Watching Indonesia:

An Ethnography of the Ether

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Thesis Declaration

I hereby declare that the work herein, now submitted as a thesis for the Doctor of Philosophy of the Northern Territory University, is the result of my own investigations, and all references to ideas and work of other researchers have been specifically acknowledged. I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis has not already been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not being currently submitted in candidature for any other degree.

Stephen Peter Atkinson

dated 26-02-03
Abstract

Since 1976, Indonesian television has been transmitted to the nation and beyond via a series of geo-stationary satellites. In the early 1990s, the number of television stations using this system grew from one to six. All could be received clearly in Darwin, Australia by anyone with access to a parabolic antenna. The increasing availability and affordability of this technology gives rise to the possibility of a new kind of inter-cultural research that allows television viewers to engage with the culture and politics of other nations via its broadcast television. The thesis proposes that an ‘ethnography of the ether’ can illuminate sites of contestation within a given nation while contributing to our understanding of the televisual medium itself. Such a method raises issues about interpretation; about the subjective positioning of the viewer/researcher; about tensions between the ‘local’ and the ‘global’; and about the limits of audienceship for national television services. Indonesia and Indonesian television went through major changes over the period covered by research for the thesis. These culminated in the resignation of president Suharto in May 1998 in the wake of severe economic collapse and widespread political protests. Following this, Indonesian television, which had previously been the site of official attempts to contain its narratives, began to openly embrace a hopeful, new era of reform.
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Introduction

National transmissions in a global mediascape

Searching for theoretical approaches to the broad methodological conceit of this thesis, that is watching Indonesian television in an Australian national cultural space, has trapped me in a double bind. On the one hand, presuming to study television as a universally or transnationally legible phenomenon runs the risk of essentialising television at the expense of appreciating that its texts, practices and intersections with viewing publics remain historically and culturally situated despite the ‘complex connectivity’ of globalisation (see Tomlinson 1999) and the communications and media technologies commonly associated with it.

On the other hand, attempting to study broadcast television as a manifestation of a specific local (most usually national) context, especially one in which the researcher/writer is not ‘at home’, runs the opposite risk of becoming blind to the universal application of ‘findings’ by essentialising the cultural specificities or ‘otherness’ of the features of television in that context. Thus, while each approach may be a perfectly valid way to study television, the tendency to essentialise poses difficulties for both. This ‘double bind’ is also a primary feature of much debate on tensions between the local and the global, or the particular and the universal, that stem from ‘flows’ of culture and media across national borders. What, if anything, is threatened by these flows? Are the world's cultures becoming more alike? Does the idea of global culture (in the singular) necessarily diminish local cultural diversity?

In addition, each of the approaches I have mentioned has echoes in paradigms of media studies research that over the last two decades have sometimes been regarded as almost antithetical to one another; that is, in the dichotomy often assumed to exist between text-based studies and audience-based research. In the former it is the characteristics of texts and their messages that are emphasised, while in the latter it is the nature of their reception. Again, the tendency to essentialise and strictly demarcate the parameters of categories has served to weaken both positions. Although there had been a much earlier history of academic and industry-funded research in the 1940s and 50s into the ways audience members used and engaged with the media (see Curran 1990), media studies’ focus on the audience was more generally from the point of view of the ‘effects’ of the media, which assumed a level of predictability in the way media messages were received. The study of the media from this perspective utilised the analytical frame and methods of the social and behavioural sciences. A classic example which focussed on the advertising industry's employment of behavioural scientists to actually fashion more irresistible messages (rather than just interpret their agendas and effects) was Vance Packard's The Hidden Persuaders (1961 [1957]). It is an important work because it popularised, across a broad readership, the view that subconscious human motivations are knowable and therefore manipulable by an alliance between ‘experts’ and the media.
Meanwhile, the influence of structuralism and semiotics from literary and film studies led to an increased emphasis through the 1970s on the study of television programmes as texts. This questioned the ‘taken-for-grantedness’ of media effects by highlighting the complexity of their products (Turner 1993: 219). Although the idea that programmes can be ‘read’ as ‘texts’ is clearly indebted to literary studies, the incorporation of semiotics, the study of signs, allowed textual analysis to turn away from the value judgements of literary criticism to describe the semiotic richness of examples of popular culture without resorting to an assessment of their relative artistic merit (see for example Williamson 1978; Hartley 1982; Turner 1987). Exposing the textual complexity lying beneath otherwise unexamined, taken-for-granted popular cultural products, however, does contain the suggestion that all that is hidden can be revealed. It may be noted here with reference to my comment regarding Packard’s work, that semiotics’ ability to unravel texts has similarly led to the use of semiotics by the media and advertising industries in order to better craft them (see Wernick 1997).

A rejection of the ability of textual analysis to fully determine how meanings are made of complex texts at the point of reception, led in turn to an important reaffirmation of the ‘active’ audience in the 1980s and the growth of ‘new audience research’ (see for example Morley 1980, 1986; Ang 1985). The problems associated with the treatment of television as a universally legible and appreciable phenomenon can be likened to criticisms directed at the ‘textual analysis’ of its programmes in that both are object-rather than sub/ecr-centred (Fetveit 2001: 174). The height of criticisms directed at the project of textual analysis lies in the assertion that texts have no inherent meaning, rather that meaning is shaped only in relation to the particular details of consumption and the subjectivities of consumers. This elaboration of the ‘polysemy’ of meaning (see Fiske 1987, 1989), which placed all interpretation in the hands of the reader/audience, questioned the primacy of the text both as a vehicle of communicable meaning and as an object of study.

Limits to this claim are immediately apparent when it is noted that the books and essays which state this view are themselves texts whose own ability to express an intended meaning must therefore also be called into question. Neglect of this parallel is perhaps based on the shaky assumption that the texts and audiences of popular culture are far removed from those of the critical analysis of popular culture. However, as Andrew Wernick (1997) points out: ‘Just by being published even the most critical criticism of popular culture is continuous with the phenomenon it would distance itself from’ (208). What the example of academic texts on the subject suggests is that texts carry preferred meanings for preferred audiences; that is, that all texts are created, whether consciously or unconsciously, with an audience or readership in mind. One aspect of this lies in an ‘author’ knowing when it is and is not necessary to explain certain features, expressions and references contained within the text. Texts are to some degree inscribed with the conditions (the when, where and who) of their
reception, therefore increasing the probability that intended meanings will be comprehended and accepted by the reader.

Another observation that problematises the application of the text-reader model of engagement between television programmes and their audiences is that programmes can most often be described as ‘producerly’ rather than ‘writerly’ texts. They are the creations of crews, committees, standardised work practices and mutable generic conventions, all carried out under conditions of relative anonymity rather than readily attributable to authors with a singular, identifiable worldview. And while there is still a professional division between the producers of programmes and their audiences, both are imbricated to an extent that blurs this distinction if we consider a programme's ‘mode of address’ as constitutive of an audience, and the diffused authorship of television programmes as negotiated texts more consciously planned to appeal to an imagined mass audience. Clearly these factors are descriptive of other commercial text-making practices, but in television (and broadcasting generally), producers’ focus on the simultaneously engaged community of viewers highlights the medium's characteristic of ‘sociability’ (Scannell 1996), a feature also connected with stations’ claims to project the tastes, values and concerns of the ‘audience community’.

With the spotlight now brightly on the audience and its practices, television programmes, especially soap operas, which had previously been considered textually unworthy and associated with vegetative, passive viewing, received renewed attention. What if the true value of these programmes lay not in what their texts seemed to offer up to analysis, but in how they were used and incorporated into daily lives? Robert C. Allen's (1985) work on soap opera was particularly influential for its recognition of the congruity between the textual features and seriality of soap opera, the way audiences engaged with them, and the manner of their production. The focus on soap opera also provided researchers with the perfect vehicle to critique assumptions about the passivity of women in the television audience as consumers and the targets of advertising, through which the history of soap opera is woven, and as subject to the pleasures of ‘mass culture’ (see Nava 1996). Women, children and the indigenous communities of the colonised world have all been regarded as those most vulnerable to manipulation by marketing, advertising and the mass media, and such naturalised assumptions have played a prominent role in research of all ‘persuasions’, whether funded for the purposes of government, the media industries or academia.

The prime-time soap Dallas was a particularly glaring target for this line of inquiry (Ang 1985; Katz and Liebes 1985), its production coinciding with the growing marketisation of national television industries worldwide, and media studies’ renewed interest in ‘the audience’. It was a programme whose presumed deleterious impact on the world's cultural diversity was arguably borne out only in the uniformity of its condemnation by governments and other guardians of national cultural integrity. The extent of its influence is also most evident in the quantity of important research carried out on the topic of its audiences. Dallas,
because it was broadcast all over the world where it was as widely reviled by governments and cultural critics as it was popular from the point of view of audiences, may have helped to bifurcate audience studies into two distinguishable streams: that of reception, the study of the ways individual viewers interpret the same text differently; and ethnographic studies that sought to understand the uses different social and cultural groups made of programmes and television more generally (see Fetveit 2001: 181). Ethnographic studies complicated earlier assumptions about the imposition of foreign values that resulted from the flow of cultural products chiefly from the U.S. to the rest of the world, because different audiences incorporated them into their own culturally and historically defined contexts, and therefore used them differently. As James Halloran noted in 1970:

We must get away from the habit of thinking in terms of what the media do to people and substitute for it the idea of what people do with the media (cited McGuigan 1992: 131).

The global popularity of programmes raised questions about the broad assumption of their negative impact and the uniformity of their use. Yet the claim that this was somehow evidence of a universal preference conveniently ignored the details of international distribution and the reliance of most national networks on imported content. The idea that highly popular U.S. cultural products were examples of a ‘truly global culture’ through which the world was united was carried to absurd lengths by American academic Robert L. Stevenson (1992) who advocated sending Serbs, Croats and Bosnians to Euro-Disney to sort out their differences (546).

**A detour to McDonald's**

In connection with the worldwide distribution of certain (often American) cultural products and their absorption into more specific contexts we can cite Ariel Heryanto (1999) who reminds us that:

No consumption takes place in a purely natural, biological, ahistorical universe. Eating a McDonald's hamburger in Los Angeles never means the same as eating ‘the same thing’ at the same moment in one of its counter-outlets in Yogyakarta, supposedly the capital city of High Javanese Culture, or in Mahatir's Kuala Lumpur, or in Ho Chi Minh City (159–60).

In this is the assertion that although hamburgers may be fundamentally the same the world over, their consumption in different places situated by frameworks not purely geographical renders the meanings attributed to them different, subject to their wider contexts. In as much as hamburgers, and in particular McDonald's hamburgers, are ascribed with meaning, they can also be thought of as texts.

Remaining with the hamburger analogy, it can be noted, at a tangent to Heryanto's assertion, that differences in meaning are not simply a local, organic response to a global product. They
are also scripted by the company's public relations departments. Promotions for McDonald's, the rhetoric of good corporate citizenship and details of outlet design,¹ are all attempts to ameliorate suspicion of the enterprise by showing that its operations bring economic and social benefits to host communities. Diversity is claimed not to be threatened by the universal homogeneity of the product, rather that local differences are respected, embraced and even enhanced by the company's presence (see Probyn 1998).

Consistency remains an integral component of the company's promise to consumers. Despite this, the company is careful, for example, not to offend the religious dietary restrictions prevailing in any given nation. To affirm the company's sensitivity to religious matters, McDonald's is also a major sponsor and facilitator of religious celebrations and activities, ranging from the provision (free with the sale of every ‘unreal meal deal’) of coloured-water squirters for holi, the Hindu festival of colours in India, to sponsorship of Koran chanting competitions in Indonesia. In these ways, in theory, the company can take root in a limitless variety of cultural landscapes. Employing another botanical figure, Elspeth Probyn (1998) has utilised Giles Deleuze's metaphor of the ‘rhizome’ to illustrate that corporations like McDonald's ‘ceaselessly establish connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances … like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts’ (Deleuze, cited Probyn 1998: 155).

We should not lose sight of the clear, mundane difference between food, which is literally consumed, digested, converted and unwanted waste excreted, and the ‘texts’ of a medium like television that enter our ears and eyes and once inside are processed in more or less unquantifiable ways described variously as psychological, behavioural, ideological, social and cultural. Food and texts, according to this schema, are connected to the satisfaction of quite divergent uses, needs and desires. Yet food is also heavy with cultural meaning and has uses other than nourishment. As Probyn (1998) has discussed, food is a source of cultural identification and a major ingredient in the links between family members and domestic life, and between the nation and the citizen (161). The same might be said to be true of television. Global consumer products like branded hamburgers and Coca-Cola, therefore, whose promotions while initially universalist have more recently sought to establish a natural place in the daily lives of consumers all over the world, have parallels with globally marketed media products because the meanings of each are contingent on the context of their consumption. Through this contextualisation they become part of the local scene. In the words of a magazine advertisement for Hong Kong Bank, ‘before you stand out … you have to blend in’ (Asiaweek 19 Oct 1994: 46–47). Embracing aspects of cosmopolitan culture does not therefore assume the deterritorialisation of the culture in which they are consumed.

¹ See for example John Keay, who observes of his visit to McDonald's in Yogya his surprise to find 'Arjun, Semar, Bima and the whole wayang gang' sharing space as mascots with 'Ronald McDonald and his pals, Hamburglar, Birdie and so on', (1995: 184).
This is an idea somewhat at variance with comments by Edward Said, for whom the global market for media products has the ability to produce audiences whose affinities outweigh all other formulations of presumably more ‘authentic’ localised collectivities. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) he asserts that ‘the international media system has in actuality done what idealistic or ideally inspired notions of collectivity – imagined communities – aspire to do’ (374). Although referring here in a general way to ‘international media’ viewed from the perspective of an anti-imperialist discourse, Said later specifically cites broadcasting and ‘Hollywood programmes like *Bonanza* and *I Love Lucy*’ as examples of ‘a very efficient mode of articulation knitting the world together’ (Said cited in Wheeler 1997: 186 [italics in original]). Can any television show (ignoring for a moment Said's odd anachronistic reference in 1994 to *Bonanza* and *I Love Lucy*, occasional reruns on the ascendance to retrograde, ‘classic’ status) really be thought of as a ‘mode of articulation that knits the world together’, whether in Hollywood, rural Australia (see Meaghan Morris’ (1990) description of Lucy’s effect on the home life of her childhood in the country town of Maitland in the 1960s), or Beirut?

The seemingly contradictory trajectories of the particular and the universal of the sort discussed here, then, are mutually incorporated, each within the other, in the idea of global culture’ espoused by Arjun Appadurai (1990) who states that:

> the central feature of global culture today is the politics of the mutual effort of sameness and difference to cannibalize one another and thus to proclaim their successful hijacking of the twin Enlightenment ideas of the triumphantly universal and the resiliently particular (307–308).

