Representing culture and politics (or is it just entertainment?).
Watching Indonesian TV in Bali

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Changes in Indonesian television broadcasting are best gauged in terms of how they are viewed by their audiences. Here I examine Balinese households’ viewing practices in the context of broadcasting after the 1998 fall of Suharto, finding enhanced levels of engagement by viewers compared to my observations of pre-1998. Balinese viewers are interested in the new broadcasting trends, and in new kinds of programs, particularly current affairs. They also remain devoted to traditional performance genres such as *ludruk*—short dramatic scenes which use stock Indonesian historical characters and situations to make satirical political commentary. My observations of changes in Indonesian television broadcasting after Suharto have been supported by newspaper articles on the subject published in the latter part of 1999. During this period I observed Balinese households routinely watching television, and discussed my observations with the members of these households. This paper is neither a study of media texts, nor a study of television reception. Instead, I try to link the micro-practice of watching television at home to the context of television broadcasting changes taking place at a time of great social, political and economic change in Indonesia. In this regard I attempt the project suggested by Raymond Williams, of looking not for the components of a product but for the conditions of a practice (Williams 1980, 48). Both ‘news’ programs and
'entertainment' programs are considered in this light. Bali is an excellent choice for a critical 'take' on Indonesian television broadcasting given the strong local political claims of Balinese people within the civil and religious structures of Indonesian nationalism.

I observed television watching in a small number of Balinese households at frequent intervals over a four-month period, and much of my data are in the form of notes written late at night from memory. In view of this limited ethnographic data, there is no attempt to generalise from the specifics of close engagement with certain programs observed in these households, to the wider Balinese population, and certainly not to the Indonesian television-viewing population. Nevertheless, in my observations over years of related visits to Bali, this figure of the highly engaged viewer appears as something new. My analysis here attempts to demonstrate the extent to which the materials of television broadcasting may be taken up by communities of viewers in their discursive reconstruction of political events and changes. In order to understand this reconstruction, I have worked through a body of theory in relation to my limited observational data on the practice of Balinese television viewing, and so discussion of that theory frames my analysis. It is hoped that this paper will generate ideas for further research and interpretation that others may find useful in extended research on television and media in Indonesia.

The fieldwork context

When I went to Bali to do fieldwork research on social change and popular culture, I was fortunate to be able to live in a small empty house for a few months. I considered engaging a maid since the house had no modern conveniences. However, many people told me that I could never get a full-time pembantu (maid) because I didn't have a television in the house. If I wanted a pembantu, it was first necessary to buy a TV. A maid would expect to be able to watch her favourite television shows, especially during the day. In the end I purchased a refrigerator rather than a television set. My friends were incredulous. They pointed out, quite accurately, that even some of the poorest households in Bali had a television set. Whether in the urban or the rural context of Indonesia there has been an expansion of television set
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ownership as television watching becomes more and more firmly
entrenched as everyday cultural practice (see for example Hobart, 1997).

In relative terms, a television set is affordable in Indonesia. In
September 1999 a small Polytron TV cost Rp 1,250,000 new (at that
stage the exchange rate was approximately A$1=Rp. 5,000). On a typical
government salary of about Rp. 500,000 a month, a television set was
worth about two and a half months' salary. However, like the family
motor-cycle, also a mandatory purchase, in such families the money
for a new television set is usually borrowed from a bank or some other
source, such as relatives. Obviously a second-hand TV is much cheaper.
Very few sets are ever thrown away. There is a thriving back lane trade
in fixing and re-selling them. So even households on less than Rp.
125,000 per month can afford an old set. Even if it is a struggle for a
family to buy a television, sacrifices tend to be made, since television-
watching has become an integral part of family life, social life and
private leisure in Bali. As the example above illustrates, young women
from very poor rural backgrounds working as maids usually expect to
be able to watch television.

However, despite the popularity of television-watching in Bali, not
all channels broadcast from Jakarta can be received without a satellite
dish. In the north and east some channels are unavailable even to those
who own a satellite dish. Denpasar gets TVRI (the government-funded
channel),RCTI,SCTV,ANTEVE,TPI and Indosiar without much
trouble. However, Singaraja, beyond the mountains in the north, only
receives TVRI and RCTI without the aid of a satellite dish). So the
public broadcaster TVRI will continue to be a force in Indonesian
television broadcasting primarily because it has the strength of signal
to broadcast into the many regions which are still not able to receive
private channel transmissions (Nusa Tenggara 5 October 1999).

Most of the ethnographic data on television-watching in this paper
was gathered in the home of Luh, a friend and colleague in Denpasar
with whom I have stayed on many occasions. Luh teaches English at
tertiary level. Her husband Putu works in the office of an importing
company. They have two children and a maid—Ketut. Other data
come from other urban households I visited regularly in North Bali
during the last five months of 1999.
The data in this paper were all collected in group television-watching situations. Although the sole television-viewer in Bali is a logical possibility (for example, the maid watching daytime TV while family members were absent), it seemed to me that group television-watching was always the preferred leisure option. In Bali, as in many other places in the world, few if any people watch television completely alone for any length of time. Morley stated that when assembling data on television viewing, 'the basic unit of consumption of television should be the family/household rather than the individual viewer' (1992, 138, see also Gillespie 1995). The business of watching television in Bali is typically busy with talk between viewers, child-care duties, household tasks and production of handicrafts. Discussion about, during and after television programs is not just idle talk, it cannot be divorced from the ongoing matter of the constitution of everyday reality in the household, and this is a shared reality as much as a matter of individual subjectivity.

In Indonesia, the lifestyle impact of private television stations is observably much greater on urban than on rural populations (Sreberny-Mohammadi 1996). In fact the current private channel development 'feeding frenzy' signals fierce competition among investors to broadcast to major cities where the urban middle-class live and consume. Although, as implied above, much of the Indonesian archipelago still cannot receive most existing commercial television broadcasting channels, five more private stations in Java have been approved, and nine others are waiting for frequency allocations (Nusa Tenggara 5 October 1999, 12). Some of these proposed new private television channels seem driven by religious or cultural goals such as the pro-Islamic Televisi Muhammadyah (TVM), but most seem to be driven by the belief that a huge amount of profit can be made from television broadcasting through advertising revenue. This despite overwhelming evidence that two of the existing private television stations—ANTEVE and TPI—are struggling to keep afloat financially. When the new five private channels go to air, like the current ones, they will bypass most rural populations altogether, unless families in rural regions can buy satellite dishes, which are expensive. It is the case, then, that much of what I have to say in this paper must be understood in the light of an urban viewing population in Bali.
The political context

