex system, it is effectively beyond its participants' grasp, which results in elevating and detaching the analyst from the subjects of study. Early anthropologists asserted epistemological superiority because they claimed their observations were objective and systematic, whereas their informants had mere interpretations. 'Certain powerful theoretical abstractions promised to help academic ethnographers "get to the heart" of a culture [through] a central armature or structure of the cultural whole' (Clifford 1988: 31; my parentheses). Culture-as-assemblage questions the value of inferring the whole from the parts. Inquiry works by extrapolating from daily practices and participants' understandings, so conclusions are always provisional. The researcher's position is modest: like a child, their struggle to learn is crucial to the search for sense.

For Bali, Clifford Geertz's writings exemplify the first approach. A strong authorial voice makes them evocative, persuasive and attractive to general audiences. Over time the arguments and evidence often prove tenuous and insubstantial. By contrast, most anthropologists engage in painstaking ethnographic detail which draws extensively on Balinese interpretations. More is at issue than rival versions of culture. Who gets to declare some practices to be culture for what purpose? The question is not 'What is culture?', but 'Who is trying to achieve what in articulating it as such?'. Claims to knowledge are acts of power.

For Bali, a further refinement claims yet more: 'Culture = tradition'.

> The New Order cultural policy follows the logic of capitalism in treating culture as a commodity or as an unchanging token of traditional values, while at the same time masking or denying its ideological and political features. [Underlying this is] a certain conception of arts and culture… The first is the glorification of cultural heritage, based on an essentialist notion of culture as ideal values to be excavated from the

archaeological past and to be sanctified and preserved as a normative structure (Budianta 2000, pp. 109, 116; my parentheses).

Hobsbawm argued that people invent tradition by privileging one interpretation of the past over others and then repeating it endlessly (1983). That, incidentally, is how propaganda works.

One Balinese scholar, I Gusti Ngurah Bagus, understood how radical Cultural Studies was (n.d.). We were both teaching Anthropology at Universitas Udayana in 1971, when one day I mentioned the phrase I had heard: *Désa Kala Patra.* He stopped me and said to beware of newly-coined slogans masquerading as ancient tradition. The expression had been coined post-Independence to address the Balinese need to emphasize their textual pedigree. Other hypostatized Sanskritic phrases are equally dubious. As to the *Puja Tri Sandhyā*, 'the Balinese Hindus did not have a "standardized mantra" for daily prayer until the 1950s' (Lanus 2014: 243). 'The phrase *Tat Twam Asi* is not—at least to my knowledge—in evidence in the pre-colonial Balinese textual tradition', nor, for that matter, was *Tri Kaya Parisudha* or *Tri Hita Karana* (Fox 2011: 23). Invented tradition warps. UNESCO declared that 'the cultural tradition that shaped the landscape of Bali, since at least the 12th. century, is the ancient philosophical concept of *Tri Hita Karana*' (2011: 5). The phrase was actually coined in 1966 by a Balinese colonel as part of aligning Balinese culture with Pancasila. On the basis of what social practices is quite unclear.

> We are seeing a conscious neo-traditionalism that can be called a 'folklorization' of the culture. The folklorized cultural elements are extracted from their original context and combined in an imagery with ethnic connotations to be consumed by the urbanized and Indonesianized Balinese middle classes (Picard 1996, p. 176).

People often invent tradition. Britain is world-famous for celebrating ancient customs. However, most were manufactured in the nineteenth-century at the height of colonial expansion. Beware those who claim to speak for tradition.

3. What is Meant by Cultural Studies?

Culture Studies is *not* the study of culture but its nemesis. (That many Balinese conflate antithetical approaches highlights just how powerful a hold ideology has.) All the humanities and most social sciences study culture under some guise. For Cultural Studies, culture masks how power and hegemony work. Its aim is to 're-theorize the question of articulating social classes, race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, nation and global capital together, into a forceful explanatory framework' (Morley & Chen 1996, p. 4). The critique is thorough-going and dangerous. Many scholars who want to seem trendy

amputate antagonisms they do not like. For example, American ideological antipathy to class results in such amazing acrobatics that the Director of the Birmingham Centre, Stuart Hall, remarked: 'I don't know what to say about American cultural studies. I am completely dumbfounded by it' (1996, p. 272). Turning to Bali, more is excluded than admitted. As Cultural Studies analyzes inherent contradictions and conflicts, omitting what you do not fancy nullifies its potential. Like a ship without key parts—engine, rudder, hull etc.—it may look impressive but flounders when launched.