This ‘mutual cannibalisation of sameness and difference’ by complicating ideas of cultural and media imperialism also supports the notion of an active audience because, like audience studies, it makes problematic the idea that texts contain inherent meanings and values which the audience receives automatically, passively and identically, no matter what the contexts of their reception. Importantly, what blanket theories of international media reception do not (perhaps cannot) take into account, is the infinite range of ‘lifeworlds’ into which media products are incorporated, and which in turn affect engagement with those media products.

Global culture may, in the very act of not speaking directly to specific circumstances, even be thought of as a potentially open set of texts because they are ‘neutral’, available to anyone, make no particular cultural demands, and do not impose restrictions on use or assume an adherence to a particular cultural identity in the manner of media products that position audiences in accordance with their belonging to a local community or nation.

Imported media products occupy a prominent position in the schedules of most nations’ broadcast television, especially those without large television production industries of their own. Many programmes achieve a worldwide popularity that allows them to be regarded as
part of a shared global culture without in any way contributing to a denial of the nationality, or sub-national affiliations of their audiences, or somehow rendering the lives and values of audience members uniform. Part of this is that the specific national origins of globally popular programmes are generally well-known, they are not thought of as ‘global products’ nor do they display any awareness of or attempt to cater to the myriad contexts of their reception. That these programmes elicit the same response from all people within and across all nations is both unlikely and difficult to assess. That they are somehow accommodated within the national cultural frameworks of broadcast television seems beyond dispute. Imported programmes, local productions, advertising slogans, and both global and national media events, all enter the mix in television’s repository of public culture and popular memory. The following comes from an article celebrating the anniversary of Indonesian television that appeared in the TV news and programme guide, Vista-TV. It is a description intended to take ‘thirty something’ (a deduction based on the earliest show it mentions) audience members back through the annals of their common TV memory. Although some are rated as highlights, the emphasis is on their entry into everyday lives and on the shared empathy with those whose lives and performances have been captured on the small screen:

You will certainly remember how the actions of Joe Mannix captivated viewers from all walks of life; or the calmly cool voice of Sambas in coverage of live sport competitions; or with his characteristic smile, Koes Hendratmo shouting: ‘Berpacu dalam Melodi!’ (‘The Melody Race!’); or the cleverness of MacGyver in overcoming all kinds of difficulties; or Mandra whose commentary never ceased, and so forth.

Perhaps you will also still recall the time our ‘hero’, Rudy Hartono, walked off despondently, when he was beaten by one of his arch rivals, Svend Pri, in the ‘All England’. The millions of viewers watching followed him with sunken hearts. Including you most probably. Likewise, many viewers joined in with exclamations like: ‘Wow crazy!’, ‘Hey, how come so exhausted?’, ‘Eng…ing…eng’, as uttered by the late Benyamin S during the days of the ‘Commercial Choice Transmission’ on TVRI (Dahana 1996: 23).

Joe Mannix was the protagonist of the 1960s–70s (in production from 1967–1975) American television series Mannix, a crime thriller rated America's top rating crime show in 1971. Private detective Mannix was intelligent as well as tough and regularly used high-tech
computing models to apprehend his prey. Extremely popular in many parts of the world the show has also been regarded as one of the most violent (Lewis and Stempel 1993: 79).

It screened on TVRI in the early 1970s and was one of those programmes targeted in a change to less violent, more family-oriented material following the launch of the first Palapa satellite. The American action adventure series *MacGyver* was an early success of station RCTI which began broadcasting the show in 1991. Part of its popularity with a young audience is said to have derived from the perception that the battles of its eponymous main character were primarily fought in the defence of human rights (see Sen and Hill 2000: 9–10). The actor *Mandra* is the rubber faced, forever petulant and whining star of numerous television shows (including *Si Doel Anak Sekolah*), and advertisements (You will note my intertextual confusion as to whether it is Mandra the actor or his trademark character I am describing here). *Rudi Hartono* was the champion badminton player at the heyday of Indonesia's international prominence in the sport. He was reigning champion of the *All England* tournament, badminton's preeminent international championship, from 1968 to 1974. In 1975 he was defeated in the final by the Danish player *Svend Pri*. Competition between Indonesia and Denmark in the championships had always been fierce. Sporting events such as these were broadcast live via satellite on TVRI thanks to the Intelsat receiving station established at Jatiluhur in West Java in 1969. Hartono regained the title in 1976. *Benyamin S* was one of Indonesia's best known comic actors. His distinctly Betawi (indigenous Jakartan) accent and humour was a major feature of a successful series of films in the 1970s and he came to epitomise the wide-eyed larrikin yokel adjusting with difficulty to the encroachment of urban cosmopolitanism into his native Jakarta and, by extrapolation, into other urbanising areas in Indonesia. It was a role he carried to television most famously in the TV adaptation of *Si Doel Anak Sekolah* (Doel the Schoolboy). Benyamin S had also starred along with Rano Karno (who played Doel) in director Sjumandaya's film version *Si Doel Anak Betawi* in the 1970s. He appeared in numerous television advertisements throughout his career. In the late 1970s before the total ban on television commercials in 1981, all advertisements were grouped together into a half hour block given the title *Mana Suka Siaran Niaga* (Commercial Choice Transmission). A feature of broadcasts were Benyamin S's idiosyncratically delivered advertising slogans that quickly entered the vernacular and persist as popular catch phrases today. His death in 1997 was mourned across the nation.
None of this would presumably require any further explanation to the ‘you’ to whom the piece is addressed. There is nothing specialist about the knowledge it calls upon. To the contrary, it is a broad sweep of a memory shared by millions. It also displays a lack of distinctions whether between locally produced and imported programmes, or between sport, drama, action, comedy and commercials. All have been incorporated without discomfort within the same national broadcast schedules to reach the same national audience.
A connection between McDonald's and programmes like *Dallas* that have entered the lexicon of global culture, lies in the observation that they are held to contain cultural values, which are sometimes thought to *impose* themselves on the specific circumstances of their consumption. The places where texts, broadcast through the ether, are picked up by our aerials, or where hamburgers are eaten, will in part determine the way they are engaged with and the uses and meanings taken from them. But these ‘texts’ are accompanied by others that prepare the ground, as it were, for their fertile, ‘rhizomic’ incorporation into new environments. The makers of programmes like *Dallas* do not necessarily provide accompanying promotions although their fame and notoriety precede them in magazines and by word of mouth. Promotion and contextualisation is carried out in a different way by local ‘distributors’; that is, by the television channels that incorporate them into their schedules.

Free-to-air broadcast television stations (as distinct from subscriber-based stations whose viewership can be bound by different commonalities) set out to establish their operations and their audiences as having local or national concerns even if the majority of programming is imported. One of the most important venues for achieving this takes the form of daily newscasts and current affairs shows because it is here that the idea of the national public is most clearly articulated through reference to events shown to have relevance to the lives of people contained within that construction whether the events presented are local (pertaining to immediate metropolitan or regional surroundings), national, or global. The aim of news is to make viewers care about what is reported, and to feel as if the information presented is important to their participation in the public conversation and the community at large: communities actual and imagined are addressed in news services. Despite globalisation, parochialism remains a strong draw card for some newscasts even when the majority of the station's schedules are imported. As promotions for Darwin's local commercial station Channel 8 crowed: ‘It's all well-and-good knowing what's going on across the other side of the world, but who can show you what's going on across the street? Channel 8. News you can use. The Top End turns us on’ (*NT News* 16 Oct 1996: 13).

Advertisements and locally made series, and the establishment of ‘personalities’ appearing in each of these, also contribute to the national character of stations’ transmissions, the particularities of which inflect the meaning of all programmes broadcast by them. Stations also set out to establish their own brand name through logos and slogans often in the form of ‘station idents’ (station identification spots) between programmes. These typically, in the case of nation wide networks, emphasise the equivalence of a station's transmissions and audience with the shape and character of the nation.

The connection I have drawn with textual analyses and criticisms directed against them, lies in the accusation that text-based studies emphasise content over readers’ interpretations in the same way that ideas of cultural-imperialism as an effect of global media products negate the importance that specific cultural contexts of reception have on the meanings made of them.
For their critics, both assumed that media texts exercised a hegemonic and ideological power over audiences that empirical research did not bear out.

**Watching the ethnographer watch**

Problems with the second of the two approaches to the study of television I began with, that which emphasises the nature of differences between nations’ broadcasts, can be roughly equated with those levelled at empirical audience-based studies. These attempt to gain a fuller understanding of the localised or personal nature of meaning-making by physically getting closer to the specific contexts of television viewing in order to retrieve traces of the ‘actual audience’ from the abstract mass. This is an interest that has produced a body of work that is broadly ‘ethnographic’ in method sometimes taking the form of watching people watch as if an audience watching television is itself a kind of performance. Problems with this approach lie in the regularity with which the researcher's own ‘situatedness’ is not clearly announced but rather allowed to be obscured and replaced by his or her proximity to, and direct communication with, ‘the source’ of inquiry. Proximity to human informants and their social or domestic context is made to stand for objectively observed truth. Yet interpretation of human subjects’ utterances and actions is often no less contentious and riven through with subjective assumptions than is the random interpretation of texts on the airwaves. Ethnography also makes texts of their subjects, literally as well as metaphorically, in the form of sound recordings, field notes, questionnaires, photographs or video, which are then most often subjected to a secondary analysis. All academic research and writing, in this light, can be seen as textual analysis in the service of textual production. The primacy given to empirical research and ‘fieldwork’ in area studies, anthropology and other of the humanities and social sciences has in the past largely ignored this aspect of its data collection and therefore failed to properly acknowledge the discursive worldview within which analysis is framed.

As Meaghan Morris (1990) has claimed with reference to the tenuous separation between the discursively formed interests of the researcher (with particular reference to John Fiske's construction of the audience member as what Morris refers to as ‘the ideal knowing subject of cultural studies’) and the culture that is interrogated:

> In the end they are not simply the cultural student's object of study, and his native informants. The people are also the textually delegated, allegorical emblem of the critic's own activity. Their *ethnos* may be constructed as other, but it is used as the ethnographer's mask (16).

Further (hopefully making more of a mess of the distinctions I began with), the methodology behind a significant proportion of the research I have compiled here can also be thought of as ethnographic, although it has admittedly not benefited from, or been complicated by, contact with actual human subjects, whether as informants or participants to be observed and/or engaged with. The ethnography pursued here owes more to one of the methods espoused
by participant-observer E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1940) who, for his study of The Nuer, set up his tent in such a position as to enable him to conduct research by watching the activities of the village through the aperture of its entrance (see Rosaldo 1986: 92). There are some fundamental differences, however, between my circumstances and his that warrant attention. My ‘tent’ was a cramped, poorly lit and airless room between the men's toilet and the lift lobby on the ground floor of the Northern Territory University Library. The aperture through which I observed the comings, goings and movements of the subject of my thesis was a television screen hooked up to a satellite dish on the roof of the building. I did not go to live with my subject, I channelled my subject to live with me. If mine was truly an ethnography, it was an ethnography of the ether that attempted to interpret the visible electronic traces of television networks emanating via satellite from a cultural milieu other than my own.

Apart than those departures, my approach bore remarkable (albeit ironic and superficial) parallels to that of Evans-Pritchard. It was essentially voyeuristic or observational and, while in one sense I participated in the culture I observed, I sought not to interact in any way that would impose my presence upon, and therefore influence, the people and activities under observation. My attempt was clearly more successful in this regard. We can picture in the mind's eye, just as ‘the Nuer’ no doubt pictured, the anthropologist scribbling feverishly away in his tent, scrutinising and recording anything that moved. The shadows he cast on the tent walls at night perhaps provided some visual stimulation for the villagers under scrutiny, and the darkness, some respite from his gaze. But in the light of day the very presence of that canvas hide and the scribbler inside may have been enough to render awkward the most mundane activities. There was no risk of me making my subjects self-conscious. Their activities were already performances for unseen and unknown observers staring out through the flaps of their own tents. I knew my subjects knew I was in there because sometimes they fixed me in their gaze and addressed me directly. The television screen as I have suggested can be thought of as the aperture of the camera that records its impressions for us, and the rooms in which we sit as the housing of giant camera obscura.

Watching someone else's television

If I was a ‘participant-observer’, to what extent was I participating? To watch television, it is sometimes said, is to feel yourself part of a larger audience. As Daniel Dayan (2001) has asserted,

The experience of watching television cannot simply be described in terms of the individual. Watching television is always a collective exercise, even when one is alone in front of the set. Watching television means being part of a ‘reverse-angle shot’ consisting of everyone watching the same image at the same time or, more exactly, of all those believed to be watching (743) [my italics].
But what about when ‘one is alone in front of a set’ that appears to be broadcasting someone else's television? And when that is the case, why and how can we feel ourselves to be part of the collective exercise? Although the performers seemed oblivious to the fact, and the technology itself does not discriminate, I was not like most other members of the collective because while my observations were essentially identical to everyone else's in the ‘reverse-angle shot’ (I saw with my eyes what others saw), the performances were not directed towards me. I was not part of the preferred audience. They didn't have me in mind. I wasn't targeted. As a consequence there is a strong likelihood (though no guarantee) that the meanings I discerned from my observations differed markedly from the interpretations of other people simultaneously engaged in the practice of watching.

In the first, least avoidable instance was spoken language. Although I have a reasonable grasp of Indonesian, it is not my first language, it is still foreign to my ears. I do not live, nor have I ever lived, in Indonesia and I was not ‘immersed’ in the way usually expected of area studies and anthropological research. Apart from the sense of ‘alienation’ this produced (a state which in the Brechtian sense has been beneficial to my attempts to think outside television and gaze more objectively on its structures), in practical terms it meant that some accents, idiomatic expressions, many references to the inventory of popular cultural memory and shared television history, and any but the most prominent domestic current events easily passed me by. As did many jokes. My lack of familiarity with the rich historical and cultural background of types of programming based on ‘traditional’ theatre like ketoprak and ludruk may, for example, have produced misinterpretations of their significance although stylistically some struck chords of recognition with theatrical forms from the Western tradition. Similarly, horror genres, prevalent on Indonesian TV schedules over the period covered by my viewership, featured a collection of monsters and supernatural beings I was not initially familiar with. While I understood immediately when they were up to no good, there being an unremarkable similarity between the aural and visual signifiers of impending menace, it took me some time before I was able to recognise their particular characteristics: to know, for example, that tuyul are spirits that provide their masters with wealth and good fortune; that sundel bolong use their sexual attractiveness to lure young men to early graves; or that another, whose name I am unsure of, is a beast comprising just head and flapping entrails that seeks out pregnant women and nourishes itself on the unborn. It could be expected that exposure to this rich pantheon of spirits and demons begins at childhood and that television audiences utilise cultural knowledge acquired since birth when watching these programmes. Nevertheless, in perhaps another more lurid example of the mutual ‘cannibalisation’ of sameness and difference, the concept of monstrous transgression is highly familiar to me having dealt casually with monsters since my own earliest nightmares, fears that became a fascination barely satisfied in childhood by staying up late on Friday nights to watch ‘Awful Movies with Deadly Earnest’, hosted by Deadly himself with pop-out eyes, a companion skull named Yorick, and wearing a smoking jacket of ornately stitched brocade. It was here that I came to appreciate the edgy humour of
horror that alternates shocks with laughs. Interpreting the nature of sameness and difference between the monsters of Indonesian screen culture and those I am more familiar with (not, unfortunately, a concern of this thesis) might demand something approaching a poetic oneirocriticism, a method incidentally, that could also prove useful for the more Utopian fantasies of many advertisements, commercials being similarly resistant to any attempt at a purely rational interpretation of aims and instrumentality.