Immediately after the resignation of President Suharto there was a steep increase in the number of politically oriented cheap tabloids as control of the press loosened. The different events of late 1999, each extraordinary in itself, were reported in widely distributed street newspapers full of ‘conspiracy theories, sensational language, accusations and counter-accusations’ (Olle 1999, 6). The last five months of 1999 saw the independence vote in East Timor (Timor Lorosae) and its violent aftermath. President Habibie lost the last vestiges of credibility as the Golkar Party foundered—initially in the backwash from the first ‘democratic’ party elections for government, later in the muddy waters of the Bank Bali scandal, and inexorably through the revelations of Suharto’s corruption. Throughout the whole period there was massive student protest, including protests in Bali. The largest rallies were against the role of the military in all aspects of Indonesian life, and against western intervention in East Timor. Furthermore, in some provinces such as Aceh and West Papua there was widespread agitation for independence. Intense dissatisfaction with Jakarta/Javanese hegemony was evident throughout the archipelago. Religious clashes between Muslims and Christians were tearing the Moluccas apart, and anti-Chinese feeling flared sporadically (Ride 1999). October saw the run-up, outcome, and unruly aftermath of the Presidential and Vice-Presidential elections. The new President was Abdurrahman Wahid, a moderate Muslim, with Megawati Sukarnoputri as Vice-President. In November President Wahid consolidated his new cabinet of largely untried politicians.

At the economic level, the crisis (krisis moneter) continued. More jobs were lost, real wages fell further (Booth 1999, 3), the cost of living continued to rise sharply, and millions of people found it even more difficult to make ends meet day to day. In late 1999, the IMF made, and then provisionally withdrew, offers of an economic rescue package. Bali was not one of the provinces worst hit by the economic crisis (Wetterberg et al. 1999), but local conditions had been exacerbated by the downturn in tourism following reports of civil unrest in Indonesia since 1998. This situation worsened markedly in September after the
Australian and United Nations troops entered Timor Loro-sae to restore order after the extraordinary violence following the vote for independence. Anti-Australian and anti-western sentiments, enthusiastically fanned by the Balinese and Indonesian media, led to travel warnings being issued by embassies world-wide. The rate of western, especially Australian, tourism dropped off sharply for a time. This had immediate disastrous effects on those parts of the Balinese economy closest to the tourist industry, but the more long-term effects were felt far wider in the local economic infrastructure.

Suasta and Connor (1999) note a new political mood in Bali dating back some five years. They remark upon what they call a new climate of political enthusiasm and activism, especially among young people. Suasta and Connor explain that this mood of political consciousness is deeply entwined with a collective sense of Balinese being what they refer to as 'an ethnic minority threatened with alienation from land and culture' (114) in the Indonesian state. In Bali, the daughter of founding President Sukarno, current leader of the PDI Perjuangan party, Megawati Sukarnoputri, was regarded as the Presidential candidate in 1999 who best represented the interests of Balinese. Balinese people were strong supporters of President Sukarno in the early years of the republic, and this history undoubtedly adds to the lustre of Megawati's popularity in Bali. Furthermore, although a practicing Muslim, Megawati's Hindu affiliation through her Balinese grandmother was clearly of enormous symbolic importance in Bali during the year of elections.

The multi-party elections in 1999 were the first openly contested elections since 1955 and a public education campaign was launched to facilitate 'free' voter choice. The media were a very important part of this campaign, consciously contributing to the delivery of relevant information, and encouraging critical discussion and reflection (Atkinson in this issue). The 'information and discussion' genres of broadcasting pioneered during the party elections continued during the Presidential election campaign, the period which is considered in this paper. In the Indonesian party elections, PDI Perjuangan (The Democratic Party of Indonesia—Struggle) gained the highest proportion of support. Luh, Nyoman and all of their friends and family
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Megawati campaign banner, Bali

were avid supporters of Megawati and the PDI Perjuangan party, along with over eighty-five percent of other Balinese (Surya 1999). To Balinese supporters, Megawati’s strong vote meant that she should automatically become President, but the President is elected by the upper house of the parliament (MPR—Majelis Permuyawaratan Rakyat) and in October, Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) was elected over Megawati. Although she became Vice-President some days later, disappointment in Bali ran high and riots resulted.

In broad brush-strokes this is the political context in which I observed Balinese households watching television, and I was immediately struck by the intense engagement of people with certain programs during this time. This was very different to my impressions of household television watching on previous visits. Then I had found Balinese people dismissive of TV. They tended to describe it as just ‘entertainment’ (iseng-iseng—Vickers 1997, 6; see also Hobart, 1997). In the intense political climate of late 1999, however, they seemed much more engrossed with Indonesian television program content, especially with television talk shows and current affairs. Even game shows, variety shows and some of the ‘locally’ flavoured comedy shows such as ludruk were subject to closer scrutiny and commentary. It is
the purpose of this paper to explore such concentrated viewing, through examining a temporal 'slice' of Indonesian television as watched on Bali.

What is television?
I will begin with discussing various theories of viewing practices. Such theories will be discussed in terms of whether ways of viewing result from the 'top down', as the result of a global homogenising effect of television, or whether they have to be seen as localising forces, specific in time and place.

An obvious starting point is the proposition that watching television in any country makes an impact of some kind on viewers. The media can at least be said to 'play a pivotal role in organizing the images and discourses through which people make sense of the world' (Golding and Murdock 1996, 11). According to Fiske, people watching TV make context-specific meanings from the images available to them:

They [the images] are transformed into the people's words and behaviour, and in their new forms are textured into the conditions of their everyday lives. We should not think of these meanings as affecting everyday life, as if they entered a causal relationship with it; rather they are part of everyday life (Fiske 1996, 62 emphasis in the original).

In the modern, technological world, there is virtually no moment in politics, or in public life generally, which is unmediated. That is, constituted as an 'event' by the publishing, broadcasting or electronic media. 'The key defining condition of our era: our society is imagesaturated' (Fiske 1996; see also Baudrillard 1983, 1987). This is as true in Indonesia as it is elsewhere in the world.

Gurevitch talks about the international dimension of this saturation as 'global television.' If we accept that television, as a form of media, reports on events in the world, yet at the same time actively shapes the constitution of those events, then the 'real life immediacy of satellite technology adds a qualitatively new and sharper edge' to this capacity (Gurevitch 1996, 217). In times of rapid and revolutionary social
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change, this technology means that ‘the audience is positioned inside
the event’, by necessity taking active part in the process of interpretation
since ‘little rhetorical control is possible in “live” coverage’ (213).

Gurevitch’s view develops beyond an earlier analysis which
‘presumes a largely passive, victimized audience, rather gullibly
replicating “top-down” messages’ (Corner 1996, 285). The process of
‘mediation’ which derives from the concept of media implies that the
form of communication actually constitutes an important part of the
meaning and content of the ‘message’. In the case of television, as I
hope to show in the examples in this paper, the form and genre of
programs shapes the way content and meaning may be read by viewing
constituencies.