For Birmingham Cultural Studies: 'culture is the site of the struggle to define how life is lived and experienced' (Grossberg 1996, p. 158). Phrased differently, culture is a labile argument between rival representations, an evolving dialogue between conflicting interests. Its contradictory is monologue where alternative articulations are silenced or disarticulated in favour of a hegemonic account. 'The single, true interpretation is an autocrat's dream of power' (Donoghue 1981, p. 199).

Official, tourist and artistic sources reiterate the monologue of Balinese *kebudayaan* as about balance and harmony. Where did such ideas originate? The terms used—*keseimbangan*, *kerukunan*—are not even Balinese. Arguably conflict in Bali

> is not evidence of chaotic breakdown of the cosmos, but the fundamental characteristic of life. The Balinese world is one in which the many elements are never harmoniously united, in which there is no single all-encompassing principle, no way of comprehending the whole (Geertz 1994, p. 95).

What is more,

> given the history of the New Order's use of the performing arts, the question is whether we have failed to recognize that our work has helped to naturalize a myth of 'balance and harmony' that was designed to gloss over a massacre (Fox 2011, p. 300).

The explicit ideology of *kebudayaan* stands starkly contrasted to how Balinese have long imagined the world.

> Contrasting the cosmologies of Pancasila and Balinese popular theatre, the ideal of 'balance and harmony' characteristic of state television turned out to be quite sharply incongruous with the model of power and polity exemplified through local drama… [Rather] we find the king's relationship to his realm to be cast neither in terms of balance and harmony, nor spiritual recognition, but rather *mastery* (Fox 2011, pp. 218, 290; my parentheses).

Myth-making masquerades as history. Away from the domains where state ideology rules, Balinese often refer to the converse of harmony, namely *sakti*.

Balinese talk about *sakti* is pervaded with a rhetoric of battle. Their ideas are founded on a view of the world as one of a multitude of beings, human and nonhuman, great and small, in competition for control of one another (Geertz 1994, p. 85).

Balinese history, literature, social and cultural practice reiterate the theme of conflict and struggle. *Babad* dwell at length on the role of war. *Kakawin* like the Śiwarātrikalpa, celebrate 'the fantastic and gruesome methods of warfare' (Teeuw *et al.* 1979, p. 32). *Lègong*, prettified for tourists, mostly deals with dissension, fighting and grisly death, as do *kidung* like the Pañji cycle. Ideologically Bali is a contradiction: balanced butchery and melodious mayhem. Proponents of the balance-and-harmony thesis fantasize away the quarrels, antagonism and hostility that make up daily life. Conflating Cultural Studies with studying *kebudayaan* is complicit in reiterating capitalist ideology.

4. Articulating culture

Nowadays rival visions of culture are argued out through the mass media. Cultural Studies treats culture as a kaleidoscope of competing practices of articulating distinct elements that could equally be differently arranged. And hegemony is those articulations generally accepted at any moment. How does this work in Bali?

> The people of Bali have begun to forget their sense of self. This sense of self, which is based on religion and culture, has begun to be pushed aside. The soil of Bali, which is a part of tradition, has begun to change hands. The culture, whose breath is Hindu and which pioneered the bringing of Bali into the arena of international tourism, has begun to be replaced with outside culture… To protect the identity, space and process of Balinese culture. This remedy will flow towards raising the capacity of Balinese people so that they do not fall subject to the hegemony of global culture (Bali Post 2004, p. ii; cited and translated by MacRae 2010, p. 15).
>
> [the priority is] the advancement of customs, religion, traditions, arts and culture as well as local wisdom (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQkPWTp4sxY; my translation).