Despite the difficulties presented by the dense undergrowth of partial comprehension, I continued to watch. Soon programmes and personalities became familiar to me. I could do a convincing imitation of the fruity tones of ‘advernesian’ (or iklanesian, iklan being Indonesian for advert), the ad speak that thums in my head as I type this. I developed my favourites. Entered a competition. Would find myself at the local shop absent-mindedly singing the ‘Indomie’ jingle or softly muttering an a cappella rendition of the ‘waiting music’ that played while RCTI was getting ready to receive the obligatory relay of TVRI's evening news. In these small ways I was also participating in the collectivity of the Indonesian television audience. But despite all that, I could not escape the awareness that Indonesian television was in most other regards divorced from my daily life. It was as if it was part of a private fantasy world, although sometimes talked about, never wholly shared with anyone else.

When I went for a holiday to Bali with my family in July 2000, we stayed for the first week in a hotel room with a television set. I lay on the bed for as much of that time as possible transfixed by the screen, flicking through the channels with the remote, and for that week Indonesian television suddenly seemed so real. Because whenever, under duress from my partner and two year old daughter, I switched off the TV and went out into the street, I felt myself surrounded by the outflow (the effluence) of television. People looked vaguely familiar as if they might have been watching too, (or had I been watching them?); many were speaking the same language people spoke on television; billboards and newspapers written in that language had pictures of sinetron stars hawking goods or promoting their TV programs; the child star, Joshua, was huge everywhere from TV to T-shirts and children's fashions; pop songs I'd seen on video clip shows or in the breaks between programmes, were playing on radios and in cassette stores; the brands I'd seen advertised on television lined the shelves of shops and supermarkets; an old man sold homemade cardboard wayang puppets of the TV super hero, Saras 008; and here and there in warung, variety shops, and hotel lobbies, I saw people watching the same television I'd just switched off. Television leaked into the street just like the street leaked into television, seamlessly in places, and each fed and consumed the other until they were one, producing what Stephen Heath (1990) is perhaps referring to when he speaks of television's ‘seamless

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3 Sinema elektronik – the generic term for Indonesian produced tele-dramas and soap-operas.
equivalence with social life’ (267). More certain is that it was a first-hand observation of the ‘leaky boundaries’ (Fiske 1989) of popular culture.

The reverie could never last. When holiday makers in Bali fly home they step off the plane still wearing their tie-dyed ‘happy pants’ and their hair in colourfully beaded plaits but soon, after a short period of transition, the habits of home make those vestiges of another time and place untenable and gradually they are removed. Likewise, the sense of participating in the collective practice of watching Indonesian television that I’d experienced while watching TV in Bali could not be wholly sustained in an environment that had different daily patterns and its own television. But the experience gave me an insight into both the difficulties of watching other people's television outside the national, cultural and linguistic borders of its imagined audience, and the benefits of it. The idea of seamlessness is key in both the difficulties and the benefits: on the one hand it is the seamlessness, the invisibility of television's connections with daily life and its taken for grantedness, that makes television difficult to pin down, and yet the fact of being an outsider makes that seamlessness apparent, allowing loose threads in the seam easier to spot and unpick. The other impression I took away with me was the concept of ‘effluence’ as a way of thinking about how television flows out into the places it purports to reflect and represent. Put another way, in the words of Hermann Bausinger:

> television or other media do not impart a slice of reality, in that they reproduce it in a slice-like and fragmented fashion, but rather that reality consists of that which has been mediated both by the media and by other things, and is constantly constructed anew. The content of television radiates out into the rest of reality (1984: 350).

John Ellis (1982), in the ‘Preliminaries’ to his Visible Fictions, describes as ‘insuperable’ the fundamental difficulties of writing about the television of another nation. ‘Broadcast TV, he writes:

> is the private life of a nation-state, defining the intimate and inconsequential sense of everyday life, forgotten quickly and incomprehensible for anyone who is outside its scope. This sense of privacy accruing to each nation state's broadcast TV is another problem for anyone writing about TV in general. It means that any research is difficult if it is research that aims to go beyond viewing and analysing individual programmes and series. To look at the whole phenomenon of broadcast TV in a particular country, both how its output works and how it intersects with the economic and social life of that country, it would be necessary to live there for an extended period of time (5) [my italics].

The claim that television is a nation-state's ‘private life’ could be usefully employed to support my earlier claim as to the voyeuristic nature of the research compiled here. But
resisting this temptation allows me to ask: what is so ‘private’ about it? Who is ‘inside’ and what, exactly, lies ‘outside the scope of broadcast TV when the footprint of a satellite television transmission does not conform exactly to the shape of the nation it is presumably intended for and instead ‘spills’ across its borders into neighbouring nation-states (such as the one I am a passport-carrying citizen of) where it can be freely enjoyed? By simply pushing the ‘on’ button on the television in my cramped, airless room and taking a seat, I was able to watch Indonesian television and thereby become part of its audience. When Visible Fictions was published in 1982, satellite technology was not as commonplace as it is today. Nor was discussion of cultural globalisation, or the internet and the prospects of broadband webcasting, and these are factors that immediately complicate Ellis’ notion of the national particularity of broadcast television. Satellite technology enabled me to watch Indonesian television daily without going to Indonesia, and the concept of globalisation has blurred the clear distinction between what lies inside and outside the scope of nations and ‘their’ television, at least it has in post-colonial modernities like Australia and Indonesia. Nations’ incorporation into a global system is seen largely in terms of the speeding up, and increase in volume, of ‘flows’ across borders.

As I have confessed, while watching Indonesian television I felt a lack, an inadequacy, was unsure that my membership of the audience fulfilled the conditions of the collectivity projected by the broadcasters. But if that projection, as Ien Ang (1991, 1995) and others have attempted to show, was on one level based only on the vagaries of ratings figures derived from a numerically tiny fraction of the target audience which in itself offers no concrete certainty of its actual entirety, what ‘it’ wants, and what uses and meanings are made of broadcasts, then isn't my membership, my use, of Indonesian television and what I take from it just as valid an element in that imaginary, invisible audience? Indonesian television became part of my ‘private life’ too. It entered my sub-conscious. Sometimes I dreamt about it. Because I can't speak for those I believe to be watching (especially because of the scant empirical evidence I have for what I believe to be the case), I am the only locus of meaning, although even that locus is uncertain, full of sometimes contradictory urges, moods, tendencies, influences, reasons for watching. Afterall, I may have derived pleasure, knowledge, even some stupefaction, from my engagement with Indonesian television as an audience member but I also had it in mind (sometimes shoved at the back of it) to write a thesis about it. ‘We are all’, as Stuart Hall (1986) has suggested, ‘in our heads, several different audiences at once’ (10).

What separates me from those I believe to be watching is, however, both where I live and my nationality. Changing just one of those things would render my position less problematic for Ellis; because, in his view, unless I can either be Indonesian or have lived in Indonesia ‘for an extended period of time’, my situation remains ‘insuperable’. On one level, this thesis is about my blundering through Indonesian television because it is devoid of an innate, lived
understanding of the inter-relationships between the texts of television and their intertextual references in social, historical, political and cultural ‘reality’.

And yet it is a critique of Ellis’ misgivings about the possibility of studying the television of another nation contained in John Hartley's frequently cited essay pertinently entitled *Invisible fictions* (1993) [first published in 1987] that guides this exploration. Hartley takes issue with Ellis’ claim (and a similar assertion by Anne Kaplan in an editorial written in 1983) that television is essentially national and therefore opaque to anyone ‘beyond its scope’, because the suggestion is based on the unfounded assumption that television and nations have distinct, pure essences. What makes the study of television in different nations ‘insuperable’, suggests Hartley, is ‘the kind of criticism that constructs as its object an essential form’ (1993: 163). Rather, it is far more productive, he goes on, ‘to speak of impurity’ (163).
Impurity

The notion of ‘impurity’ as it applies to television, the nation and their constitution of one another is a central assumption of this thesis. It is difficult to speak of either television or the nation, or the connections between them, without recourse to the ideas of impurity contained in intertextuality, ‘cannibalism’, and transnational flows, all of which evoke the transgression of borders as problematising the assertion of pure essences. Some of these ‘transgressions’
are clearly visible to anyone who watches television. The international trade in programmes as I have discussed, is the most obvious of these (see figure 1). Allied to this, and containing within it other forms of intertextual impurity, is the regenerative indigenisation of genres and formats, the cloning of syndicated gameshows (see Skovmand 1992), and the operations of International news wire services such as Reuters. Less immediately visible but fundamental to television as institution are cross border flows in technology, training, technical staff, management, finance and production.

Another term used to describe television's impurity that carries a better sense of being ‘up to the elbows in it’ is ‘dirtiness’. The term's application to television can be attributed to Hans Magnus Enzensberger, but once again it is in Hartley's work that the concept has been more fully developed. Enzensberger in his Constituents of a Theory of the Media (1970), a discussion of both the mobilising potential of the mass media and the Left's failure to harness that potential, notes: ‘The electronic media do away with cleanliness; they are by their nature “dirty”. That is part of their productive power. In terms of structure, they are anti-sectarian …’ (18). En route to this point, Enzensberger notes the tendency of the Left to recoil when faced with the media's ability to absorb and appropriate images and ideas ostensibly incommensurate with one another, and orient them toward their own ends:

Admittedly, when an office equipment firm can attempt to recruit sales staff with the picture of Che Guevara and the text We would have hired him, the temptation to withdraw is great. But fear of handling shit is a luxury a sewer-man cannot necessarily afford (18).

John Hartley (1983) has taken up the metaphor to illustrate how ‘dirtiness’ inflects the enterprise of television in every aspect of its operations, from the construction of its texts to its engagement with and representation of social, political and cultural practices, and those practices’ engagement with and representation of television.

The forms of TV representation are not specific to television; its discourses are produced, regulated and reproduced just as much off screen as they are on it; its institutionalization of these rather than those signifying practices cannot be explained by looking at the practices by themselves; and even its own programmes are made meaningful outside television itself, in newspapers, magazines [see figure 2], conversations, learned papers, etc. In short, television texts don't supply us with a warrant for considering them either as unitary or as structurally bounded into an inside or an outside. If TV has a distinctive feature, it is that it is a dirty category (63) [my brackets].

As Enzensberger (1970: 18) and Hartley (1993: 163) have both noted, in addition to being its most distinctive feature, ‘dirtiness’ is also among its most productive. Ellis himself notes, despite his conviction that nations and their television are discrete entities, that crossing
borders can be a productive experience for media theorists when he writes: ‘sudden exposure to the often bizarre practices of broadcast TV in another country can stimulate fresh thinking’ (1982: 5). He cites as an example the well-known case of Welshman Raymond Williams (1974) who ‘discovered’ the concept of television’s ‘flow’ when confronted with the unfamiliar spectacle of U.S. television in a Miami hotel room. Hartley (1993), in his critique of Ellis, seizes upon this as a glaring hole in Ellis’ own argument about the insuperable incomprehensibility of another nation's television:

transgressing the frontiers of the familiar, the national, produces culture shock, the bizarre, the alien, the inexplicable – which turns out to be the very condition for understanding, stimulating fresh thinking by breaking habitual bonds (164).

But the productivity of television’s impurity is not confined to its effect on media theorists nor is its impurity solely related to the trans-national character of the medium, although this is indeed an important feature of it. Notions of dirtiness, cannibalisation (television eats itself), effluence and intertextuality as I have mentioned also allude to the productive impurity of television's texts and practices.

Writing and researching a thesis, especially one about television, offers a perfect example of yet another dirty category. Scholarship with the aim of furthering knowledge in particular fields engages processes that are dirtier and more impure than many might care to admit. Direct quotation, interpretation, paraphrasing, cross referencing, all the while assiduously avoiding plagiarism or outright imitation, are all an essential part of the process of production of any academic work. Theses in their efforts to produce an original perspective, in part through the combination and interpretation of already existing texts, are distinctly intertextual, ‘mosaics of quotations’ (Kristeva 1986: 37), which together construct a narrative that is itself a contribution to the genre or cross referenced body of the discipline or interdisciplinary field of investigation. Other academic research in the Humanities and Social Sciences is also often an impure practice in which the neutrality of the researcher can never be declared outright, and the relationship between researcher and subject is often not as separate and distinct as the conventions of objective inquiry pretend.

Mark Hobart (1997, 2000) plunges head-first into the mire of impurity with productive results. On the one hand, his research, while ostensibly about television reception in mountain Bali, focuses on the interstices to show how television feeds into much wider channels of articulation where meanings are negotiated not so much through engagement with television texts themselves but at their juncture with other repositories of cultural knowledge and experience. The medium of Hobart's research is not strictly TV viewing (the television itself is not physically present in his narratives) but conversation in which the shared experience of television features as a resource and interpretive tool among others. Television becomes a way of thinking about Balinese Hindu prophecies and vice
versa. The divisions between them become indistinct. Nor are conventionally imposed barriers of academic discipline strictly adhered to in Hobart's work. His participation in the conversations on which much of his writing is based, he confesses, is not in the manner of detached uninvolvimento often claimed by ethnographers, but openly as both friend, researcher and employer (Hobart in conjunction with SOAS and STSI Denpasar established a small facility in Bali to record, transcribe, and digitise cultural performances broadcast on local television – see Hobart 2001), a mixed status that ‘runs counter to the ideal of neutral scientific observer who remains aloof from, and has no effect on, the people he or she studies’ (2000: 82). The very transparency of Hobart's complex relationship(s) with his already critically sophisticated ‘subjects’ has the effect of allowing his narratives to convey more than strict adherence to disciplinary convention would in one sense be capable of because it does not obscure our view of the place in which he sits. His work comes to emphasise the spatial, textual and interpersonal relationships that constitute a field of study therefore enabling him to include himself within his own frame of reference.