Even with the best (or worst) intentions, television broadcasting
does not lead automatically to predictable and uniform cultural effects
on target populations. It has been argued that, ‘we engage with television
through the same practices that define our involvement with the rest
of everyday life, practices that are themselves contained by, but also
constitutive of, the basic symbolic, material and political structures’
(Silverstone 1994, 170). Since these are not the same in all nations, all
communities, or indeed even in all families or households in a given
community, it is clear that multiple readings of, and engagements with,
media texts are far more likely than any singular response.

Other studies of television provide conceptual tools which broaden
the interpretive possibilities. Fiske (1996) claimed that since people
watching TV make context-specific meanings from the images available
to them, as a part of everyday life, ‘their production and circulation is
a necessary popular practice of the same order as the tactics of creating
popular spaces within the place of the dominant order’ (Fiske 1996,
62). That is, watching television is a practice within a larger set of popular
social practices, which may involve a high level of personal engagement,
but also may not. It should not be considered a priori as a process.
While watching TV certainly involves recognition of the familiar and/
or the exotic, it seems wise to avoid drawing conclusions about
psychological processes of ‘identification’, which are simply difficult
to prove without substantiating data. It is also the case that we should
not assume that recognising the familiar on television is any different
from recognising the familiar in face-to-face interaction with other people.

The one universal about television is that people all over the planet like watching it (see for example, Gauntlett and Hill, 1999, 291). Does this mean that watching television makes a single set of cultural values familiar to everyone? It would also seem that the gloomily predicted 'globalisation/westernisation' of media is not taking place in a straightforward way, if at all. The imputation of an homogenous effect of television has been described as just another colonial discourse, thinly disguising 'the quasi-scientific theory of vanishing races incapable of competing with European civilization, doomed to extinction' (Abou-El-Haj 1991, 139). For example, the secondary data from newspaper reports in this paper actually point to an apparent strong disaffection in Indonesia (and Bali) at present towards western (American) films, while Indian films (Bollywood) and Chinese martial arts epics remain hugely popular.

While western navel-gazing sees only the 'core' of American film, music and television media spreading across the world, changing everything in its path, there are rising 'cores' of film, television and music production in Asia and other parts of the world (for example Brazilian telenovelas, Bollywood movies, Hong Kong Martial arts) (Abu-Lughod, 1991, 132).

Abu-Lughod analyses this 'core' in terms of different kinds of agency. Describing the syncretism of cultures in Tunis, Abu-Lughod says, 'From an ethnocentric point of view what we tend to see is the westernization of oriental music, but I would like to propose an alternative diagnosis. What we are seeing is the orientalization of western music' (1991, 133 emphasis in the original). This two-way process is important for understanding what is happening with television viewing in Indonesia.
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which stand in opposition to this discourse. Inclusion in a vast amorphous 'we' of commodified nationhood (exemplified in formal New Order broadcasting in Indonesia) may be rejected in favour of smaller scale groupings which gain their distinctiveness and sense of membership through the definition and exclusion of ineligibles—however these are defined (Bauman, 1999). Counter-reaction to the force of nationalist propaganda in Indonesia tends to take the form of strengthened religious, ethnic or regional separatism, in Bali as elsewhere. Sreberny-Mohammadi argues that often in accounts of globalisation 'the local is really the national, while the truly local (subcultural, grassroots, etc) is ignored' (1996,189).

Analysing people watching TV is a demanding and complex task because it is really hard to tell what is going on (and in). The concepts of representation and identity appear central to most modern analyses. The commonly accepted 'fact' about television content is that it represents some aspect of 'reality' through images and text, or that it tells a story through images and text that we, as members of culture, can recognise as representing either the familiar or exotic. While viewing these representations, audiences, at both the collective and individual level respond affectively according to their identity—who they take themselves to be. In this way media texts are claimed to either affirm or challenge the identity of viewers. However, the postmodern view renders this whole analysis problematic. In the first place, television content is not separate from reality in any sense. And television texts are less about the 'representation' of reality than the constitution of a specific discourse of reality—for example, a natural disaster reduced to ten second sound bites of interviews with miraculous survivors. As to the issue of identity, the concept hovers between essentialism and meaninglessness, connoting a fixed sense of self which is imagined as under constant threat. Mark Hobart offers the following critique of identity within the framework of analysis I am attempting here,

Identity. Analytically the term is less than useless. It is a concept which is only definable by what it excludes and is an excellent example of closure or suture as used in cultural/media studies (Hobart pers. comm. 2000).
However, Hobart maintains that despite the limited usefulness of the term identity as an analytical concept, everyone now talks about their ‘identity’. The term, whether linked to either ethnic or religious discourses of belonging, really implies a cultural identity claim. So identity has become important as a folk concept. Gorz claims this is characteristic of the historical period of late modernity:

Each person occupies multiple functions, roles and places without being able to identify with any one of them; in consequence, everyone has to construct an identity for himself—or herself, to define the right line of conduct for him—or herself. The ‘quest for identity’ is never-ending; adolescence never quite comes to an end: one’s home and one’s sexual relationships, as well as one’s line of work and particular job, are all regarded as temporary, while one ‘waits’ for something which ‘actually’ corresponds to what one is looking for—a fulfilling, socially useful activity which has meaning and prospects, an activity with which one can identify (Gorz 1994, 22-3).

Acknowledging that the search is on for meaningful identities in contemporary Indonesia, in this paper ‘identity’ will be discussed as an emergent political discourse in Indonesia and in Bali.

The context of television-watching in Bali/Indonesia

This emergent nature of ‘identity’ becomes clear if we look at the viewing practices of households who belong to one of the minority ethnic/religious groups within the diverse constituency of the Indonesian state. To put it bluntly, there are not many people in Hindu Bali who consider their interests well represented by images and text which celebrate Muslim Javanese ‘identity’. The Balinese claim a strong, yet internally contested position of local ‘identity’ in Indonesia due in large part to their practice of Balinese Hinduism in a predominantly Muslim nation, and in equal part to the significant discursive constitution of Bali within the global tourist market. The debate over the conflict between tourism and culture in Bali, ‘has contributed
substantially to a reconsideration of cultural and religious values and strengthened the Balinese image of themselves within the multi-ethnic Indonesian society' (Hobart, A., Ramseyer and Leeman 1996, 226). During the time of my research, I found this ethnic/religious 'location' of Balinese within the Indonesian state to be fraught with tension. Like many other groups and regions in Indonesia, Balinese considered that as a region and as a people, they had suffered massive disadvantages, prejudice and marginalisation during the New Order regime.

However, the 'top-down' politics of core to periphery broadcasting cannot be ignored in the current example, since it is the case that the Suharto government made overt use of television broadcasting for nation-building purposes (see for example, Kitley 1999; Aripurnami 1996). This was clearly based on a view of the promising propaganda value of television. Even so it is hard to gauge the 'success' or 'failure' of this attempted ideological persuasion. Were the diverse populations of the archipelago convinced by the messages or not? There seems to be no conclusive evidence either way. Aripurnami talks of the 'substantial impact' (1996, 253) made by the first wave of sinetron (cinema elektronik—Indonesian soap opera) which was supposed to teach Indonesian women how to behave in the new New Order regime (Aripurnami 1996, 250). However, Hughes-Freeland maintains that 'studies in audience response to television in Indonesia suggest that television has a limited influence in bringing about social change' (1996, 265).