The first is from Satria Naradha's proclamation in the Bali Post of his slogan *Ajeg Bali*; the second from the Governor's televised concluding address to the *Pesta Kesenian Bali 2019*. Similar bromides are uttered at every festival. On these accounts, *kebudayaan* has curious qualities. It is a zero-sum game: the more foreign, the less Balinese. It is quantifiable, timeless, unchanging. Endlessly marketable and consumable, it risks vanishing. So it must be safeguarded against the forces it itself unleashed. It is a possession, an asset, a brand, material and

immaterial capital, accumulable, sold in 10,000 artshops, exported by container-load, built over with villas, remorselessly filmed as dance, ritual and parade. By becoming industrially (re)producible, *kebudayaan* has ceased to be about human experience, original, open, transformable, potentially indeterminate. It is not culture in the sense that 'as an anthropological reality it generates itself and it perishes by itself. It is a singularity, it has its birth and death, you don't need to attempt to save it. It has its own way' (Baudrillard) 2015, pp. 144-5).

Kebudayaan is a monologue. There is no discussion, far less argument—only the voice of authority, muzzling all other possibilities—an unverifiable, unvalidatable asseveration: 'Believe this!' It is an arsenal of empty signifiers to be launched *via* the mass media. Exactly the same tropes were deployed thirty years ago (Hobart 2000: 33-37). Since pre-colonial times, the Balinese populace are used to being spoken at and spoken for. Silence is assent. What in fact they think remains a mystery.

Claims about how mass media work suffer startling omissions. What guarantees the conditions of their reception? Cultural Studies extrapolates from Althusser's analysis of Ideological State Apparatuses:

> ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals… or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!' (1984, p. 48).
>
> Interpellation refers to the way that any use of discourse 'hails' the addressee. In responding to the call, in recognizing that it is *us* being spoken to, we implicitly accept the discourse's definition of 'us', or, to put it another way, we adopt the subject position proposed for us by the discourse (Fiske 1987, p. 53).

Whenever *kebudayaan* is mentioned, Balinese are supposed to recognize they are being addressed, should pay attention and respond accordingly. If they did not, official and media pronouncements would fall on deaf ears. Perhaps they do.

5. Culture and Tourism

Balinese culture and tourism have been forged into an unhappy partnership (Picard 1996). What happens when the latter falters, as during the 'Covid crisis'? The response is the default official rhetorical figure: 'planning' for

> a New Era of Bali, which implies maintaining the sanctity and harmony of Bali's nature and its contents to create a life of Balinese manners that is prosperous and happy in the manifest and unmanifest worlds… This

theme is specifically implemented to glorify and honour the primacy of plants, animals and the biodiversity that exists in them. Then it is packaged in a guided, intact, unique and enchanting work of art… The COVID-19 pandemic did not dampen the spirit and enthusiasm of togetherness in organizing this year's Bali Arts Festival. [The] spirit is to maintain the rich heritage and uniqueness of Balinese culture with the customs and traditions of art and local wisdom that are sacred, sublime and noble. Do not be destroyed and become extinct (Koster 2021; my translation and parentheses).

The widespread misery the pandemic inflicted is disguised by the ideological insistence on harmony and glorification of what little is left of nature 'guided' and 'packaged' into art. There is no mention of the irreversible damage of tourism to Bali's ecology and infra-structure, deforestation, conversion of riceland, over-consumption of water with saltwater entering aquifers or problems from uncontrolled waste and pollution. Pious phrases disguise the impact of proposed tourist growth (Butler 1980).
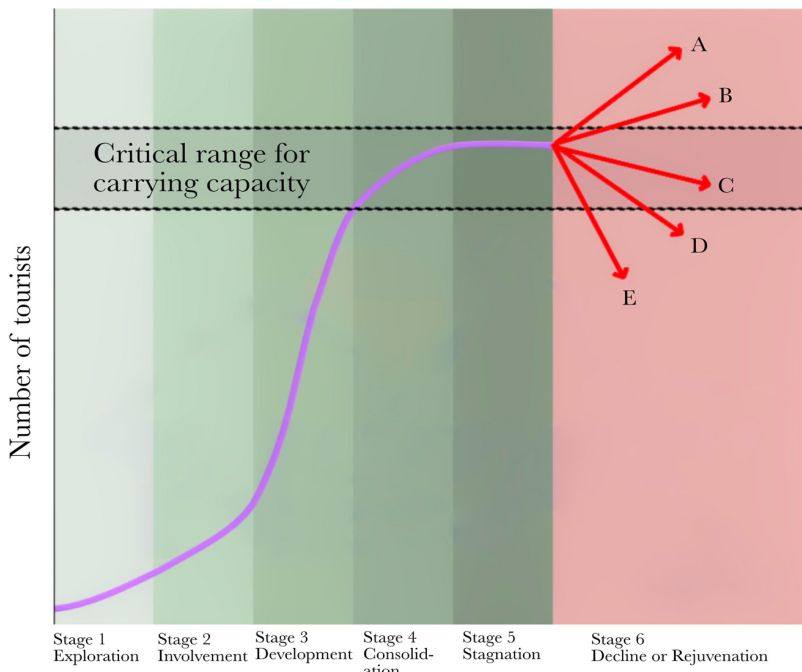
Possibilities at the final stage of the model