If audiences are now generally acknowledged as incomprehensible unless understood to have an infinite range of ways of using and relating to the medium, thus complicating the notion of the whole, ‘mass’ audience, then the ‘whole phenomenon of television’ must also be understood as containing myriad elements that are each as significant in isolation as are the nuanced behaviours of real audience members. Strangely, an acceptance of this understanding of the audience seemed to coincide with the idea that watching television was an indiscriminant, impartial activity. The TV was switched on and allowed to flow through the myriad patterns of daily lives. The rediscovery of more discrete uses for the medium led in turn to the acknowledgement of occasional unified behaviour on the part of audiences, referred to more specifically at this time as publics gathered around ‘media events’, or fan cultures around soap operas and cult series. People, according to this version of television use, were absorbed in the realms of particular programmes and became not a scattered, dispersed group of individuals, each their own audiences inside their heads, but conscious of belonging to a viewing community, a ‘public’ sharing experiences, tastes, and attributes.

These issues crop up periodically throughout the thesis because, although this is not a thesis expressly about the rest of the Indonesian television audience I believe to be watching, it embarks from the understanding that any mention of television carries within it an implicit evocation of an audience. My own theoretical position on the range of audience behaviour adheres to a lifetime of experience as a television viewer. Sometimes people such as me watch television indiscriminately. We switch it on, watch, don't watch, channel surf, leave the room, talk over the top of it with other people in the room, turn the sound down to better hear what someone else is saying to us or to try and discern what the commotion is outside, eat in front of it, make love in front of it, fall asleep in front of it, read in front of it, play with the children in front of it, tell the children to be quiet and shoo the dog away from in front of it so that we can be more glued to it (etc, etc). And that's
just during the ad breaks. These are all examples of what Bausinger (1984) has referred to as ‘parergic media consumption’ (349), activities subsidiary to television viewing perhaps but never subordinate or dependent upon it. At other times people such as me leave the television dormant until a favourite programme is about to start. During either of those modes of engagement I sometimes but rarely feel myself to be part of an invisible audience existing beyond the loungeroom. However, programmes either caught accidentally through indiscriminant viewing or watched as a fan frequently become topics of conversation with other members of the television audience. And transfixion with ‘media events’, especially the doom-laden spectacles of ‘Gulf War’ and ‘September 11’ coverage, has sometimes produced such an acute loss of self and daily routine that membership of the audience has been my only solace.

The point is I've never found the need to look beyond my own personal experience in these matters. Although, like Evans-Pritchard, I like to watch, I see no reward in watching others watch. That I've allowed myself the confidence to regard my own viewing habits as representative of audience behaviour, however, owes a debt to empirical studies: I've yet to read a description of a television audience in which I have not recognised myself.

The thesis: a brief explanation

Any study of Indonesian television must begin by acknowledging two fundamental questions: What is television? What is Indonesia? The question ‘what is television?’ is the broad inquiry of the entire thesis. As I have already asserted, one of the most notable characteristics of television is that it is ‘impure’, ill-defined and hard to get a fix on because it flows out into the world as much as the world flows into it. Where television stops and where it starts is moot. Throughout the thesis I will emphasise this characteristic by focussing on points of contact between those two flows, the confluence of flows in and out. A major vein of information about television that also constitutes an important aspect of the entire phenomenon, and an example of these flows, lies in newspaper and magazine articles. These I stress are not ‘secondary’ resources, but an integral part of watching television. Earlier academic studies in Indonesian and English have also provided an important source of background information and suggested different ways of watching and thinking about television in Indonesia. Media commentators and academics are as thick on the ground in Indonesia as anywhere else (perhaps more so) in as wide a range of voices and points of view. The Indonesian daily press, and journals aimed at more specialist academic readerships are rich with articles about television (programmes, policy, personalities, business) the currency of which is often extended through edited volumes or the publication of retrospective collections of columns by particular commentators (see for example Veven SP Wardhana, 1997c).

Other academic texts in English have similarly contributed to my knowledge of the topic of Indonesian television. Philip Kitley's essays on Indonesian television, and his published
thesis, *Television, Nation, and Culture in Indonesia* (2000) have provided an especially important source of information in English about the development of television from its beginnings until the mid 1990s. Although my thesis takes a very different approach to the study of the same topic, it nevertheless draws liberally from the details Kitley has amassed, hopefully without unnecessarily replicating his analysis. The work closes shortly before Suharto's resignation ended an era of both Indonesian political, social and cultural life, and forced a reassessment of body of work the New Order had inspired in academic disciplines outside Indonesia, notably Australia.

Simon Philpot's ‘critique of the critique’ of Indonesian politics, *Rethinking Indonesia* (2000) draws attention to the Orientalist pre-conceptions inherent in much of that analysis. Philpot is particularly critical of the regularity with which commentators have tended to draw cultural conclusions when faced with the task of explicating the features of political power in Indonesia, or assessing the ability of a modern ‘civil society’ to emerge from the residue of feudalism deemed to be at its core. Glib allusions to Suharto behaving like a ‘Javanese king’ or to the political system under the New Order as akin to an Indonesian *wayang* shadow-puppet theatre with the president as the *dalang* behind the scenes, continued to stand in for more thoroughgoing political analysis in the media and some academic circles right up to the moment of Suharto's resignation. The reliance on these sorts of cultural allusions to explain impossibly complex histories and processes, he notes, most usually end at the borders of the West.

Krishna Sen and David Hill's *Media, Culture and Politics in Indonesia* (2000) presents a lively overview of the media and its popular cultural content in Indonesia under Suharto, and includes a chapter on television. Although published post-Suharto when radical changes had already taken place, effectively overturning the political situation in which their research was couched, it was in its own way part of the counter charge against the too easy assessments of Indonesian government control over channels of information and popular entertainments that allowed others to emphasise the authoritarian and totalitarian aspects of New Order rule. Sen and Hill instead describe the richness of cultural life existing despite the regime's aspirations for control. Whether consciously part of a resistance to the government, or more unconsciously unruly and transgressive in the ways popular culture is want to be, the popular media is shown to defy easy incorporation into state agendas.

Yet what is distinctly Indonesian about Indonesian television is a question that is complicated by another kind of flow (‘signal spill’), one that enabled me to watch it so effortlessly in Darwin, Australia. Indonesian television is not confined to Indonesian national territory. If it has a particular location, it is a place roughly equivalent in size to a small sedan circling the earth in geo-stationary orbit (that is, at a speed that matches that of the earth's rotation) at 113° East, 22,300 miles above the equator from which Darwin and Jakarta are roughly equidistant.
I have divided the thesis into two sections: ‘Watching Culture’ and ‘Watching Polities’. This is not because I believe a clear separation exists between Culture and Politics. To the contrary, the body of the thesis beneath these headings sets out implicitly to undermine that artificial division by drawing attention to how thoroughly the discourses of culture and politics are interwoven. Official acknowledgement of their interconnection is also clearly apparent in attempts to regulate the content of television in Indonesia. Such divisions are nevertheless maintained in the everyday taxonomies of media producers, audiences and critics as manifested by the arbitrary separation between ‘Information’ and ‘Entertainment’, and ‘factual’ and ‘fictional’ programming on television, where the former refers to the broadcast of resources for the ‘public sphere’ and the latter to those consumed in the ‘private sphere’. There is a great deal of overlap and intertextual traffic between them. All are based on conventions of narrativity and could therefore be subjected to the same analytical approach, that is, from the perspective of how their stories are told. But in the sense that they rely upon quite different modes of address which in turn call upon particular modes of engagement, the naturalised distinction between them remains a stumbling block for any attempt to discuss the subtleties of their imbrication with one another. I have chosen not to dwell in a pointed way on their interconnections, but it is my hope that over the course of the thesis an impression of them ‘leaks’ through.

In section one I set out to explore the effect that the discourses of Indonesian national identity – as a determination of cultural cohesiveness for the purposes of political sovereignty – have had on television’s content. Throughout its history in Indonesia, television has been thought of by governments primarily as a tool of nation building (see Kitley 2000). But along the way to serving this agenda, television has had to deal with conflicting issues arising from the international nature of its operations, and the wandering attention of some sectors of the audience. In the first instance, schedules since the beginning have relied on a large percentage of cheaper imported content. Although there is ample evidence to suggest that many imported programmes have been enthusiastically received by Indonesian audiences, their presence was, like the advertising that initially supplied a significant proportion of funding for TVRI, regarded as a necessary evil rather than a concession to popular tastes or pragmatic financial calculations.

From the mid to late 1970s, the decision to incorporate television into Indonesia’s own geostationary satellite communications system Palapa⁴ as the most efficient and cost effective way to instantly gain national coverage for the purposes of education and the promotion of rural development programmes embraced technology that soon after began to carry a range of trans-national broadcasters. These transnational incursions, frequently at odds with official formulations of national identity and the need for media control, contributed to

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⁴ The name ‘Palapa’ comes from an oath taken by Gajah Mada, Prime Minister of the Majapahit empire who vowed not to rest until all the islands in the archipelago were united under him (see Cribb 1992, Kitley 2000).
a more diverse range of cultural affiliations that complicated the government's prescriptive view of what it meant to be, and behave as, an Indonesian.

The cultural distinctions that Indonesian governments and cultural critics have attempted to draw between Indonesian cultural and social values and those of the rest of the world, particularly those of an essentialised West, pre-date the establishment of television. I have taken one pre-independence example of attempts to articulate this distinction from the pages of the literary journal *Poedjangga Baroe* in the late 1930s. The search for representative forms of Indonesian cultural expression in this case gave rise to a heated debate that centred on the hybrid popular music genre, *kroncong*, a form that had gained substantial popularity and critical disdain through the emergence of the mass media of cinema, radio broadcasting and the recording industry in the first part of the 20th century.

The dominant position of imported films in Indonesian cinemas was similarly a cause for concern for many members of cultural and political organisations in the 1950s, when the ubiquity of especially American media and commercial culture was interpreted more precisely as the advance guard of foreign political and economic domination (see Sen 1985). I have used President Sukarno's tour of the United States in 1956, and his speech to a group of Hollywood executives in which he proclaimed their creations 'revolutionary', to begin discussion of the ambivalence with which the presence of foreign media products has sometimes been regarded. Allowing things to be seen and heard is a potent capability of cinema and television. This, by short-circuiting a reliance on literacy, has demonstrated the potential to perforate barriers between nations, different political systems, and the divisions between socio-economic groups based on access to formal education that have sometimes been erected to contain them. The rather convoluted debate that took place toward the end of the New Order period on the relative merits of dubbing or subtitling imported television programmes can be seen as an extension of this. While the New Order achieved a level of success in its commitment to mass education, the barrier afforded by foreign languages offered another opportunity to limit access to 'foreign' values.

In addition to the presence of imported media products, the steady development of domestic commercial television in the last decade of New Order rule brought about new challenges to the official discourse of national culture in the form of a more consumerist spin on many of the same institutions and symbols the government had used in attempts to unite the nation and achieve a sense of national identity. Advertising's use of these tropes of nationhood opened up new associations and created potentially destabilising opportunities for palimpsestuous readings. This emphasised the intertextuality of advertising and its effortless appropriation of sometimes incongruous imagery and subject matter. My focus on examples of advertising in this and the following section is based on an appreciation of them as media products in themselves, not solely as instruments for the promotion of goods, services and public awareness campaigns. They also belong to a textual system that straddles information
and entertainment. While evidence for the instrumentality of advertising has always been in serious doubt, their impact on the look and ‘flow’ of commercial broadcasts, and the aesthetic values and narrative sophistication of many, is certain.

In section two of the thesis, ‘Watching Polities’, I examine the potential of television to contribute to the political resources of the audience through its ability to provoke public debate about the political needs of a society. If section one is based on the speculative presence of an audience, section two points to an imagined public that is produced in the confluence of the practices and agendas of media producers and those of media consumers, a confluence that at times renders indistinct the line of demarcation between them. Once again the points of entry into my attempts to understand these flows are in events lying on the verge between television's mediations and lived reality: in the student demonstrations in the lead-up to Suharto's resignation at which both the presence and absence of television crews was critiqued by an ambiguous parody of news gathering practices and the manner in which they frame reality; in attempts by the government to exert authority over television's coverage of the rioting that followed the gunning down of several students at Trisakti University; and in television's appropriation of these events in the form of an insurance company sponsored variety show that screened later that year. In the final part of section two, I take a close look at the television advertisements for political parties and public awareness campaigns that formed such a prominent feature of television broadcasts in the lead-up to the nation's first openly contested multi-party general election since 1955. In these, the divisions between information and entertainment, commerce, culture and politics are finally dissolved for the promotion of popular involvement in political processes, a display that also promotes television as having the potential to function as one of its most effective allies, contributing to the process in ways that are frequently overlooked.
Background

Television in Indonesia has progressed through a number of identifiable phases since regular broadcasts began in 1962. These are principally a reflection of the major changes in political leadership that have taken place in Indonesia in the forty years since then: the fall of President Sukarno in 1965–68 and President Suharto in 1998 being the most dramatic of these. But the changing shape of television has also been the product of ongoing technological and economic developments, and shifts in the ways government, business and audiences have sought to use television, each sometimes in conflict with others. The major changes to television that created the context of this study took place between 1989–1995 when marketisation of the industry ended the government monopoly on television broadcasting that had existed since its inception in the early 1960s. During this period, five privately-owned, commercially-sponsored stations (televisi swasta) went to air. The establishment of these stations could be seen as a direct product of the government's diversification of what had previously been an oil economy, following the collapse of oil prices in 1981–2 and again in 1986, to promote manufacturing, the production of consumer goods and private enterprise (see Robison 1990, chapt 5). With this reorientation in the way the nation fuelled its economy came far-reaching social changes. A vastly expanded urban ‘middle-class’ with education, relative wealth, ‘privatised’ domestic spaces and access to cultural experiences at a remove from those promoted by the government's conception of national culture were the target audience for televisi swasta stations and the advertising they screened. The indicators that drove televisi swasta, ratings, competition between stations, and perceptions of audience demand, were a world away from the original conception of television as a tool to promote national unity and an officially conceived homogenous national culture.

TV broadcasting in Indonesia began three times in 1962: first, with a transmission from the Presidential palace on the occasion of Independence Day celebrations; then one week later on 24 August, the date now commemorated as TVRI's (Televisi Republik Indonesia) official anniversary, with the telecast of the opening of the Asian Games which took place at the newly-completed Senayan stadium in Jakarta. The games continued until 12 September. TVRI covered them extensively (Kitley 2000: 31). At the close of the competition broadcasts ceased for a time because no thought had been given to how the station might operate on a day-to-day basis without the lynch-pin of a spectacular occasion or event (Kitley 2000: 22). Then, three weeks later it began again for the third and last time. Daily broadcasts have continued since.