On Indonesian television, much government station broadcasting has been located within a narrative about nation characterised by a politically controlled linear historicism, where the 'local' tends to be relegated to, and strictly controlled within, a sentimental niche (see Hellman, 1998). The most cogent example of emphasised political control in government broadcasting is the early evening Indonesian news segment which survives from New Order days as a formulaic delivery of so-called 'facts' about domestic and world events, presented by robot-like news presenters in monotones. Since the overthrow of Suharto, 'news' has been far more open and less under the control of government ministers. Nevertheless, it seems still the case that viewers tend to regard cynically any 'news' that is reported in this generic way
in the given time-slot, preferring to get their ‘facts’ from the local newspapers or from current affairs talk shows (see the discussion below). Their cynicism is perhaps understandable, given continued evidence of high-level corruption in Indonesian life (Kompas 23 March 2000).

One of the optimistic interpretations which could be made of the data on current affairs broadcasting and watching assembled in this paper, is that the historical moment of political uncertainty in Indonesia produced an arena of public debate in which relevant information affecting the public good was widely available through the media. The heightened political immediacy of Indonesian current affairs in the last half of 1999 produced an effect similar to the historical moment when ‘the world’ avidly watched the Gulf War apparently live to air in real time. The viewers’ sense of participation was in striking contrast to the use by the New Order of television broadcasting as a form of stridently nationalist propaganda in which the range of ‘preferred meanings’ (Hall 1973) was obviously strictly controlled so that important information was not widely available.

A more cynical view, though, might interpret the wide range of views and political takes depicted in Indonesian current affairs in the last half of 1999 as a conscious attempt to constitute the population of viewers as a solid ‘nation’; a project to shore up a sense of pan-Indonesian national identity through an implied message which might go like this: ‘we (the nation) are in political crisis, here is the field of key players, revealed warts and all. Let us make a decision about what is to happen’ (fieldnotes, 19/9/99). It is certainly the case that in the centre (Jakarta) and in trading capitals around the region, the disintegration of the Indonesian state was the most feared scenario in the last months of 1999. I found both government and private channels fervently preached national unity during this time, through advertising, through promotion of nationalist songs, and through patriotic addresses to the nation, not only by politicians, but sometimes unconscionably by journalists, game show hosts, music variety hosts, and even soap opera stars. However, in the provinces it was a different story. Many activists and ordinary people, even in Bali, talked enthusiastically of independence, especially after the successful vote in Timor Lorosae, and despite its bloody aftermath.
It may be that the unusual openness of television broadcasting during late 1999 was driven to some extent by the political need to create a sense of 'honest' unity in a nation severely disgruntled by the lies and deceptions of the New Order era. It may also be the case that both the ex post facto interpretations that I have presented above are missing a sense of the chaos and broadcasting incongruities that characterised this brief historical period.

The expansion of television viewer numbers in Indonesia has happened simultaneously with an expansion of private television channel broadcasting, driven mainly by the quest for advertising profit and latterly encouraged by a post-reformation relaxation of licensing laws. At the same time as this 'saturation' trend, however, there has been a change in emphasis away from imported and western-derived programs, towards locally-produced and culturally specific programs on commercial channels. This latter trend is in no small way connected to two vast structural changes at the local level: the disastrous economic crisis which makes local products cheaper, and the opening up of media possibilities in the post-reform period. Ratings claim to show that viewing audiences across Indonesia are now enthusiastically watching locally-made programs in preference to imports (if ratings can be believed any more than they can in the west). My own observations bear out the ratings claim. At the content level, significant trends are towards open political debate in talk shows and current affairs bulletins, while in straightforward entertainment, 'local' flavour derived principally from Javanese performance genres, is dominant in a proliferation of comedy shows.

However, it must be admitted that the genres, formats and styles of the Indonesian media product, both current affairs and entertainment, are immediately recognisable. That is to say, they look and sound very much like the particular genre of 'global television' (Gurevitch 1996) to which they belong. Even though, as I implied earlier, we should not imagine that the 'package' has nothing to do with the 'content,' it is the case that similarity does not constitute replication. The television shows I discuss below must be understood in the context of a late modern hybridity of both form and content. For example, Sang Prabu uses a western-style genre of the comedy series
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t numbers in Indonesia has panion of private television the quest for advertising profit mation relaxation of licensing ion’ trend, however, there has imported and western-derived d culturally specific programs d is in no small way connected I level; the disastrous economic r, and the opening up of media . Ratings claim to show that now enthusiastically watching to imports (if ratings can be west). My own observations nt level, significant trends are ws and current affairs bulletins, sent, ‘local’ flavour derived ce genres, is dominant in a the genres, formats and styles both current affairs and sable. That is to say, they look ar genre of ‘global television’ g. Even though, as I implied ‘package’ has nothing to do similarity does not constitute ass below must be understood ty of both form and content. tyle genre of the comedy series with live studio audience, looks back to the animistic past for characters and plot format, to the social/cultural present for political commentary, and to the technological present/future for special effects and regional distribution via satellite. In short, even if we subscribe to the notion that television is ‘a principle medium of modernity’ (Vickers 1997,1), how groups of people understand television programs must be evaluated in terms of the context in which it is broadcast and received, as well as the content and message.

In the rest of this paper I will discuss a number of themes relevant to the discussion above. Firstly I will examine one of the cheapest of the local program formats: game shows. Secondly I will discuss music variety shows, then ‘serious’ current affairs programs. Finally, I will look at locally-made fantasy series which draw upon indigenous Indonesian art forms such as ketoprak and ludruk, and cultural sources such as Majapahit Hindu stories and myths.

Game shows

Game shows would probably be one of the lowest-cost local, live-to-air programs. Prizes included small-scale consumer goods such as ghetto-blasters, television sets or watches, and cash, although I never witnessed anyone win more than a million rupiah (about A$200-220). Indonesian game shows appear so similar in format to those prevalent in the west that it would be possible to follow them easily without any knowledge of the language. There always seem to be two teams made up of ‘ordinary’ people, a dynamic male host, a set of competitive general knowledge tasks or tests, and a range of prizes for the winner(s). Contestants smile and project a warm personality even when they are losing.

Game shows are always live to air. The contestants are slapping palms together, either one or both—American style. The fact that they do it every time, sometimes less than enthusiastically, may mean that they’re told to do it as format when they are being trained for the show. i.e. be cheerful, slap palms up, laugh a lot etc (fieldnotes 29/10/99).
Rather like the confessional talk show, the appeal of game shows for viewing audiences probably lies in participation—taking sides, arguing, agreeing, cheering on, even sneering at. A range of contestant types are included in Indonesian game shows, roughly corresponding to ethnic groups in the archipelago (i.e. a few contestants of Chinese and of Melanesian appearance, as well as pale- and dark-skinned generic 'Indonesians'). Furthermore, there would appear to be a commitment to inclusivity of religion and lifestyle.