A. Successful redevelopment
B. Minor modifications & modest growth
C. Stable by cutting capacity
D. Overuse of resources and sharp decline
E. Epidemics or other disasters leads to collapse of tourism

'Butler's graph of Evolution of a Tourist Area.'

The model makes explicit what many recognize. Bali, now in the final stage, faces clear-cut options: decline or rejuvenation. Proposed changes are purely cosmetic changes. Anyway, what exactly is 'Bali' these days?

6. Bali is a theme park

> Bali has long been famous as an earthly paradise in which a favoured race of men live in Utopian harmony with their own kind, with nature and their gods (de Zoete & Spies 1938, p. 2).

If Bali is a paradise, whose? Modern paradise consists of innumerable amusement and theme parks. Some aspire to the outlandish. The Bali Safari and Marine Park simulates the African Savannah in equatorial South East Asia, offering an extravaganza, *Bali Agung—the Legend of Balinese Goddesses*, with elephants, tigers, even camels! Simulacra replace reality: the show ends with Déwi Danu, the goddess of Lake Batur, attired in Las Vegas glitz.

'A tourist theme park's idea of Balinese deities.' (Photo: Bali Safari & Marine Park)

Bali not only hosts theme parks but has itself become a theme park. Simulacra infiltrate daily life. *Bata* and *paras*, formerly the exclusive reserve of courts and temples, front government buildings, tourist hotels, large art shops, even private homes. In place of the empty space (*natah*) in house compounds, spurred by tourist demand verdant 'Balinese gardens' became an international and even domestic vogue. *Pakaian adat*, a term straight from New Order ideology, is widely obligatory. Madame Suharto's vision of Taman Mini as 'more complete and more perfect' than Disneyland, is becoming Taman Maxi in Bali.

Balinese tradition consists of signs. The *sakti* figures of Rangda and Barong used to emerge only on special occasions. After Bateson and Mead persuaded Balinese to perform in daylight, regular tourist performances sprang up with 'real-looking' figures and fake trance self-stabbing. So long as rites are not performed, once *tenget* figures become icons to play with—mere simulacra. I do not exaggerate. The Bali Arts Festival Parade in the 1990s already featured floats, with mythological heroes and Rangdas riding on the back of Barong Kèkèt (see https://youtu.be/wczVkT-D1uQ).

Baudrillard argued that an image goes through stages of simulation.

—it is the reflection of a basic reality
—it masks and perverts a basic reality
—it masks the *absence* of a basic reality
—it bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum (1983a, p. 11).

Simulacrum is a difficult notion, especially for Balinese who have a transformational metaphysics. Its European origin lies in Plato's concern to distinguish true from mistaken knowledge, which depends on signs—icons, words—referring to what exists. With the European enlightenment this comfortable certainty was smashed. Once words and signs may deceive as easily as point to the truth, not only is misrepresentation possible, but may be produced on an industrial scale—think Balinese art or fake news. Does it matter? It may, if a pharmacy sells you fake pills or if someone uses fake news to overturn a democratic government. The effective founder of scientific method, Francis Bacon's answer was to believe nothing, to put everything to the test (2007).