Despite Sukarno's stated goal of using the new medium for the purposes of education and to gain mass support for the government's political and economic development, the economic climate into which television was launched was not conducive to ‘mass communication’. Figures on television set ownership around the time of its official launch vary but are usually estimated to have been around 10,000 (Alfian and Chu 1981: 22). While both
the reach of TVRI's signal and the number of television sets present in Indonesia at that
time would suggest that few had the opportunity to watch, it can be assumed that the
ratio of viewers per set during television's inaugural broadcasts was enormous. John Hartley
and Tom Q'Regan's essay (1987) on the launch of television in Perth, Australia, mentions
that although there were only 3,300 televisions operating on the first night of television
broadcasting, around 70,000 ‘jostled and joked their way into the picture’ (229). Even
with that ratio of viewers for each set (about 23:1) the number of viewers witnessing the
launch of television in Indonesia in and around Jakarta and Bogor may have approached
a quarter of a million. A large number of these televisions were also set up in public
spaces around the capital and these could have conceivably attracted far greater numbers.
As Philip Kitley (2000) points out, the presence of these public sets in the Indonesian
capital highlighted a fundamental difference between the launch of television in Perth in
1961 and Jakarta one year later, and between the different roles and uses forecast for
television (32). In Jakarta, those without access to privately owned televisions gathered
around public sets installed by the government, while in Perth people pulled up chairs to
watch through shop windows where televisions were operating to promote sales, alongside
other modern electrical goods. Adjacent to the glowing screen was the clearly displayed
price tag. Television was consequently launched as a boon to entertainment and information
in the private sphere. The promotion of television in Australia centred on the acquisition
of the set itself as the most modern and modernising household appliance. In Indonesia,
however, television was promoted as an affirmation of nationhood and modernity. Television
was technically a creature of the Asian Games. Ideologically, it also became associated with
development, urbanism and modernity.

The building of Asian Games facilities and the infrastructure of television were both part of
the project of demolition, renewal and construction that had gripped Jakarta in the previous
two years. As Indonesia 1961, an official English language publication of the Indonesian
Department of Foreign Affairs proudly proclaimed:

The toil has begun. Some projects are already being executed in several parts
of the country. In the capital narrow streets are widened; old buildings are
torn down, and new ones, larger and taller, take their places, while whole
suburbs come into being. Djakarta's face is changing; in eight years it will
have changed completely (1961: 90) [my emphasis].
Figure 3: Hotel Indonesia, with 11 of its 14 stories completed in early March 1961, is intended for tourists in particular. The road outside is being widened and a decorative garden being made in the traffic circle there.

Television was one of the plumes that rose from the bulldozed rubble of the past: part of the phoenix whose other components included the 14 storey Hotel Indonesia, the Indonesian National Bank building (both modernist structures in the stripped classical style), ‘suburbs’,
wide thoroughfares and numerous, massive, social-realist statues and public monuments. In a discussion of plans to build one such monument on the original site of Indonesia's proclamation of Independence, *Indonesia 1961* states:

Being therefore historical, the site was just the right one according to national sentiment for the ceremonial commencement of the implementation of the development plan. The old building there will be demolished as if to mark the close of a certain period of the Revolution; and on its ashes, so to speak, there will rise a huge monumental building, to be called the Blueprint Building. This is designed to be an expressive symbol of the effort of the nation, a beacon for a new period, the socio-economic phase of the Indonesian Revolution (75).

Emphatically, then, monuments of this sort were ‘beacons’ intended to conduct a dialogue between the present and the future by acting as a point of closure with the past – a closure effected through the past's literal demolition. Only after the preservation and rearticulation of the past's symbolic gestures, sites and objects, could the foundations be poured for the next, sequential ‘phase’ in the projects of Development, Revolution, and Modernity. As Benedict Anderson (1978) has noted in his tandem critique of newspaper cartoons and Jakarta's monuments, rather than simply see this period of reconstruction as a quest for foreign and domestic status, it should be recognised that ‘monuments are a type of speech (that) face two ways in time … (They are a commemoration of) events or experiences of the past, but at the same time they are intended, in their all-weather durability, for posterity’ (301).

Monuments, then, turn to face the future and it is in their company and their orientation that the original impetus of television also needs to be seen, as a pointer to the direction forward, of advance, and presumably, as part of the ‘socio-economic phase of the (continuing) Indonesian revolution’. In the language of Sukarno's Guided Democracy, this entailed the struggle of the Newly Emerging Forces against the Old Established Forces. The erection of the transmission tower at the stadium was, as with these other monuments and commemorative halls, the concretisation of the idea and principle of ‘struggle’: the will and wherewithal to achieve something against seemingly insurmountable odds. At that time, in Sukarno's worldview, the independent nation's attempts to carve out a niche in an international powerscape dominated by imperialistic political and economic forces demanded a new kind of inspiration and perspiration that was indeed revolutionary. Information Minister Ali Murtopo, in his 1982 dedication to TVRI's first twenty years, an address in which he anthropomorphically periodised television as an institution with a childhood, a youth and, at 20 years old, a young adulthood, looked back to the physical struggle that gave birth to the station, and wrote emotively of the raw human effort required to hoist the station's transmission antenna with ropes and pulleys atop the concrete tower adjacent to the stadium at Senayan. After an entire day of labour the antenna was finally installed at midnight on 23 August, just hours before the games were due to commence. This was a job
he points out that was usually, in the West, accomplished with only a fraction of the sweat and human determination through the use of helicopters (cited Subrata et al 1982: 15).

When television resumed broadcasting after the conclusion of the games for a time the medium continued to bear the characteristics of a public monument because its transmissions were restricted in scope and range. While broadcasting can be regarded as having the characteristic ability to communicate through space and across great distances messages that monuments can only bear through time, the lack of sufficient funds meant that the reach of TVRI remained confined to the capital and nearby Bogor. The prohibitive cost of television sets meant it was likely that a broader cross section and larger numbers of the population had regularly seen Jakarta's monuments up close than had watched television. The expressive range of television broadcasts was another source of similarity, with the few descriptions of broadcasts available emphasising that airtime was weighted toward the didacticism of speeches, political rallies and parades (see Kitley 2000: 43–44). But perhaps this too was partly an effect of the limited funds available for the service. Under these conditions, TVRI was incapable of seriously expanding its audience whether through political will or audience demand.

Although commercial enterprises sought to use the new medium to promote themselves and their products, and in 1963 the decision was taken to accept some advertising and sponsorship as a source of much needed revenue, commercials were limited by both the political and economic climate of Indonesia in the early 1960s. There was also little need for advertising in times of such scarcity. In 1965, advertising accounted for less than 20% of TVRI's income (Anderson 1980: 1257).

In the days following the coup of the night of 30 September 1965, TVRI broadcast images from Lubang Buaya, the ‘Crocodile Hole’, where the murdered generals’ bodies had been dumped. In the weeks that followed, television played a role along with other media in the dissemination of information and disinformation that has come to characterise the numerous tangled versions of events that led eventually, in 1967, to the transfer of power to Suharto.

Perhaps the most immediate effect the events of the military coup/counter-coup had on television broadcasts was its loss of Sukarno, ‘the prima donna of Indonesian television’ (Alfian and Chu 1981: 22). As Saya Shiraishi (1997) notes, the rhetorically brilliant Sukarno whose ‘deep baritone voice’ had dominated radio transmissions and whose presence had successfully made the transition to the audio-visual medium of television was replaced by Suharto, ‘the knowingly smiling’ but silent general. Of Suharto's first appearance in October 1965, she writes that:

the state funeral for the six army generals killed in the coup was broadcast. President Sukarno did not attend the funeral. On the TV screen, Nasution, whose daughter was fatally wounded during the attack and died soon after
the funeral, made the emotional speech. Soeharto appeared on TV, standing in silence behind Nasution, with his dark sunglasses. The age of the orator Sukarno was about to end (91).

Just as people all over Indonesia had come to recognise the modulations of Sukarno's voice during World War II through the extensive radio network established by the Japanese occupation and the ‘singing trees’ of speakers set up in public squares and market places, under the New Order and the age of television Indonesians would become familiar with the image of Suharto's smile (Shiraishi 1997: 91).

With the assumption of power by the New Order, television entered a new phase and, although most changes were not instantaneous, by 1968 the government under President Suharto had registered a commitment to expand the station's infrastructural capacity, while also seeking to satisfy and potentially enlarge the audience through an increased emphasis on entertainment programming. Economic policies implemented to attract foreign investment also led to cheaper imports (including television sets) and the new ideological environment dismantled barriers that had previously impeded the importation of cultural products especially from the United States, at that time by far the world's largest exporter of television programmes. Advertising came to play an increasingly prominent role in the financing of television and in the overall look of its broadcasts. As the expansion of television's signals began to increase in the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, so too did the government's concern about the impact of television on a population fractured along religious and socio-economic lines and that broadly defined by the rural-urban divide.

These fissures tore open during the Malari (MAlepetaka Lima-belas JanurARI – The January 15 Disaster) riots of 1974 which were sparked by the official visit to Jakarta of Japan's Prime Minister, Tanaka. Japan was then one of the nation's most important foreign investors and country-of-origin of many of its consumer goods. The Indonesian economy's reliance on this foreign investment and the increasingly conspicuous display of promotions for luxury goods were for many critics of the regime an indication that the material gains promised by New Order policies had only succeeded in further enriching an affluent, urban elite close to the government. Two enormous billboards for Toyota and Sanyo were the focus of demonstrations in the weeks leading up to the visit, and protesters pointedly hoisted a large Indonesian flag to the top of a Japanese built skyscraper (Anderson 1980: 1265). Anti-Japanese sentiment was partly responsible for the sense of frustration expressed by Malari and rival Generals Sumitro and Murtopo were also suspected of fanning the flames of the unrest to play out a power struggle between the two but perhaps more important was the conspicuousness of an economic elite who seemed to prosper while conditions for the majority of the population deteriorated. As advertising images were held to have played a part in sparking the upheaval of Malari, one attempt to manage popular dissatisfaction with government policies following the riots was to ban the broadcast and public display of
advertisements for luxury cars and housing estates, examples of the things that seemed to provide clearest evidence of the unequal distribution of wealth. That the regulations applied only to audio-visual advertising and billboards, and not to print media advertisements, suggests that in addition to a mistrust of the power of the image, it was the public display of these images and their effect on the non-newspaper-reading public, that is, the illiterate and semi-literate members of the population, that was to be avoided. Another method of control was to ban those publications held to have been too critical of government policy in the lead up to the rioting. There were also moves to establish rules of conduct ensuring government officials, including those from the military, presented to the public a more austere image of themselves and their lifestyles. The concept of the ‘floating mass’ put forward by the new Minister of Information, Ali Murtopo, which proscribed all political activity between five-yearly elections was also intended to limit further opportunities for social unrest (see Schwartz 1994: 32–33). All these measures were the heralds of new plans for television in the third major stage of its development that followed the launch of the first Palapa series geostationary satellites in 1976.

Despite reservations about its possible negative side effects (see Kitley 2000: 46–54 for details of criticisms levelled at plans for a national satellite system) satellite technology was chosen above other methods of creating a nationwide communication network as a cost effective way of instantly linking the scattered islands and regions of its territory. Transmitting television through the satellite network meant that it suddenly acquired the potential to reach around 78 million people, close to 60% of the nation's population (Kitley 2000: 61–62). TVRI's broadcast area immediately leaped from 75,600 square kilometres to 212,000 and the number of registered TV sets climbed for the first time to above 500,000. By 1979 this figure had climbed to over 1.5 million (see Chu, Alfian and Schramm 1991: 44, Kitley 2000: 58).

It was no longer an urban medium. Once television was hooked up through the system in the second half of the 1970s, television was thrust to the coal-face of relations between government and the rakyat (the people, the masses). Television became for the first time a medium whose audience was increasingly rural, and frequently without much formal education. In the late 1970s and through the 1980s, the government set out to harness the benefits of the expanded broadcast reach and altered demographic make-up of the audience. Television came to be treated more as a tool of education and rural development but also, through the government's more closely checked monopoly over its broadcasts, it became an apparatus of containment, a formulation that held TVRI in dubious tension throughout the remainder of its monopoly as the nation's television broadcaster. TVRI from the late 1970s occupied the category of ‘development media’. Theories about the usefulness of the media to ‘Third World’ development were fuelled by heated UNESCO debates around the issues of media imperialism and the ‘free flow’ of information between nations. These led in turn to measures to implement a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO),
set out in the MacBride Report, *One World Many Voices* (UNESCO 1980) and, soon after, to the United State's abandonment of the organisation in protest over what its delegates saw as attacks on its freedom to distribute media and cultural products and the rights of people all over the world to watch them. The New Order's adoption of the terms of development media and of the ‘free but responsible’ *Pancasila* press, although frequently considered evidence of the regime's authoritarian and totalitarian urges, should be read in conjunction with these debates and by then well-established academic theories about the developmental role of broadcasting in the ‘underdeveloped’ world. The terms of conflict around these issues was frequently axiomatic and centred on the disjunction between Western notions of ‘state propaganda’, and ‘totalitarianism’, and ‘Third-World’ nations’ efforts to deliver ‘state education’ and rural development programmes to disparate and far flung populations.

Yet, an early dismissal of the ability of television, throughout the ‘developing’ world, to deliver educational and other development needs was the medium's frequent reliance on commercial revenue and imported content. In Indonesia, after attempting for several years to control the broadcast of advertisements by programming them into blocks so that they could be excluded from satellite transmissions to rural areas, television commercials were finally banned entirely in 1981 in an effort to consolidate TVRI's development mission. This had the effect of releasing television and its discourses entirely into the hands of New Order agendas (Kitley 2000: 68) but once again was a move supported by dominant contemporary assumptions about the predatory nature of advertising, the development needs of the newly independent nations, and debate in international forums about the media's ability to serve development (see for example, Chu, Alfian and Schramm 1991 and issues of the journal *Media Asia* throughout this period).

While TVRI's entire audience was not necessarily held in thrall following the station's more thorough moulding to reflect government policy, the station's monopoly left viewers ostensibly without alternatives. Despite constant complaints from the public about the station's nightly newscasts and the more didactic form of other shows introduced through the 1980s to fulfill television's official educative and developmentalist orientation (see Kitley 2000), the boredom and scepticism of many audience members appears to have done little to force the government to ease its authority over programmes and schedules in the search for more popular material. Soon however, the availability of domestic video and direct broadcast satellite (DBS) transmissions emanating from outside Indonesia increased the potential for audience revolt. The wealthier urban sector of the audience in particular were turning increasingly to the pleasures of VCRs and satellite television, just as transnational satellite station operators were turning ever more ardentlly toward the lucrative promise of Asia's millions, in particular, but not exclusively, its expanding middle classes.