Some female contestants have bleached or dyed hair and even piercings, others wear various styles of the Islamic veil and full body covering. All slap hands in the air (fieldnotes 29/10/99).

Game shows were directly integrated into the leisure life of the household in my experience. One particular show was regularly watched in Luh's household in the late afternoon. Each day, Luh, Ketut and the children would decide upon a team they liked. As the game proceeded they would call out the answers to their favoured team, and bemoan correct answers given by the team they did not like. Reasons for this choice were not explained to me, but I did note that a favoured team never contained a man wearing a Muslim cap, or a woman wearing the full Muslim veil. Luh and her contemporaries were often scathingly uncharitable about Muslim women who wore the veil. They also mocked hard-line Muslim clerics if ever they appeared. It was automatic that everyone left the room when Islamic prayers came on the television every evening. Even the children muttered under their breath in irritation at this interruption to their viewing. In short, I often found high levels of resentment towards Muslims, especially, but not exclusively, towards those of fundamentalist persuasion, although I have never witnessed actual verbal abuse by Balinese Hindus towards Muslim people.

My argument is that that the family group watching of television game shows, especially taking sides on religious/lifestyle grounds, constitutes part of the microsociological 'work' of strengthening the Balinese image of themselves within the multi-ethnic Indonesian society as described by Hobart, A., Ramseyer and Leeman (1996, 226). This
is so because the demonstrated antipathy towards orthodox Muslim
game show contestants by Balinese viewers encodes a signalling of the
‘other’ within the disjunctive representation of the Indonesian people
as a nation, ‘or a national culture’ (Bhabha 1990, 292). Game shows,
then, should be understood not only as light entertainment of a
politically neutral kind. In a highly charged political atmosphere such
as prevailed in Indonesia and Bali during the last half of 1999, the
apparently benevolent culturally-inclusivity of game show contestant
teams could be critically taken up by viewers within an overt agenda of
local ‘identity’ politics to fight out imagined battles for supremacy
(and prizes).

Music variety shows

Local music variety shows obviously incur more expensive production
costs than game shows. However, they (apparently) achieve such high
ratings that each channel has at least one if not more, Pesta (broadcast
on Indosiar on Sunday nights at 8:30) is a good example of a national
Indonesian music variety show which shows the thrifty production
characteristics and ‘local’ content mentioned above:

Last night at Luh’s place I watched a musical variety show called
Pesta. The show was being taped live before an appreciative
studio audience in a single set (fieldnotes, 4/10/99)

Last night (Sunday) we all watched Pesta on Indosiar while
talking about other things. Featured was Slank, a grunge/thrash
band from Jakarta. They rode into the studio on their Harley
Davidson motorbikes (fieldnotes, 8/11/99).

I watched Pesta with Luh’s household many times. In each show there
was usually one big-name Indonesian band, singing group or singing
star, implying a reasonably high one-off performance fee had been
paid. The rest were a stable of ‘in-house’ performers, presumably on a
set wage. The band Slank were big in Indonesia when I was there in

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1999. They were five male musicians, thin, ragged-looking, with piercings and tattoos, who played loud, electric guitar-led ballads in a kind of synthesis of Seattle grunge and traditional heavy metal. Writing of the heavy metal music scene in Bali, Baulch claims that through the development of the local rock music scene and its attendant style codes, Balinese youth are finding a way to enjoy ‘capitalism’s fantasy land free of the shackles of cultural preservation’ (1996, 25). Murray’s claims (1991) concur with this view. She maintains that the lyrics of Indonesian popular music are often quite radical, reach mass youth audiences, and may even prove to be a kind of rallying point for the development of political consciousness.

It was certainly the case that at the age of 17, Ketut (Luh’s maid) was an ardent fan of Slank and knew the words to the song they performed on Pesta. Ketut pointed out her favourite band member to me and said that he came from Ambon (Eastern Indonesia). Ketut had little knowledge of English and little taste for western popular music. She would get up and do some housework away from the television-watching area if someone sang a song in English. In some ways Ketut’s position represents a groundswell of young people’s opinions on western popular culture. They seemed to much prefer local music and performance in Indonesian to western pop. As I argued before in relation to game shows, popular culture texts such as television music variety shows may appear to be ‘just entertainment’, but they may also be implicitly taken up as constitutive ‘political’ materials by groups and individuals (see Eyerman, 1999) with local agendas. In this case the discourse of the local would seem to be at the national (Indonesian) level rather than the regional (Balinese) level.

Frith maintains that entertainment such as popular music is ‘a setting for symbolic activity’ (1996, 170). Indonesian rock and pop, and popular music from Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines attract big following. It is western music that is least popular with young people in Indonesia at present. Southeast Asian pop, however, trades on the genres and styles of western pop music conventions while using regional language and moral frameworks of understanding to compose lyrics. Moreover, recent Indonesian popular music styles like reggae dangdut, ska dangdut, and lately rap dangdut and hypno dangdut, as
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it such as popular music is ‘a 70). Indonesian rock and pop, ipore and the Philippines attract at is least popular with young east Asian pop, however, trades music conventions while using os of understanding to compose popular music styles like reggae dangdut and hypno dangdut, as well as Indo thrash, and ketc rap (fieldnotes, September and November, 1999), synthesise some of the traditional music forms of the archipelago with ‘global’ popular music conventions and genres. Bhangra (itself a post-colonial hybrid popular music form from India and Bangladesh) has become very popular in Indonesia and its distinctive sound is currently being synthesised into some of the existing hybrid forms mentioned above.

If we apply Abu-Lughod’s (1991) argument to the Indonesian context, then the showcasing of Indonesian popular music on live to air television shows plays a pivotal role (Golding and Murdock, 1996) in organizing the images and discourses through which young people understand themselves as Indonesian.

It is most certainly the case that my fieldwork in Bali took place at a time of widespread distaste for things western, not only music. I occasionally found quite high levels of resentment against westerners, and I heard frequently expressed resentment against the hegemony of western, particularly American, culture. This was evident in some television broadcasting changes. For example, the private channel ANTEVE was reported to be on the brink of severing its link with the global music broadcasting giant MTV, since western music segments and video clips were achieving extremely low ratings in comparison with local music presentations (Brillianto 1999)3.

Current affairs

Current affairs-style programs have been proliferating in the new climate of openness in Indonesia which has prevailed since the reform process began in May 1998. As I pointed out above, such programs are cheap to produce and are almost certainly guaranteed an avid audience as scandals and uncertainty continue to dominate Indonesian political life. Current affairs talk shows have been around in various forms on Indonesian television ever since it began. However, the Suharto government strictly forbade speaking about sensitive issues, and previous talk shows had to tread very carefully (Nusa Tenggara 10 November 1999, 12).