Barong and Rangda manifest religious ideas. When performance becomes detached from its ritual context, it masks and perverts that reality. When Balinese commercialize 'Rangda and Barong Dances' using unconsecrated masks but pseudo-religious trappings, it hides the loss of the original reality. The final stage happened in the 1980s when the Dinas Kebudayaan 'invented' giant Ogoh-Ogoh for parades. Reality has succumbed to spectacle and simulacrum. Analytically, Rangda and Barong only differ from Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck in the stage of simulation. Insofar as Balinese do not recognize a problem, *kebudayaan* lobotomizes.

Theme parks promise paradise. But Bali's dysfunctional urban sprawl, planning chaos, over-development, pollution and crumbling infrastructure make it a bizarre utopia—welcome to *Holidays in Hell* (Marshall 2011).

Utopias are sites with no real place. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces… Because these places

are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias (Foucault 1986, p. 24).

Heterotopias are places that are different, where people can behave differently, indulge in different experiences or just drinking and nightclubbing in a different ambience. Bali offers a host of heterotopias.

Public discourse about tourism parrots a Western capitalist cosmology of cost-free progress, 'the fairytale of infinite growth' (Jones 2019). Balinese cosmological thinking, by contrast, considers the present Kali-Yuga as 'the state of dissolution from which it is impossible to emerge otherwise than by a cataclysm' (Guénon 1942, p. 26). More popularly, village Balinese speak of life being *sakadi roda pedati*—like the wheel on the buffalo cart. What goes up inevitably comes down and *vice versa*, as things turn into their opposites (*tungkalik*).The great and good in Bali invoke *kebudayaan* when it suits them and ignore contradictory practice.

7. Why Bother with Cultural Studies?

The vacuity of *kebudayaan* makes it manipulable. So we might ask: Who does what, to whom and why by articulating diverse practices *as kebudayaan*? If culture is inherently contested, who and what is disarticulated? Every modern society has divisions according to class, gender, ethnicity and more. Culture is used to subordinate and naturalize these distinctions in the interests of dominant groups, so marginalizing or silencing others. Asserting something as 'our tradition', 'our culture', normalizes hegemonic articulations. No wonder advocates of *tradisi* dislike questioning and criticism.

Kebudayaan 'follows the logic of capitalism' (Budianta above) nostalgically to resuscitate a perfect past that never was. The mass media's function is to lend verisimilitude to 'dominant-hegemonic' articulations (Hall 1980) by reworking conflict, antagonism and argument to fit an acceptable and digestible story— modern myth (Barthes 1973). How culture was disseminated through the mass media has proven a rich theme, because they play such a large role in modern life. But is this popular or mass culture? Bali highlights the difference. Local theatre performances were a common feature of village life in Bali until the 1980s when TVRI, audio and video tapes exposed audiences to the famous troupes, which led the former to disband. Mass *kebudayaan* (culture for mass audiences) effectively destroyed much popular culture (culture created by ordinary people), which talk of *kebudayaan* conveniently obscures.

8. The Theoretical Challenges of Media Studies

Analyzing mass media production, distribution and reception requires theoretical sophistication. So Media Studies scholars increasingly turned to French Post-Structuralism. Their respective debates share an analysis critical of mainstream conservative academic disciplines by interrogating their epistemological and political presuppositions. There are important differences however. Whereas early Cultural Studies practitioners owed much to late Marxist Gramsci, the French were in effect post-Marxist: they took Marxism on board and moved on. For example, Cultural Studies retains the concept of ideology. But Foucault questioned its intellectual coherence and implicit reliance on universal criteria of reason, truth and knowledge, as their epistemic frameworks had transformed several times during European history. Some French scholars were revolutionary in questioning the foundations of European thought itself and so their own 'tradition'. My personal summing up is that Cultural Studies has been a highly sophisticated attempt to rethink the concept of culture; whereas thinkers such as Foucault, Deleuze, Baudrillard and Derrida critically interrogated and undermined the claims to universal authority of European—aka Western—knowledge. Although it might seem abstruse, the arguments directly affect understanding of Bali.