The increasing availability of domestic VHS and Beta video equipment and their compact and transportable tapes led worldwide to a reassessment of assumptions about national
broadcast television and the predictability of audience behaviour (see Boyd and Staubhaar 1985). Home video technology is said to have led directly to the licensing of Malaysia's first commercial station, TV3, in 1983 (Karthigesu 1990; Boyd and Staubhaar 1985). And it was TV3 that large numbers of the Indonesian audience in regions close to Malaysia – North East Sumatra and Kalimantan – were found to be tuned to during a tour of the regions by TVRI's director Ishadi SK. (Kitley 2000: 220–221). This shock discovery was attributed to both the weakness of TVRI's signal (following Ishadi's official report the signal to these regions was boosted), and to the relative attraction of its programming. But in addition to the audience's quest for clear reception and entertainment, it can be argued that the attraction to TV3, at least in North East Sumatra around Medan, was (and continues to be) based on a strong sense of Malay identity that looks away from Jakarta to face across the Straits of Malacca, the shipping-lane that only narrowly separates two Malay coasts sharing bonds of history, ethnicity, language, culture and migration.

The Indonesian government's decision in the 1970s to expand its national telecommunications network through satellite technology and incorporate broadcasting into that network, perhaps paradoxically implicated the domestic medium in a transnational mode of transmission and reception. Philip Kitley (2000) vividly describes the hoped for metaphorical effect of Palapa thus:

The fragmented, far-flung archipelago is unified in a seamless electronic net that annihilates space and imposes its own time, drawing the vastness and diversity of Indonesia into a whole, structuring for the periphery a clear and constant fix on the center (82).

However, the transnational nature of satellite broadcasting was also highlighted by the Indonesian government's own decision to recoup costs by leasing transponders on Palapa to foreign broadcasters. The ‘open-skies’ policy of 1986 that allowed Indonesians to legally own and use their own satellite dishes as long as this was conducted in a responsible manner that would not conflict with the projects of national unity and security was similarly an indication that the government was aware of the difficulties, or impossibility, of policing access to the transmissions of a technology whose ‘space annihilating’ characteristics it was itself exploiting. Afterall, Palapa's national mission was to forge common, unifying links across linguistic and ethnic divides, and to conquer distance within Indonesian territory. Yet, rather than outright acquiescence to a flood of foreign transmissions into Indonesian national space (which was, in any case, barely a trickle in 1986 compared to the explosion in the decade to come), the decision to allow Indonesians to own and operate their own DBS television receiving equipment at risk of them tuning into foreign broadcasts also took into account a growing class-cultural division; that is, between a predominantly urban, cosmopolitan sector of the population who could afford satellite dishes, the cost and availability of which was then extremely prohibitive, and the majority who could not. The urban cosmopolitan class was not the sector the government was paternally predisposed
to protect. They already had access to foreign media and cultural values through overseas education and travel and were more likely to have a working knowledge of English. There was perhaps also a sense that this was the sector that had most clearly benefited from the New Order's economic policies and were least likely to require guidance or to threaten the status quo. Allowing limited access to a choice of television stations through the ‘open-sky policy’ was thus a controlled way of compensating for a growing rising class dissatisfaction with domestic programming which had come to focus more on rural development programmes following the launch of Palapa.

This rising cosmopolitan class, although still a minority in terms of the entire Indonesian population, had begun to expand in both numbers and economic influence as a result of government policies launched in the early 1980s aimed at the diversification and privatisation (swastanisasi) of the economy. The eventual decision to licence private, commercial stations (televisi swasta) was, I would argue, directly related to these policies.

Initially, the government attempted to maintain TVRI's monopoly on the national audience by restricting the audience reach of televisi swasta: firstly, through the demand that the first channel to be granted a licence, RCTI (Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia), encode its signal, making it available only to subscribers who could afford the monthly fee and the cost of a decoder; and secondly by designating them Limited Broadcast Stations (SST – Stasiun Saluran Terbatas), their licence restricting them to designated metropolitan areas. RCTI broadcast to Jakarta and environs and later gained permission to set up a relay to Bandung. Its sister station SCTV (Surya Citra Televisi Indonesia) was restricted to Surabaya and later expanded to include Denpasar. Anteve (Cakrawali Andalas Televisi) was granted a licence for Lampung in South Sumatra. This policy of localism for commercial broadcasts was, however, short-lived. Permission was granted for station TPI (Televisi Pendidikan Indonesia – Indonesian Educational Television) to utilise TVRI's network during the daytime (on weekdays TVRI's broadcasts commenced in the late afternoon) ostensibly in order to carry out its educational mission. But the station also carried advertisements and this led to pressure on the government from rival stations to allow them access to the same audience. In addition, RCTI and SCTV had meanwhile begun to exchange programmes between themselves and their subsidiary stations via Palapa, thereby making their broadcasts available to anyone with access to a satellite dish and in effect establishing a de facto national network distinctly at odds with their SST licences.

Requests by the government to desist were largely ignored. Not long afterwards, in 1992, the government agreed that from the following year stations would be granted permission to establish their own national networks. With this, the very concept of the nation and its articulation was no longer the closely guarded monopoly of government agendas and it came to be appropriated by a diversity of commercial interests.
That the government appeared to buckle so readily can be attributed to the identity of the station owners: all licences were held by presidential family members or those in other ways close to the government. RCTI was the concern of two diversified conglomerates, Bimantara and Rajawali. The latter had applied for a broadcast licence in 1987 but this application was rejected. It was only when it was joined by Bimantara, the company headed by Suharto's second son, Bambang Trihatmodjo that the bid was finally successful. Bimantara's other integrated interests included telecommunications, real estate and suburban housing developments, food and beverages, petro-chemicals, and banking (see *SWA* 5(11) August 1995; * Asiaweek* 12 Apr 1996). SCTV was a jointly run operation between Bimantara affiliates and President Suharto's foster brother, Sudwikatmono (although this is perhaps an overly simplistic description of the byzantine and ever changing nature of SCTV's joint ownership). TPI was controlled by Siti Hardijanti Rukmana, better known as Mbak Tutut, Suharto's oldest daughter whose other major interests included toll roads, property and banking. Anteve was owned by Bakrie and Sons a diversified *Pribumi* (indigenous Indonesian as opposed to Sino-Indonesian) company whose establishment predates the New Order. This was the only station not controlled by the company of someone close to the President. Bakrie was nevertheless a prominent Golkar member and chairperson of KADIN, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (see MacIntyre 1991: 40–56 for background on KADIN’s influence on government economic policies). The last station licensed under the New Order was Indosiar, or IVM (*Indosiar Visual Mandiri*), established by Liem Siow Liong and his Salim Group a diversified conglomerate whose interests include food and beverages (including majority control over flour milling) and cement. Liem Siow Liong was among Indonesia's wealthiest entrepreneurs. His close personal and business relationship with President Suharto began when he was contracted to quartermaster Suharto's Diponegoro Division during the struggle for independence (see Vatikiotis 1993: 178).

The details of ownership were an important aspect of the growth of the private, commercial television business under the New Order but it is not one I will emphasise in this thesis. Media ownership is at issue throughout the world, nowhere more so than in Australia where detailed histories of the Packer and Murdoch dynasties provide perhaps greater scope for a study of collusion between the media and government (see Chadwick 1989 for a chronology of close contact between the two). This is something that is often ignored when it comes to pointing an accusing finger at a nation like Indonesia, an hypocrisy not lost on Indonesian media professionals. As David Hill (1994) has noted in his study of the press in New Order Indonesia:

> Indonesian editors talk with a wry smile of the fact that it is the Australian, not the Indonesian, press which is monotonous and dominated by a small clique of media magnates (16).

A direct connection between ownership and control in Indonesia is often taken for granted (see for example Kingsbury 1998: 151) but remains difficult to establish. It was my own
experience of watching Indonesian and Australian commercial television side-by-side that quickly led to my developing serious misgivings about the assumption that the Indonesian electronic media under the New Order was tightly controlled and firmly in the hands of the ruling elite, while the Australian media was unquestionably free, open and democratic. In addition to this comparative assessment has been the Australian government's regular attacks on the financial and editorial independence of the national public-service broadcaster, the ABC, throughout the period of my research (for a range of defences against these attacks see Fraser and O'Reilly 1996).

Once televisi swasta stations were established furthermore, the details of ownership arguably mattered less than the imperatives of their continuing, profitable operation; that is, to gather an audience and to sell that audience to advertisers. While the concept of audience demand is an elusive one, because answers to the question of what that demand is perceived to be and how it should best be satisfied can only be based on a small statistical sample and a lot of rumbling in the dark, the pressing need for commercial stations to consider such questions immediately set them apart from TVRI whose sclerotic view of the national audience and its needs had scarcely been revised since the launch of Palapa in 1976. TVRI's claim to a monopoly on the production and broadcast of news perhaps provides the greatest evidence for the government's assumption that it somehow maintained ultimate authority over information and the construction of the national viewing public, even while commercial stations were searching for modes of address that actively sought to differentiate its audiences from that of the government broadcaster. Officially, televisi swasta were ‘partners’ of TVRI and its promotion of government policies and national unity. That commercial stations were established ostensibly to provide an alternative for those who would otherwise look to the VCR or foreign satellite stations seemed evidence of their support for the goals of national unity and security. But at the same time it was a tacit acknowledgement that TVRI programmes did not suit all of the audience all of the time. In a formal way, however, the pledge of partnership rejected any accusation that televisi swasta and TVRI were competing for audiences on the basis of viewer preference. This was affirmed by the obligation that all commercial stations simultaneously relay official TVRI newscasts. Similarly, private stations relayed TVRI coverage of events (parades and speeches marking official occasions and anniversaries) deemed by the Department of Information (Departemen Penerangan or Deppen) to be of national importance. Despite these obligations, in other regards commercial stations displayed many of the same sorts of content TVRI had excised from its schedules so as not to contradict its mission. Advertisements and imported programming were the most obvious of these. Not that the schedules of televisi swasta were necessarily intended to undermine the New Order's authority, but it was a contradictory, Janus-faced enterprise caught between two allegiances: between styles and modes of address that often reflected an embrace of cosmopolitan sophistication, personal choice, ‘lifestyles’ and consumer culture on the one hand, and formal support for the government's often paternalistic and inward-looking cultural policies and principle of ‘familyism’ (kekeluargaan)
on the other (see Kitley 2000: 82–83). Following the introduction of private stations and their market imperatives it became still less easy to defend the view that ‘television (under the New Order) was at the epicentre of national ideological control’ (Sen and Hill 2000: 220) without acknowledging the limits of control whether at the point of production, scheduling or reception.

In no-one is this tension better personified than in Peter Gontha, ‘a trim, balding man with a thin, vaguely sinister moustache’ (*FEER* 18 Jul 1996), a senior executive with Bimantara, the conglomerate headed by Suharto's second son Bambang Trihatmodjo. As we have seen, Bimantara held the licence for RCTI, Indonesia's first private commercial station that went to air in 1989. Peter Gontha was the epitome of cosmopolitan sophistication and a man of contradictions: keyboardist, media executive, durian lover and music entrepreneur whose nightclub, *Jamz*, was Jakarta's premier jazz venue. He became a folk hero of private enterprise and model of rich young executives. His media interests – and there were so many he was sometimes referred to as Indonesia's Rupert Murdoch, a magnate whose signature graced a wall in *Jamz* – were similarly tailored toward a youngish upwardly mobile, moneyed and educated urban audience. They fashioned a following that was urbane and politically and culturally liberal. Among them was the Jakarta radio station *Trijaya FM* which he established under the auspices of Bimantara in 1990, whose live talk-back and interview segments, particularly the morning drive-time programme, *Jakarta First-Channel*, hosted by Nor Pud Binarto were notoriously controversial. It was a factor that also contributed to their financial success (See Sen and Hill 2000: 99). Demand for advertising on the programme was booked up three months in advance. So controversial that *Jakarta First Channel* was taken off air after a candid interview with Goenawan Mohammad regarding the banning of *Tempo*. Programme names and the bulk of the station's promotions were in English, a stylistic reflection of the cosmopolitan milieu of its operations and target audience which set it apart in particular from the staid, formal Indonesian of government channels. This was particularly noticeable in the jarring contrast that occurred when the obligatory relays of *RRI* (*Radio Republik Indonesia*) news bulletins went to air; the alternately racy and cool, sophisticated patter of *Trijaya* announcers gave way to the wooden delivery of officialdom in tones that breathed inertia. These were the sorts of contrasts that commercial television seemed bent on producing when it programmed its own ‘soft news’ and current affairs shows immediately before the relay of TVRI's evening national news, *Berita Malam*. The first of these shows to appear was RCTI's *Seputar Indonesia* (Around Indonesia). *Seputar Indonesia* was another of Peter Gontha's creations, produced by PT Sindo, RCTI's in-house news and current affairs production company he established, and it set a benchmark of technical quality and popularity for the newscasts of other stations that followed. It was based unashamedly on CNN's anchored newscast segments and this alluded straight away to a mode of address and news values that were not a feature of the journalistic culture encouraged by the Department of Information. In addition to the stylistic features that set these shows apart from their TVRI counterpart was a commitment to high production values. The breezy delivery of
**Seputar Indonesia** news-readers and an understanding of the importance of eye-to-eye contact between news-reader and audience enabled by the ‘autocue’ was in sharp contrast with the scene from the TVRI studio where newsreaders needed to perpetually bow their heads to read from pieces of paper. This was indicative of TVRI's insufficient funding, but also perhaps of a moribund attitude to the audience and its mission. RCTI, the first and, throughout the last decade of the New Order period, the most profitable of the televisi swasta stations, raised audience expectations about how television – and newscasts – should look. This we can attribute to Peter Gontha. In addition to RCTI, Peter Gontha became vice-president of SCTV, where in 1996 he was instrumental in the development of that station's own news/current affairs show, *Liputan 6* (Report at 6), which during Suharto's last days and in the year that followed gradually overtook *Seputar Indonesia's* reputation for being politically controversial consequently seizing a larger ratings share.

Whenever questioned, in the relatively few interviews Gontha granted the press, about his closeness to the presidential family he pointed to his creation of *Seputar Indonesia* as a way of establishing his credentials as an independent media operator who is not against criticising the government (see *Forum Keadilan* 15 Sep 1994). And when probed on television's capacity to contribute to ‘social control’, he insisted television was purely an entertainment medium that had nothing to do with political considerations, only business calculations in the pursuit of profit (*Forum Keadilan* 15 Sep 1994: 34). In a way this reneged responsibility for the potential political effects of broadcasts by claiming adherence to the moral neutrality of business and the market.

Yet beyond this, it seems, his loyalty to the presidential family remained firm. At the time that Nor Pud Binarto was sacked from the highly profitable *Trijaya FM* after overstepping invisible limits (see *Article 19* 1996), Gontha was also a prominent board member of the Private Radio Broadcasters’ Association chaired by Mbak Tutut. When asked about his attitude toward the banning of the publications *Tempo*, *Editor* and *DeTIK* in 1994, he responded that he agreed with the government that they had abused the government's commitment to keterbukaan (openness) by going too far (see *Forum Keadilan* 10 Mar 1997).