The extraordinary popularity of television talk shows at the present time on Indonesian commercial television is therefore explicable in
terms of audience enthusiasm for talking about, and hearing about, topical issues after a very long period when talking publicly about these things was tightly controlled (*Nusa Tenggara* 10/11/99, 12). During the period of my observations, examples were *Aneka Dialog* (RCTI), *Bincang-bincang, Debat Terbuka* (ANTEY), *Di Balik Berita* (SCTV), *Selayang Padang* (Indosiar), and *Pro dan Kontra* (TPI). They usually involved live interviews with political or topical figures, reflecting the dynamic changes in Indonesia since reform, and in the context of the economic crisis (*Nusa Tenggara*, 10 November 1999, 12). To some extent these programs have come to be regarded as authentic sources of political information. Despite the new climate of information openness, news broadcasts remain centrally controlled within the generic parameters of news broadcasts under the previous regime. The delivery of information is still formulaic and people still seem suspicious about the accuracy of news bulletins. In contrast, the current affairs programs in which senior politicians and business people are questioned by journalists seemed to enjoy much greater credibility during the period of my field research.

In 1999, Luh and her husband, and their adult relatives, would usually watch in a very focused way if an important political figure was being interviewed such as Rudy Ramli in the Bank Bali scandal, or General Wiranto, former head of Armed Forces in Indonesia. They loved it when the interviewer asked questions which put the interviewee on the spot and would add their own impertinent questions. A running dialogue would often start up once the interviewee had made a few revealing statements, and lively political discussion between viewers in the room would ensue. This often meant that nobody present heard some of the later comments of the interviewee since they were drowned out. I must admit to a sense of astonishment at the openness of the questions asked and answered:

Admissions, revelations, laying bare the dark details of Indonesian political collusion, corruption and nepotism, shady economic deals, a military juggernaut which is a law unto itself. Why did some of these people ever agree to come on live TV and be grilled? Did they believe the old laws prevailed and no
difficulty questions would be asked? Were they hoping for the political exoneration/survival of having come clean? Are there press agents in Jakarta who negotiate huge fees for these appearances? Is it just that the outcomes of the present uncertainty are so unpredictable that no-one who wants to get on can afford to have no profile? (fieldnotes, 15/10/99).

In almost every instance where I witnessed a political talk show topic spill out of television and into discussion by the household, I was reminded that the media can be an arena of public debate in which relevant information affecting the public good was widely available (Gurevitch 1996). It seemed to me that these current affairs programs constituted a significant component of the process of democratic social transformation in Indonesia during this time. The interplay between the images and sound of the political interview on TV and the political discussion in the room was dialogic. The show was live to air and the discussion was taking place in the same moments of real time. In some ways this is the opposite of how television was used during the New Order Suharto years to carefully control and limit public knowledge and debate. Television used in that way obviously constituted the viewer as a passive subject. In contrast, the lively controversial interviews I watched tended to implicitly constitute the viewing subject as active. For example, on one occasion, I was watching television at a neighbour's place when Rudy Ramli was being interviewed about his involvement in the Bank Bali scandal. Kadek, the eldest son, was walking in and out of the room, saying 'bohong' (lies) as Ramli made ever more and more incredible statements in response to the interviewer's questions. Suddenly the interviewer asked how 'How can we tell you are not lying?' This provoked a great deal of mirth. Kadek then came and sat down to watch the rest of the interview.

It may be that the questions asked in these interviews did not have any pre-defined 'politically correct' or safe answers since no-one knew exactly who would come to hold political power by the end of the year. Since there was no political closure on responses, which had been the case during the New Order, it may be that viewers in their homes felt their contribution was as valid as any other. Also, because of the
political uncertainty, no public figure being interviewed seemed 'untouchable' any more. This also may have encouraged a high level of engagement in viewers, since there was the possibility that questioning might reveal underlying truths and motives, which would never have been permitted to happen in the past. In this way, it was probably the climate of political uncertainty which offered viewers a more active discursive location in current affairs programs than had previously been the case.

**Fantasy, traditional culture and plundering the past**

The last two years in Indonesian television have seen a proliferation of locally-produced comedy series which use fantasy/historical themes, and which often rely to some extent upon traditional performance genres and character types. In late 1999 the public relations officer at SCTV, Budi Darmawan, said he hoped yet another new fantasy comedy series would not saturate the viewing audience. 'We see more and more that the trend in television broadcasting is certainly in the direction of futuristic themes and fantasy', he added (Nusa Tenggara 29 October 1999, 12 [my translation, my emphasis]).

I first became aware of the fantasy/historical genre in Indonesian television when I watched the serial *Aladin*, favoured viewing fare of Tirta, Luh's eight year old daughter. There was a hero with supernatural powers, an evil old witch who could fly, a range of villains and a discontinuous plot. However, this was not a children's program but early evening prime-time viewing.

Later I watched episodes of *Dewi Fortuna*, the Goddess of Fortune.

There is an enormous amount of the supernatural, hearkening back to Java's atavistic and animistic past to provide villains and blood-worshippers which threaten the basically good, middle-class Muslim people in the series. The juvenile heroine/victim has just been possessed. She has turned bright blue and spewed blood. Her boyfriend is trying to save her. Now the goddess is off in her chariot skywards, watched by her atavistic boyfriend who is wearing a necklace of skulls. Lots of 'kung fu' moves, near death assaults which are somehow survived, and special effects (fieldnotes, 29 October 1999).
figure being interviewed seemed to have encouraged a high level of conversation in the room, which would never have been expected. In this way, it was probably the case that the discussion offered viewers a more active role in the programs than had previously been the case.

Telling the Past

Television has seen a proliferation of programs which use fantasy/historical themes, especially upon traditional performance arts. One example is the public relations officer at the Nusa Tenggara 91999) the serial drama, Luh's eight year old daughter. The powers, an evil old witch who threatened to destroy the serial. I first became aware of the fantasy/setting when I watched the serial "Invisible Man," the Goddess of Fortune.

One of the popular Javanese-style shows, set in a mock court setting with a live studio audience. Mostly played against a fixed set. Melodramatic over-acting and lewd innuendoes—possibly indirect political satire at times. Sang Prabu is a kind of medieval Javanese king surrounded by women and courtiers—all 'over-the-top' characters. This is clearly a synthesis of a distinctly postmodern kind. In this episode, Sang Prabu goes and meditates cross-legged in prayer in his special place. Beams of light appear and fake electric flashes. His personality splits and someone breaks off from him, a kind of alter-ego, and someone else seems to climb into his body—a demon? (fieldnotes, 3/11/99).