At issue is how viable systematic explanations of the world are. Ernesto Laclau, the philosopher whose early work underpinned Cultural Studies theory, drew on Post-Structuralism to argue holistic explanations—i.e. totalizations—are vacuous because practice always exceeds attempts to close and fix meaning imposed by discourse:

> 'society' as a unitary and intelligible object…is an impossibility… The social only exists as the vain attempt to institute that impossible object: society (1990, pp. 90, 92).

What has this to do with Bali? On the one hand we have claims that Balinese *kebudayaan* is a stable, knowable, organized totality—in short, totalitarian. On the other, we have society in practice which on close investigation turns out as precarious, constantly changing and defies totalization.

In Bali official discourse dealing with *kebudayaan* differs from villagers' accounts of *tata cara*: how matters are arranged, how things are. The disparity between government and daily usage emerges in their contrasting uses of *adat* and *awig-awig* ('rules'). Balinese *banjar* usually interpret rules situationally. While some *awig-awig* may be written, much depends on people's memories of how these had been applied in the past under what circumstances. Interpreting rules requires recognizing that order, *tata*, depends on context, which is historically changing, contingent and indeterminate.

Hankering after the interpretive majesty of *kebudayaan* is nostalgia for *tempo doeloe* before incredulity towards grand narratives set in (Lyotard 1984, p. xxiv). The notion of assemblage (arrangement, *agencement* in French) has emerged as a more sensitive way of imagining social action than is system (Deleuze 1987; Deleuze & Guattari 1988). It suggests a 'working or living arrangement', what is usable (for example a musical arrangement which cannot be performed the same twice, Buchanan 2015). *Tata cara* is not a bad gloss for culture as how-we-do-things-around-here.

An issue in studying contemporary Bali is how to address the increasing penetration of mass media. Broadcast media reach large audiences. The naïve version presumes that, if we know what people watch or read, we can understand mass culture—and so what the masses think. Fascinating analyses show how television and print attract, seduce and retain audiences and readers (e.g. Fiske 1987; Hartley 1996). Knowing what people watch is quite different from knowing what they are thinking. The drawback of interviews or focus groups is that participants frame their responses according to what they imagine is expected under the circumstances. 'The circularity is total: the ones questioned always pretend to be as the question imagines and solicits them to be' (Baudrillard 1983a: 130). The alternative of 'people meters' which watch viewers watching resurrects the old technological fantasy of surveillance (Ang 1991: pp. 63-8). Anyone familiar with Balinese (or pretty much anyone) knows that what someone says they think and what in fact they do subsequently often differ. If we allow for the unconscious, it becomes clear it is all an exercise in simulation. Everyday life eludes modes of inquiry designed for other paradigms of reality.

9. Enter ethnography

Beyond crude measurement, audience- and reader-response requires a different approach to the question: What can we know how people engage with the mass media? A useful method of inquiry is ethnography by participant-observation, which requires distinguishing two senses of culture: as totality (indeed as mythology) and as daily practice. Analysis of media production and reception practices shows how this works.

Media producers and public figures work with cultural models of mass media functioning. These rely on statistical inference from surrogates of 'real viewers' like audience ratings or focus groups. Asking what audiences make of what producers put out is expensive and effectively unknowable, so is finessed or avoided. Ethnographic inquiry however makes mockery of professionals' and popular assumptions and the axioms of the mass communications industry. It reveals a world of people negotiating the conflicting demands of management,

production practices, internal competition, peer pressure, variously imagined audiences and their own expectations. Practice rarely bears much resemblance to producers' ideas or academic writing (see Kwek 2010; Chowdhry 2013; Fong 2016). My ethnographic studies (at TVRI Denpasar and Yogyakarta, BaliTV and YogyaTV) consistently showed that producers doubted, and where possible ignored, the audience ratings which, for management, were the gold standard. Every producer I worked with gave greater weight to what individual viewers told them by email, SMS or in person, because they were judgements of real people: brief dialogues, not meaningless statistical monologues. Insofar as Cultural Studies enables us to appreciate how the mass media work in practice, it dissolves culture-as-totality into culture-as-shifting-arrangement.