Another of Peter Gontha's innovations was the TV Pool (*Pul TV*), an arrangement initiated during events of national significance that called for all stations to pool their resources to co-produce and simultaneously broadcast the same programming. Of course this was in effect similar to what the Department of Information demanded from all commercial stations at newstime. But in Gontha's deviation from this, the TV Pool was about a greater level of cooperation between all stations. This was first organised by Gontha on the occasion of the death of President Suharto's wife Tien early on the morning of April 28, 1996. Legend has it that Gontha organised this first TV pool rapidly and single-handedly, a superhuman effort that was later drawn up in comic-strip form and published in a special 1997 New Year's edition of *Vista-TV* that proclaimed him ‘Mr TV for 1996’ (*Tokoh Televisi 1996*) (*Vista-TV*)
January 1997). The story goes that as soon as Gontha heard of Ibu Tien's death at about 6am he set the wheels of the TV Pool in motion, ringing station bosses, negotiating with police to allow the installation of a satellite up-link at the Suharto family home, and arranging for a microwave transmitter to be positioned on Jakarta's tallest building. Gontha, in bringing all competing commercial stations together on such an occasion confirmed televisi swasta's loyalty to (and dependence on) the Suharto family and registered a commitment to television's role in the affirmation of national unity. But at the same time it brought home the relative strengths of televisi swasta. It was responsive and spontaneous, reacting quickly to sudden developments; it was technologically superior to TVRI; and its personnel displayed a level of professionalism and production quality that made TVRI seem drab and amateurish. Gontha, as I have stated, was the personification of televisi swasta, a creature of New Order patronage who at the same time embraced cosmopolitan cultural affiliations and a sense of independence from the values of its patron whose relevance was beginning to wane. By 1994, RCTI had become Bimantara's cash-cow, providing the conglomerate with around 34% of its total annual earnings. Seputar Indonesia, while only representing a fraction of the station's overall revenue, was one of the programmes that differentiated RCTI from TVRI and its commercial competition. It was responsible for establishing the station's reputation as an organisation that did not shy away from stretching the boundaries of government regulation. As with Gontha's own modus operandi, however, this was not necessarily part of a master plan. Rather, televisi swasta, like Gontha, remained in 'constant motion', developing a momentum of its own that was not always responsive to the New Order's interests. As one Peter Gontha observer noted, 'people think he has a plan, but he just keeps moving' (FEER 18 July 1996). Peter Gontha played an important role in shaping the development of television in Indonesia through the 1990s and it displayed many of his contradictions.
Watching Culture

The contested frontiers of national culture

(The ship) lacked the more usual conveniences but her captain had loaded up with goods that were certain to fetch a small fortune in the volcanic islands that sprinkle the waters around Celebes. And the most popular items in his illicit cargo were battery driven Japanese record players and the latest American song hits. Even Radio Permesta had been infected, and the rebel broadcasting station in Celebes arranged to give us the all-clear to land in Inobonto with a mouth-organ rendition of “I Got Plenty o’Nuttin’”…For the purpose of receiving that signal, (the captain) now erected the telescopic aerial of the Zenith Trans-Oceanic that I had nursed so carefully all the way from Hong Kong (Stevenson 1965: 229).

My convictions: a boat to sail. Sail! Do not hesitate to confront the gusting winds and hurricane gales. Sail to the shore to which you have been launched. Sail to a new world (Armijn Pané 1988 [1940]: frontispiece).

Regulations and their enforcers may attempt to clearly define nations and the characteristics of their populations and so differentiate them from surrounding territories and value systems, but the borders they police are not impermeable. Things, people, ideas pass through (and not always under the controlled scrutiny of customs, passport, and quarantine checks), whether physically, sailing across oceans and landing on beaches to the strains of ‘I Got Plenty o’Nuttin’, or through the ether from transmitters to the aerials of receivers. Similarly, people’s experiences are not confined to what happens in their physical surroundings, where they stand. ‘We no longer have roots, we have aerials’, McKenzie Wark (1994) is often saying, because while most of us, he suggests, are connected to particular locations in terms of our daily life, holding perspectives based on the more precise features of where we live, our experiences are increasingly mediated, derived from a greater variety of sources than ever before, the majority of which are physically distant from the actual spaces we inhabit; access to events that shape attitudes and values depend less on physical proximity to the sites of action. On a leaky boat, on a beach, in a detention centre, in the gutter, sitting comfortably in an armchair in front of the television. Emphatically, these remain places that determine experience and subjective perspectives of existential realities. This is a factor that the more sublime theorisation of globalisation occasionally ignores. But the interjection from elsewhere of events, ideas, images, policies have the power to inflect the interpretation of place specific experience and the assessment of wider consequences, causes and connections, to therefore propel the intellection of experience to a point not contained by the physical, cultural and historical specifics of place.
The movement of populations in the form of migration whether voluntary or through forced displacement and the mobility of information through the rapid deployment of communications technologies are two of the most obvious factors problematising the idea that culture and experience is tied to territory. Yet once again we should note that a double reading of the second of the opening quotes suggests that while mobility may be a defining, Utopian metaphor of modernity, the call to venture forth into new worlds and leave the past behind, also bears a human cargo; boatloads of people drifting, driven by hope looking for a shore to land on.

These developments have been enabled by the proliferation of what Wark (1994) after Virilio calls vectors, ‘any trajectory along which bodies, information, or warheads can potentially pass’ (11), the over-arching presence of which has led to an ‘homogenization of the space of the globe’ (13), because all points on it can be equally linked to any other point regardless of the actual space separating them. That points on the globe are virtually equidistant does not in itself guarantee equanimity in terms of activity between those points since not all points on the globe are equally charged with bodies, transmittable information, or warheads. Some, to borrow from George Orwell, are more equal than others. Nevertheless, vectoral connections are part of the frequently taken-for-granted perceptual paradigm of globalisation. In terms of the vectors of media technologies these are, in a further claim for the ‘distanciation’ of time from physical space, increasingly not terrestrial, fixed to the earth, but aerial, of the air; a medium unconstrained by political borders, the breadth of oceans, or difficult topographical features. My ability to regularly watch Indonesian television has similarly been a result of these vectors illustrating that not only do messages on airwaves enter national borders, but, in a reorientation, transmissions meant for reception within those borders spill out to points beyond them.

Despite the relatively recent application of this technology to civilian use, the experience it produces is not itself an entirely new phenomenon. And even those communication systems that physically traverse the earth, those based on cable technologies lying on ocean floors, buried in the ground or strung along poles, the telegraph, and land-line’ telephone (although these are the progenitors of the internet and are now also mobile and ‘wireless’, connected with microwave transmitters and satellites), enable the dislocation of voice from speaker, and event from place. All contribute to the possibility of telesesthesia or ‘perception at a distance’, and the ‘dislocat(ion) of perception and action’ (Wark 1994: 43). The pinnacle of dislocation lies in ‘wireless’ technology, their transmissions floating on, and shooting through the ether to reach us wherever we may be. At their inception, these technologies were sometimes attributed with wider metaphysical and existential consequences: they appeared to provide evidence for the view that human consciousness had an autonomous existence that was not bound to the human body and its mortality. In the first part of the 20th century, the miracle of ‘the wireless’ as distinct from telegraphy and telephony provoked images of an ‘etheric ocean’ through which radio waves and the voices they carried were thought to flow, and this
raised the real possibility of radio contact with the spirit world beyond (see Sconce 1998). The inventor Edison was among those working in earnest to develop an apparatus to receive radio messages from the other side (Sconce 1998: 211–212). The idea of disembodiment also carried other political ramifications. In the late 1930s the Indonesian writer/critic Armijn Pané punctuated his acclaimed modernist novel Belenggu (1940, translated as Shackles in 1988) with images of the liberating potential of the telephone, the radio and the gramophone each of which offered narrative solutions and metaphors for new paths to selfhood and intimacy, unburdened by bonds to place and tradition.

What the rapid spread of communication systems, the distribution of ‘software’ content, and the dislocation of the sites of transmission or distribution from the sites of reception means to the development of cultural processes has been a matter of interest and concern to government leaders, intellectuals, journalists and presumably to members of the wider public because it appears to threaten a notion of culture as a web of signs and meaning connected to the shared experience and history of a particular place. As far as spatially defined well-springs of wider, cultural belonging are concerned we can think of three contiguous but isolable tiers: the local, the national and the global. But these are not the only, nor necessarily the most insistent determinants of ‘culture’. Beliefs, tastes, interests, professional, union and academic associations, for example, and diasporas of deterritorialised populations, all constitute irregular nebulae of shared worldviews that cut across the concentric lines expanding outwards from the topoi of daily experience. These cross-border affiliations have little to do with where we live but have a lot to do with who we perceive ourselves to be, a perception also configured by our access to media and communications that allow virtual contact with the rest of the world and other people who are not ‘us’ in terms of localised cultural characteristics.

Television, in particular in its connection with satellite technology, has come to epitomise the ease with which private domestic spaces can also become the venue for images, people, ideas, news and media events that most often have apparently little to do with immediate surroundings but which nevertheless have the capacity to affect in some way. The idea of ‘bringing the world into our living rooms’ is indeed typical of television's own rhetorical self-promotion because the content of television is, on a fundamental level, engaged in establishing connections and relationships with places, events, ways of life, and above all, people that exist beyond the immediate ‘geography of experience’ (Wark 1994: vii). It should be stressed that ‘the world’ which television grants access to is not confined to news and information programmes. Avowedly fictional drama in its many forms is arguably still more focused on exploring and making sense of issues, connections and relationships with other people in other places, because it allows the incorporation of verisimilitudinous but speculative, hypothetical situations into the resources of identity and problem solving, and increased engagement with cross-demographic, cross-generational, and cross-cultural dialogue.
It is also important to recall, in the midst of this, that the same media and communication technologies have been, and continue to be employed to promote a sense of national belonging, through the dissemination of symbols, anthems, myths, social fictions, and shared common languages that cohere ‘imagined communities’, Benedict Anderson's (1991 [1983]) well-worn cypher for nation-states articulated through communications and mass-media. Clearly, the connections and relationships purporting to hold nations together also depend on an awareness that extends beyond the known world of daily acquaintance to produce a sense of commonality with distant strangers.

The nationalism of unitarian nation-states can in some ways be considered the most artificial field of identity because it exists primarily as a political construct. It is also one now sometimes regarded as under threat from the deterritorialising forces of globalisation and the fractured identities produced in late- or post-modernity in response to the sorts of technologies I have mentioned. For Anthony Giddens (1991), in his analysis of ‘self and society in the late-rhodern age’, one of the most distinctive features of modernity is ‘an increasing interconnection between the two ‘extremes’ of extensionality and intentionality: globalising influences on the one hand and personal dispositions on the other’ (1). The nation state and the territorial sovereignty it lays claim to can it seems, according to this schema, be effortlessly ignored in late modernity.

Nevertheless, the nation is still the *raison d'etre* of many if not most broadcast channels because it is concerned with an over-arching sense of the cultural situatedness of its audiences. Free-to-air broadcast television received through conventional antennae remains national in outlook. It is difficult for a study like this, a study of Indonesian television, to proceed without the framework of the national. One route may lay in our understanding of ‘modernity’, with which the development of the nation-state is inextricably linked. Ien Ang and Jon Stratton (1996) in their search for a ‘critical transnationalism in cultural studies’ have posited that rather than see the world as divided into nations, that it be conceived as a set of interconnected and interdependent, but distinctive modernities, signalling both the success and the failure of the universalizing European project of modernity through colonial expansion. From this historical perspective, ‘Asia’ and ‘Australia’ no longer appear as absolute binary opposites, as they can both be seen as historical products of the European colonizing/modernizing project (16).

Modernity as a master narrative of cultural, political and economic development has been a universal force that has nevertheless resulted in a diverse range of ‘distinctive modernities’. On one level it seems pointless to separate ‘modernity’ from ‘the nation-state’ and national culture as an expression of national unity, because each has been seen as a pre-condition for the development of the other, yet what Ang and Stratton's proposal forces is an acknowledgement that these are processes at work – perpetual states of *becoming* rather
than already accomplished, or naturally occurring states of being – and that the specific patterns of those processes, while interconnected parts of the same universalizing project, are determined by more localised historical forces. Such an acknowledgement rejects the notion that national borders contain populations with essential, national characteristics and that nations are simply expressions of those essences.

Shifting the focus from nations to modernities is a way for cultural studies to establish the parameters of its transnational research interests without focussing solely on the divisions between nations. This can be achieved by keeping to the forefront the interconnectedness of nations and the shared processes of modernity that all nations are a manifestation of. This perspective has been useful for my own understanding of how television, as a universal phenomenon, has come to develop its own particular characteristics in Indonesia, as distinguishable, say, from television in Australia. Despite this, it is impossible to watch Indonesian broadcast television (or indeed that of Australia) for long without noting that ideas of national cultural distinctiveness comprise an important source of stations’ terms of address to television audiences and that national culture appears to function as a way for television stations and the producers of programmes and advertisements to define their audience, who it is, where it is, and what it wants.

**Indonesian television and the nation**

In Indonesia under the New Order the promotion of national distinctiveness as an essence contained in language and shared cultural values remained a fiercely guarded shibboleth despite the encroaching evidence, especially in the last decade of New Order rule, that culturally, economically and politically Indonesia was unavoidably part of the global system, and that within the nation itself was a range of opinion about exactly what characteristics encapsulated national distinctiveness. The New Order's maintenance of authority over the formulation of what characterised Indonesia and Indonesians was one aspect of its aspiration to control. Officially set parameters of national culture can function as an instrument of restriction as much as a celebration of unifying, collective belonging. The determination of national characteristics are also a means by which the ‘un-national’ (the ‘un-Indonesian’, the ‘un-Australian’) can be pilloried. This is another aspect of the ‘intolerance of difference’ (Billig cited Van den Bulck 2001: 56) exhibited by the assertion of national culture that extends to attempts to erase overt expressions of sub-national cultural diversity. In this, the making of the modern Indonesian nation-state has been no different to nation-building processes in many other parts of the world. As Van den Bulck (2001) notes:

> The nation-state had to be a centralised polity, with strongly reduced traditional, regional, cultural, linguistic and ethnic differences. The creation of a national culture contributed to the creation of standards of universal alphabetization, it generated one single vernacular as the dominant medium of communication, it created a homogenous culture and it sustained national cultural institutions such as a national education system. In this and other
ways, national culture became a central characteristic of industrialization and an engine for modernity (56).

The sense of national identity is appealed to in all nation-states, primarily by politicians whose need to establish a clear national-cultural coherence of the territory and people they govern (or aspire to govern) relates directly to their ability (or presumption) to speak and act on its behalf as representatives of that community. The assertion of a national public with essential characteristics can thereby also function as a tool to legitimate political actions and decisions. References to a ‘silent majority’ whose silence is claimed to indicate consent, as opposed to voicelessness, despair, or apathy is just one aspect of this, one which enables criticism of a government's policies, or dissent to be dismissed as a minority view and therefore unrepresentative of popular aspirations. In this way, national governments can be seen to (re)construct the nation and national identity in their own image. These constructions are largely disseminated through the media. But the idea of the nation is also vital to the media's own attempts to define its audiences/readerships and their concerns, and is inherent in many popular cultural texts (from mini-series to commercials and pop songs).