Panji—Manusia Milenium (Panji—Millenium Man) on SCTV at 8:30 pm is yet another example of the genre. Panji is a type of romantic superhero in a superhero suit—a kind of comedy. Using the same device as the Superman series, the beautiful heroine Nadia knows Panji only as a callow youth who works with her at a kids' play centre, which might be an orphanage. The arch-villain dwells elsewhere in another dimension. His lieutenant in the earthly realm is a bad but beautiful woman (dressed like Madonna during her Jean-Paul Gaultier phase) and her two evil but stupid henchmen (fieldnotes 1 November 1999). Whenever there is a crisis, Panji becomes a superhero, invisible to all but the viewers.

While this might sound familiar to western viewers who recall The Invisible Man, some of the current comedy/fantasy series, such as Tiyul and Mbak Yul and Sang Prabu owe little to any western antecedents. These kinds of fantasy adventures draw directly upon the cultural performance stories, themes, genres and characters of the ancient Javanese past, as does Dewi Fortuna. Sang Prabu is one of the most popular. Many local viewers in Bali assured me it was the funniest of the lot.

One of the popular Javanese-style shows, set in a mock court setting with a live studio audience. Mostly played against a fixed set. Melodramatic over-acting and lewd innuendoes—possibly indirect political satire at times. Sang Prabu is a kind of medieval Javanese king surrounded by women and courtiers—all 'over-the-top' characters. This is clearly a synthesis of a distinctly postmodern kind. In this episode, Sang Prabu goes and meditates cross-legged in prayer in his special place. Beams of light appear and fake electric flashes. His personality splits and someone breaks off from him, a kind of alter-ego, and someone else seems to climb into his body—a demon? (fieldnotes, 3/11/99).

In the next episode, Deni, the good alter-ego, manages to expel the evil invading spirit from the body of Sang Prabu. After Deni comes back to occupy the body of Sang Prabu, royal commands to attack
other regions, as well as plans to raise taxes, are cancelled. The scheming Prime Minister is disappointed at the apparent return of reason to Sang Prabu. While possessed, Sang Prabu seduced Princess Malaka, who is now ashamed and very angry with her king. To explain all his previous pronouncements, Sang Prabu nonchalantly declares that these orders were a tactical test for the purpose of seeing how faithful were the members of his court (Nusa Tenggara 10 November 1999, 12). These details of plot indicate that a primary target of satire in Sang Prabu is malpractice and cover-ups in state governance. The relevance to political events in contemporary Indonesia is, of course, only implied.

While Sang Prabu was a favourite at Luh's house, I was fortunate enough to be at the homes of two other friends on different occasions when Sang Prabu was being watched. On the first occasion, the whole extended family—seven or eight people—were gathered enthusiastically in a jostling crowd on the floor of a small room to watch Sang Prabu. They laughed uproariously and were very engaged with it, chatting about the various characters and the plot during the ad breaks (fieldnotes, 11/11/99). In the home of a Ksatriya friend, Pak K, the family gathered, again on the floor, to watch and laugh together, making frequent references to Suharto and to Habibie (who was still in power at that time).

Along the continuum of shows which constitute this genre in Indonesian television broadcasting, we might place those which borrow most from western fantasy series, such as Panji, at one end, and shows like Ketoprak Humor (RCTI) which rely on traditional Indonesian drama forms, at the other. An article in Nusa Tenggara (2 November 99) reports that following the success of Indosiar and RCTI with ketoprak shows (Javanese folk theatre) 'even a television channel which has tended to avoid traditional fare is now looking at ludruk from traditional east Java, similar to programs offered by RCTI with Ketoprak Humor and Indosiar with Srimulat. A presentation of traditional ludruk will now appear on SCTV, starting on November 5th, each week at 11.00 pm' (Nusa Tenggara 2 November 1999, 12, my translation).

Ludruk is one of the indigenous art forms of east Java, from the region of Surabaya. The art form was pioneered by Cak Abdul Rashim and became a symbol of resistance in colonial times. Ludruk is a
xes, are cancelled. The scheming apparent return of reason to Prabu seduced Princess Malaka, with her king. To explain all his nonchalantly declares that these niose of seeing how faithful were gara 10 November 1999, 12). primary target of satire in Sang state governance. The relevance onia is, of course, only implied. at Lu's house, I was fortunate er friends on different occasions On the first occasion, the whole —were gathered enthusiastically hall room to watch Sang Prabu very engaged with it, chatting the plot during the ad breaks a Ksatriya friend, Pak K, to watch and laugh together, and to Habibie (who was still which constitute this genre in might place those which borrow as Panji, at one end, and shows rely on traditional Indonesian in Nusa Tenggara 2 November ss of Indosiar and RCTI with 'even a television channel which is now looking at Ludruk from is offered by RCTI with Ketoprak presentation of traditional Ludruk in November 5th, each week at 12 1999, 12, my translation). art forms of east Java, from the sionereed by Cak Abdul Rashim in colonial times. Ludruk is a melodramatic form of popular enacted drama, bawdy, only loosely scripted, arising from distinctly proletariat abangan roots. According to Peacock, writing in 1968, a performance normally included stock characters (both upper class nobility and lower class clowns), musical interludes often performed by transvestite singers, implied references to local and national issues, and comic lampooning of figures of authority—local, regional and national. Poverty, corruption and moral dilemmas were frequent themes. Depicted family and marital relations often mirrored local and community relations. Given flexibility of format, cheap production costs and portability, Ludruk performances became rallying points for resistance in colonial times, and later for political causes in the troubled early years of the nation (Peacock 1968, 41). 'From the first it was we ourselves (Ludruk performers) who entertained the freedom fighters,' says Mamiek Slamet, contemporary Ludruk creator from Surabaya (Nusa Tenggara 2 November 1999, 12, my translation). In the last few years, Ludruk has been revived as a comedy format for television. Naturally it has been altered considerably to fit the new medium, yet it would seem that the genre has kept some of its distinctive features. Peacock maintained that the original Ludruk performance devices 'lured participants (audiences) into joining a motion toward particular experiences', and thereby audiences learned 'to act and orient toward the world in certain ways' (1968, 245). If this is so then the new Ludruk programs on television may be offering audiences implied subject positions through which current political and social events in Indonesia may be viewed, while at the same time providing a form of catharsis for social anger through the parody and lampooning of key political figures.

The public relations officer for SCTV admits that Ludruk is cheaper for the company to produce and broadcast than imported series, presumably for the same reasons stated above: fixed sets, live-to-air broadcasts and low local wages. However, the low cost does not explain the popularity of these shows, not only in Java, but across the archipelago. Perhaps one reason is that current and recent political figures and events can be critically addressed and lampooned through this genre most effectively since that has always been part of their function. Another reason for their popularity may be that many of the
highly varied cultures in Indonesia have some form of satirical folk theatre tradition. The *ketoprak* and *ludruk* shows obviously speak to some common ground in those local traditions, despite obvious regional variations (see Appadurai, 1990). I am making this claim while acknowledging that Jameson maintains:

Mass culture ... The commercial products of the latter can surely not without intellectual dishonesty be assimilated to so-called popular, let alone folk, art of the past, which reflected and were dependent for their production on quite different social realities, and were in fact the 'organic' expression of so many distinct social communities or castes (Jameson 1992, 15).