The miscellany of production practices is dwarfed by the various ways people engage with the mass media. (I omit social media which raise yet further issues.) As humans are diverse and the circumstances of their implication in mass media divergent, this is hardly a revelation. But what exactly are we studying? The notion of 'media-related practices' proves useful, as it considers not just media practices such as viewing or reading, but also how people comment, discuss, judge and act on media events (Couldry 2010; Hobart 2010; Couldry & Hobart 2010). Even the more limited topic of how, say, television viewers engage with the medium can be most unexpected. And Balinese villagers' commentaries on the terms of their participation give the lie to myths about the masses.

TV watching is a social experience sparking often lively and unpredictable dialogues between viewers which may continue afterwards. Public figures would be shocked to hear how their pretensions are scathingly dissected by supposedly ignorant audiences who are far from ill-informed. Village viewers in Bali often prove remarkably reflective about the way the media interpellate them and keenly aware of how programmes and advertisements work. They draw on everyday words such as to seduce or intoxicate; analogies (*pratiwimba*) like *pancoran matatakan batu*, a rock under a waterspout (water splashes anyone near). Some are imaginative: enjoying a particular programme is like one's *jatu karman* (one's destined partner). The cognitive models of mass communication experts are simplistic compared to villagers' account of the kinds of engagement with media or theatre. Most viewing is just (*uning*) paying attention, registering and linking with previous knowledge. You may become drawn in, implicated (*rasa*). Further involvement is more active: *ngaresep*, both entering and being entered. Finally you may take things seriously (*nelebang*) and act accordingly (Hobart 2010b). These reflections are cultural in the sense that they deploy a heterogeneous assemblage to articulate everyday reasoning—culture as argument.

10. The Everyday

How should we approach the everyday? The quotidian, ordinary or normal is unmarked: unimportant, inconsequential unworthy of recognition. Socially, it is often synonymous with 'the masses'. But 'there are in fact no masses, but only ways of seeing people as masses' (Williams 1989, p. 11). Baudrillard remarked that, as TV is a mass medium, every time he watched television by definition he was a member of the masses. In Indonesian, as in English, speaking of the masses is usually derogatory, *rakyat yang masih bodoh*, stupid, uneducated. Masses lack individuality, are undifferentiated and barely worth contemplation. They have connotations of mass: weight, inertia, akin to Sāṃkhya *tamas* 'associated with darkness, heaviness, indifference, restraint, matter' (Larson 1979, p. 10). Why this insistence on the stupidity and irrelevance of the vast majority? As Gramsci remarked: 'All men are intellectuals: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals' (1971, p. 9). In order for an élite to feel superior, others must be lumped together (a *lumpenproletariat*, Thoburn 2002) as an unnameable category to be talked at and told what it is they think.

Academic treatises frame the everyday as 'defined by contradictions: illusion and truth, power and helplessness' as 'residual, defined by "what is left over" after all distinct, superior, specialized, structured activities have been singled out by analysis, must be defined as a totality' (Lefebvre 1991, pp. 21, 97). De Certeau added that everyday practices are the tactics the powerless use to subvert the strategies that governments, corporations and public institutions devise to exert control and surveillance (1984). The everyday is a passive substrate upon which structure and power act. While analysts of the everyday recognize the difficulties in addressing what most people do most of the time, advocates of *kebudayaan* actively celebrate and reinforce these élite articulations, made by 'the urbanized and Indonesianized Balinese middle classes' (Picard, above).

Culture-as-totality processes and regurgitates the everyday. What is said 'in the ordinary course of days and exchanges' is subject to formidable procedures governed by 'principles of sanctioning, exclusion, and scarcity of discourse'. Notable are commentaries by élites which exercise 'the power to constitute domains of objects' like *kebudayaan* and *tradisi* (Foucault 1981, pp. 115, 133). Repeating enunciations interminably marginalizes the daily exchanges which offer a radically antithetical account: 'culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind' (Williams 1989, p. 4). Grand monologic paradigms condemn the everyday to obscurity because they fail to engage with quotidian dialogic utterances. Culture as ordinary is argument. It occurs in the regularities, idiosyncrasies and innovations as people assert, question, discuss, agree and challenge one another in daily life.

11. Metaphysics of the Everyday

Strangely, a grand-sounding word is suited to exploring the everyday. Far from being abstruse, metaphysics is the empirical inquiry into what people presuppose in going about their daily lives (Collingwood 1940). We presuppose in our daily actions. Turning on a light switch assumes cause and effect, the continuity of electrical power and so on. Telling someone to do something presumes the medium carries a message, that it is received, the recipient can decode then understand it, is willing and able to act. Metaphysics pertains to what we take for granted like causation and contingency; efficacy and uncertainty; process, continuity and rupture. State ideology aside, Balinese treat the world as comprising conflicting and antagonistic processes, which are continually changing, but also are liable to transform radically. Balinese modulations of Sāṃkhya thought accept that 'there is one continuous process of transformation' that 'manifests itself' as tripartite process (Larson 1987, p. 66). This *triguna* embraces both living things and the environment in unceasing flux and change. Widely across Asia, people understand the world as transitory, impermanent (Skt: *anitya*; Pali: *anicca*) and ever-changing (for China, see Hon 2019). This recognition is notably absent from articles, speeches and lectures about *kebudayaan*, a crucial function of which is to deny and obliviate what ordinary Balinese take for granted.

Brahmanical experts through to villagers share a strikingly similar cosmology. Consider the understanding of reality by *Balian Usada* in Sanur outlined by Barbara Lovric

> Balinese epistemology emphasizes fluidity and transformations… The verb 'to be', as used in the Balinese magico-medical context, primarily expresses the notion of 'becoming' or of transformation. The forms in which it occurs in texts—*andadi*, *matemahan dadi*, *dadi temahnya*—signify this action and change. 'Being' has no independent existence; it is a part of a state of 'becoming'. Things are fluid. Nothing is unalterably fixed. Spirits, deities and demons, the prime causal agents in the fluctuations of existence, defy definition and determination. They have an existence of 'becoming', of illusions and of transforming rather than being. They are mobile, not confined (1987, pp. 125, 112).

Everything is endless changing, becoming. In a transformational metaphysics, distinguishing authentic origin from copy is problematic because everything is always potentially changing. How Balinese establish what is genuine or useful from fake or useless remains largely unconsidered. Apart from testing (by methods such as *mapintonin*) experience and learned judgement seem crucial.

In a processual world, power manifest as force is liable to transform. What has potential adapts, but is itself transformative. That arguably is why Balinese stress potentialities. Glossing *sakti* as 'mystical power' (i.e. mysterious, unknowable) merely defers the issue. 'Potency' or 'transformative potential' seems more apt.

> Things or beings with *sakti* have great powers of fluidity [and] *sakti* implies action, transformation and reversal… The Rangda challenges and controls leyak in graveyards. The Barong roams villages and absorbs into itself other potential agents of disease such as *bhuta-kala*. In a sense, both cult figures are objects of dread and veneration. Each has the capacity to draw within itself uncontrolled agents of destruction within the environment and to transform them in order to ensure a minimum of destruction (Lovric 1987, pp. 112, 129, 352; my parentheses).

Is *kebudayaan* transforming Bali into theme parks, floor shows and parades with Rangda and Barong as cuddly simulacra? Culture-as-ordinary and *kebudayaan* are contradictory and incompatible.

Who is responsible? Picard identified 'the urbanized and Indonesianized Balinese middle classes' (above). Nietzsche wrote of the Romans: 'to translate meant to conquer' (1992, p. 69). Translation and interpretation being the same process, who is being conquered? It is 'the silent majorities' (Baudrillard 1983b). Towards the end of the New Order, truck mudflaps bore the message: *Koh ngomong* (What's the point in speaking?). Two village voices from 1997 summed it up: a distinguished old actor and a young married woman (https://youtu.be/fK-07l6iWoo).

> 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.
> Woman: But whatever the rich say people believe them. Even if the poor tell the truth, no one believes them.

Cultural Studies scholars would argue that it is these overlooked accounts that are culture as ordinary. Although they are heard here for moment, doubtless they will soon be forgotten and silenced by monologues about Balinese *kebudayaan*.

> Faced with the choice between changing one's mind and proving that there is no need to do so, almost everyone gets busy on the proof (Galbraith 1971, p. 50).

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