The ' "organic" expression of...distinct social communities or castes' is not just an archaic phenomenon. If there was a 'folk' (popular) art of the past, then there is nothing to prevent there being one in the present, and while past and present forms of the popular cannot be assimilated to one another, as Jameson says, there is little point in denying a historical link. My research on Balinese households watching programs which drew upon the conventions of historical dance-dramas, *ludruk* and *ketoprak*, indicate that the Javanese genres and pre-Islamic themes upon which the shows rely, were received with recognition (a sense of the familiar) as well as enthusiasm. Throughout Indonesia the satirical dance/drama performance genre tells a story of 'classical' times, while often commenting subtly on contemporary events. While not seeking to deny the specificity of cultural practices across the archipelago, it is important to realize that the notion of completely autonomous 'local' cultures (for example Balinese culture) has been organised and used by Indonesian governments as a structure of domination (see Hellman 1998). The reinforcement of the idea of cultural separateness went hand in glove with an agenda of unification by the Indonesian New Order government (see Santikarma 2000).

Watching performances of dance, theatre and music from across Indonesia, one is struck by the realisation that these genres belong in a family of cultural forms which certainly exhibit difference, but also exhibit striking similarities. It is perhaps for this reason that shows

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t have some form of satirical folk literature (ludruk) shows obviously speak to the local traditions, despite obvious differences, I am making this claim while acknowledging that the 'organic' expression of some of these heterogeneous and pre-Islamic themes received with recognition (a sense of the historical dance-dramas, ludruk) is still a story of 'classical' times, while more modern, more popular events, while not seeking to be assimilated to the archipelago, it is claimed, have some form of satirical folk literature (ludruk) as being the 'organic' expression of some or castes (Jameson 1992,15).

tinct social communities or castes' If there was a 'folk' (popular) art of art, there can be only one in the present, while the popular cannot be assimilated to the art of the past, which reflected production on quite different terms. While seeking practices across the archipelago, it is not of completely autonomous 'local' art, has been organised and used by the public for the macro-level context of television broadcasting changes taking place at a time of rapid social, political and economic change in Indonesia. Looking at both current affairs programs and 'entertainment' programs, television viewing in Bali illustrates the extent to which discourses of fragmentation and national unity may be read into these new kinds of programs. The data in this paper indicate the immense popularity of Indonesian locally-produced, and/or live-to-air, programs. My impression is that the public taste for these programs in Indonesia is driven by post-reform enthusiasm for 'free' media and thirst for previously denied information, while at the same time a new mood of insular nationalism is pushing the envelope towards local content, enabling the rejuvenation of folk tradition genres and traditional mythology (Castells 1996, 1997).

This paper has attempted a rendering of a particular time and place in Indonesian history in which the business of watching television...
seemed highly politicised. I have attempted to document change and variation in an analytical field of media studies which has previously stressed the static and the dogmatic. If we take contemporary local culture in Indonesia to be more than the retention of static cultural norms, and so include the dynamic field of local politics¹, then the intense interest in current affairs programs, and the way people in Bali engage with them, shows the capacity of 'open' television broadcasting to operate actively in democratic political reform. There is no doubt that the Balinese households I observed watching television were engaging with programs through the same practices that are present in their everyday lives, practices shaped by, but also constitutive of, the basic symbolic, material and political continuities and fractures of the Indonesian state at present.

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Notes

¹ The CIA Factfile on Indonesia states that Indonesia controls 2 international satellite earth stations (Intelsat). One over the Indian Ocean and one over the Pacific Ocean. In 1997 it had forty-one television broadcast stations of which 18 were government-owned and 23 were commercial. Satellite dishes cost about as much as televisions, although some enterprising Balinese have made their own.

² The prominent and respectable newspaper Bali Post during this period waxed strong on the subject of Australia, on occasion implying an end to all relations, including tourism (see for example certain columns in the Bali Post, 15 September 1999). Strong anti-western sentiments were evident in a number of articles published during September 1999, although some commentators contested these views (see for example, Sudibya 1999, 8).

³ 'Bollywood' has millions of non-Indian fans in the Middle East, Africa and Southeast Asia because it's the non-American quality of
Indian movies that draws fans. Particularly popular are the dreamily suggestive dance numbers. 'Given the choice between a Steve Martin divorce comedy and a musical about the virtues of God and family, Arabs, Africans and Southeast Asians often choose the latter' (Power and Mazumdar, 2000:46).

On 5 May 1995, ANTEVE entered a collaborative venture with MTV. Indonesian market research indicated the popularity of MTV for young people aged 15-29. Sixty-six per cent were found to favour MTV as a music channel (Brillianto 1999:6). ANTEVE/MTV programming targeted the dynamic youth market, specifically the middle to upper class cohort, believing that the apparent popularity of MTV would give high ratings. However, in the three years 1995-1998, MTV segments on ANTEVE received the worst ratings. Almost all were less than 1 per cent, while other ANTEVE programs such as Family 100 (a quiz show), Music of the Week and Music Exchange Indonesia (all local content) had ratings from 3 per cent to 10 per cent. Although the presence of MTV may have originally helped the image of ANTEVE as a specialist music TV station, MTV has not been able to attract viewers or produce advertising revenue for ANTEVE (Brillianto 1999:6). ANTEVE is accordingly putting a great many of its investment resources into programs which showcase local (Indonesian) popular music.

The exception here was Megawati Sukarnoputri. The household viewers watched in anxious silence whenever she was broadcast.

For example, my notes read:

After a full day of rioting and burning, the whole of Singaraja went quiet as the power came back on in time for everyone, including the mob, to go home and watch the count for the Vice-President on TV. I sat watching the counting of votes with Pak R., his wife, their son, his niece Sumiati, and others. We sat on the couple's double bed as they are in the throes of renovating. Watched TVRI in black and white (poor reception). It was very silent and emotional as it became clear that Megawati would take the Vice-Presidency (fieldnotes, 21/10/99).
7 I was unable to understand the jokes, even though I understood the words. I have had this experience before in non-English-speaking contexts where even a good knowledge of the language does not permit the understanding of a joke. I believe this only comes with very prolonged cultural contact.

8 While not wishing to essentialise across performance traditions as distinct as Balinese and Javanese forms, to my western eyes, their common ground in genre, performance style and social entertainment purpose seems obvious.

9 Perhaps the most telling physical example of this is the theme park Taman Mini in Jakarta in which the whole archipelago is 'recreated' on a set of islands in an artificial lake. Each island is represented as a separate 'world' of traditional culture and architecture.

10 Strinati maintains that one of the key useful insights of postmodern theorising is 'the breakdown of the distinction between culture and society' (1995, 223).
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