Media and popular cultural allusions to the nation and senses of nationality are, however, most often not of the flag waving variety sometimes embraced by national leaders or by ordinary citizens on ‘national days’. Rather, nationalism is ‘flagged’ throughout the media and in the barely acknowledged interstices of daily life and language in countless ‘banal’ ways that reinforce nationality as part of an unstated, everyday sense of who we are. Nationalism, as Michael Billig has argued in his book *Banal Nationalism* (1995), is also not typically the highly articulated and occasionally belligerent variety that has captured the attention of so much research on the topic, in which nationalism is primarily ‘the force which creates nation-states or which threatens the stability of existing states’ (43). Contrary to this, Billig's interest and the central question posed by his book is ‘what happens to nationalism once the nation-state is established?’ (44). More often than not, he suggests, it becomes taken-for-granted, naturalised, ‘a flag hanging unnoticed on the public building’ (8) rather than an intermittent outpouring of shared heritage and destiny. Nor, in Billig's view, is it expressive of a deep yearning for collective identity presumed lost in the atomised anonymity of urban and suburban life. Nationalism is instead banal, endemic, topped-up and maintained by barely noticeable, innumerable, daily references to it. The media are the major purveyors of this ‘banal nationalism’: in news reports, in sporting events, in advertising for goods, services and the media themselves, the nation as a source of identity is ceaselessly given utterance. And even these subtle, and occasionally more forthright, utterances, Alex Law (2001) notes in his discussion of Billig's thesis, would make no sense without the background hum of ‘deictic repetition and familiarity’ (2001: 301). *Deixis* here refers to the mundane, unexamined ‘pointing words’ which position the addressee in a particular relationship to these utterances and to the speaker. However unremarkable, these underpin
and provide a context for more direct expressions of national belonging, allowing nationalism to remain for the most part, buried in a substratum lying just below the surface:


While it is not my task to examine and analyse such deictic forms in the context of Indonesian television, it is important to stress that this positioning is thoroughly embedded in the everyday speech and representations carried in the media. They are not always directed, however, purely at the national affiliations of the audience/readership. As Paddy Scannell (2000) notes in his work on the social history of broadcasting in the UK, how to speak to, and establish, a relationship with the invisible audience via the adoption of particular mode of address was and remains the ‘fundamental communicative dilemma for broadcasters’ (10). For Scannell, the way broadcasts simultaneously achieve both their intimacy and sociability is through the establishment of what he calls ‘for-anyone-as-someone structures’. These are distinguishable from the ‘for-anyone structures’ of mass produced goods, and the ‘for-someone structures’ of things that are tailor-made or solely of personal significance. ‘For-anyone-as-someone structures’ combine both these forms to refer, for example, to the observation that broadcasts are intelligible to anyone, although the mode of address employed gives each viewer the impression that he or she is spoken to individually, as ‘someone’.

On television, moreover, the viewer is always expressly, and very deliberately, positioned in a spatial as well as a communicative relationship to those on screen. This usually – notably in the case of most fictional drama – incorporates the viewer as an invisible and therefore unacknowledged participant in the scene. At other times, however, on-screen performers will turn to address the ‘fourth-wall’ as it is sometimes called, looking straight into the camera and therefore, at you, the audience member. This is especially apparent in the direct-to-camera presentations of newscasts, some commercials, and between-programme links, in which the technical development of the auto-cue has been exploited precisely to accentuate the impression that the person on screen is addressing each member of the audience individually. Looking into the camera means thereafter looking into the eyes of each and every viewer. The newsreader, framed in a head-and-shoulders close-up replicating the intimate, domestic proximity of a peer, looks at me and says: ‘Selamat malam permirsa. Kembali kami menjumpai anda, paket informasi Seputar Indonesia disiarkan langsung dari studio 5 RCTI, Kebun Jeruk, Jakarta.’

1 Good evening viewer. We welcome you back to Seputar Indonesia, broadcast live from RCTI's studio 5, Kebun Jeruk, Jakarta.
While these devices function to position audience members vis-a-vis a programme's relevance to who and where those audience members are and what their standing is in relation to broadcasts, they do not necessarily refer directly to the sense of national belonging. Other features of the news narrative do indeed rely on an understanding of national events which, while not restricted to members of a national public, are part of the knowledge common to it. Contained in this is the reasonable assumption that nationally broadcast television is watched by an audience that can also be defined as national, that is, that the transmissions and audience for broadcasts are coterminous with the nation. Yet other appeals and modes of address position viewers differently, on the basis of religion, age, tastes and so on.

Nationality, in its past and current form, firmly anchors identity to territory; not just to a knowable, geographically-defined location inhabited and experienced daily, but to a space contained within larger borders invisible to any individual in their entirety (unless from ‘outer-space’) but nevertheless posed as familiar. Importantly, these horizons are still figured as geographical despite an emphasis on the cultural affinities existing within nations; the map of the nation, often as a stylized representation, is, along with the flag and the anthem, one of the most ubiquitous symbols of banal nationalism. But the nation we live in now arguably binds us less (and increasingly less since the idea of globalisation hinges on the notion of its exponential acceleration) to the sense of who we are because the assumption of subjective identities need no longer be limited to resources derived from our immediate vicinity nor contained by those invisible national horizons. As Tomlinson (1999) in his discussion of Billig points out, images and references to national belonging are daily competing with those tying us into a global cosmopolitanism which is ‘just as much part of the mundane mediated process of identity-formation as the rhetorical forms of address that bind identity to (national) locality’ (201). That this is the case, moreover, means that:

Work done to anchor identity to the nation thus has to be seen as work: as a process that does not unfold effortlessly out of a popular culture securely rooted in geographical place. Rather it is achieved against the grain of a broader tendency for imaginary identification fairly effortlessly to escape the constructed boundaries of locality (Tomlinson 1999: 120) [italics in original].

The idea that the promotion of national identity is an endless labour is important here because it suggests that far from being a naturally occurring or stable phenomenon, the sense of belonging to a geographically contained ‘imagined community’ is a tenuous ideological construct that needs to be constantly proclaimed in order to maintain its semblance of naturalness.

In the economic conditions of globalisation, the borderless flow of finance, the formation of supra-national or larger regional trading blocs, and the importance of trans-national enterprises to national economies, the sustainability of nations as autonomous entities may be seen to rely more and more on efforts to articulate them as sovereign cultural
identities. But who benefits from such articulations? In whose interest is the perpetuation of national identity in the face of perceived threats to it from the ‘complex connectivity’ of globalisation? It would be easy to deduce that the major promoters of national identity are also its major beneficiaries: governments, because they need to establish the features of an invisible public whose interests they purport to represent; and media enterprises that need to establish the features of the invisible audiences/readerships they address. However, the absolute truth of this claim would rest on a return to the idea that the people comprising publics and audiences are dupes able to be persuaded of something perhaps against their best interests. Rather, it should be recognised that the sense of national identity is so deeply entrenched, and intertwined with the social and cultural practices that governments and the media are part of, that publics and audiences exert at least as much influence on governments’ and media institutions’ construction of national identity as the other way around. It is dialogic. Governments and the media, according to this perspective, can be thought of as the means by which the nation can be articulated, as much as its self-interested beneficiaries.

However hard the work to maintain a sense of national identity, and however unnoticed, the seed is apparently sown on fertile ground. Billig rejects, for example the possibility that banal nationalism is in the process of being replaced with a ‘banal globalism’ (Billig, cited Tomlinson 1999: 120). Only time will tell. What is more certain is that nationality and appeals to it continue to have considerable valence as a means of addressing and assuming knowledge of dispersed individuals who in turn recognise themselves in those appeals: whether for the purposes of heads of state and other national political representatives whose sovereignty requires a realm; or for producers and distributors of news and popular cultural texts who need to identify and accumulate an audience or market. Broadcast television, despite its dalliance in other beds of meaning and other modes of address, remains a high profile arena for appeals to national belonging.

The discourse of nationalism on television in Indonesia is, however, a particular case. Billig's focus is on the U.S. and U.K. and these can clearly not stand for all nation states or their nationalisms. They are not representative, for instance, of nations like Indonesia that gained their independence after the retreat of European imperialist powers following WWII. Nor does Billig pay much attention to the ‘sub-national’, stateless nationalisms that comprise numerous national unities (see Law 2001 for an investigation of Scottish banal nationalism). While Billig was primarily concerned with British national culture when he wondered what happens to nationalism once the nation is established’, nationalisms elsewhere may find themselves less secure in that knowledge. Graeme Turner (1993) has noted, for example, a clear distinction between the features of British national culture and its Australian counterpart as made manifest in television commercials. In British advertisements Turner states, ‘Britain’ isn't mentioned, is ‘ex-nominated’, suggesting that in these representations, nationality is ‘utterly naturalised, always already in place’, whereas ‘in Australian representational genres,
Australia is explicitly figured (and interrogated) as image, myth, nation’ (Turner cited Ang and Stratton 1996: 24). Australian national culture is perhaps more like Indonesia's in this regard, although clearly there are also significant contrasts between them. That both Australia and Indonesia are the sites of continuing negotiation allows them to be seen as nations in progress, rather than taken-for-granted, established and inherent. As Turner goes on to state of the Australian case, the particularities of living in an as yet ‘un-naturalised’ nation do ‘involve constant encounters with, and definite possibilities for intervening in, an especially explicit, mutable but insistent, process of nation formation’ (cited Ang and Stratton 1996: 24). This is also true of the processes of nation formation in Indonesia, although once again there are other distinct characteristics affecting the nature of these processes, especially the nature of its political governance since independence and the existence within its borders of ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic communities sometimes more violently at odds than those within Australian national borders. The threat of widespread internecine and political violence is not presently an issue for the negotiation of an Australian national identity and nor is the possibility that the strength of regional, ethnic, and religious identities could literally reshape the official map of the nation as is the case in Indonesia. We should also consider, however, that nationalism is never stable and can always be undermined by any internal fissures or external pressures that alter relationships between the elements contained in the unity of a nation state. Even the banal, taken-for-grantedness of national identity in Britain might easily give way to more emphatic flag waving under the influence of international events (that is, those events from Olympic games to wars that serve to more sharply define nations and their differences from one another, the fundamental basis, after all, of all nationalism). Or, contrary to this, simmering stateless nationalisms within national borders may still, in the future, spill over to threaten at the very least the taken for grantedness of national unity. As Law points out in the Scottish example, when national leaders in the U.K. evoke the nation there is a tendency to gloss over the history of national unity, to take it as given, and to conveniently ignore the England-centredness at its core (2001: 303). The narratives of sub-national ethnic loyalties circulating within that unity, on the other hand, are rich in painfully-remembered historical detail.

Since its beginnings in 1962 until the present, Indonesian television has performed the function of broadcasting appeals to nationalism that may be heuristically divided into a ‘nation building’ form, and its more ‘banal’ counterpart. However, television in Indonesia was not always national in terms of its audience reach although the promotion of national unity was still the express mission of all government broadcasting including television. It was a medium that began, in Australia as well as Indonesia, as a series of local transmitters based in major cities, the reception of which faded to snow with distance from them. As Stuart Cunningham (1993) notes in his history of Australian television (a history that accommodated public service and commercial enterprises in an uneasy coexistence) the principle of localism was the legislative ethos that regulated commercial licencees from the beginning (24). This was in part to affirm the position of the ABC,
the government-funded public broadcaster, as the only ‘national’ network. In addition there were technical impediments to the easy development of national networks. There was no means to simultaneously relay transmissions, and any programmes to be shared between loosely affiliated stations in different regions or metropolitan areas had to be transported physically as 16mm film. Videotape technology was expensive and undeveloped and most locally produced programming was broadcast live and never recorded (Cunningham 1993: 24/25). Despite these regulatory and technical hurdles, ‘sister’ stations in state capitals did form networking arrangements in order to minimise costs and maximise audience reach. As a consequence:

the great unofficial story of Australian television is the development of de facto networks: how they have evolved, despite their absence from the systems of regulation, and the way principles of localism and networking have competed, more and more to the detriment of localism (Cunningham 1993: 24).

Philip Kitley (2000) has sought to explain the relative autonomy of pre-network regional TVRI stations and later the restriction of televisi swasta to individual cities, in terms of the (radio) broadcasting regime established under the Dutch colonial administration (37–38). This regime, however, rather than being based on a policy of localism, as I would argue was the case with television, allowed Dutch and ‘Eastern’ stations to serve the specific demands of their different audiences, operating side-by-side but independently of one another. There are indeed interesting parallels between the Dutch representation of Netherlands society as comprising ‘pillars’ of religious and political affiliations rather than a more cohesive though nebulous ‘mass’ (see Ang 1991: 121–139 for a detailed discussion of this), and the colonial administration's application of this view to Indies society. It is this ‘pillarization’ that appears to have provided the basis for the regulation of radio broadcasting in the Dutch East Indies. The broad similarities between the development of Australian television and that of Indonesia, and the commitment to localism shared by policy makers in both nations, appear to me to be more pertinent. This is more clear in regulatory qualifications to the decision to introduce commercial television. In both nations attempts were made to limit the reach of commercial stations to specified metropolitan centres thereby denying access to an audience characterised as national (which in both cases was the protected monopoly of a broadcaster funded by government allocations). My own analysis of the ideological foundations of the Indonesian system, however, in no way detracts from Kitley's interest in the relative autonomy of these early stations vis à vis the networks that superceded them. The social histories of regional television stations in Indonesia and Australia and their relatively shortlived promotion of local cultural affinities, remains an underexplored topic of research.

Despite the principle of localism, a principle even less easy to enforce in Indonesia between 1989–1993 owing to the already well established satellite communications network, the search for ways to minimise costs and maximise profitability soon conspired to mount a
challenge to the imposition of geographical restrictions. Long before the development of these private stations, the government's own TVRI network was in practice only a loose network of localised entities with local, often live programming. The ‘tyranny of distance’ and the technical impediments to overcoming that ‘tyranny’ similarly applied in Indonesia to limit the ability of stations to truly reach a national audience. In Indonesia, the state's TVRI only became truly national with the use of satellite technology after 1976. It also enabled the station to become a centrally controlled network. In the following years, once broader access had been achieved through the establishment of ground stations and the supply of television sets to rural villages, the station was harnessed more fully into the project of nation building. After this time, the audience was equated with a national community and came to be addressed as such. Paradoxically, of course, the use of satellite technology to better articulate a sense of the nation had, for the government, the side effect of opening gateways to horizons beyond national borders. This in the intervening years was seen to complicate television's nation-building mission.

We should again note that television above all other media has always been on some levels trans-national, despite earlier policy and technical restraints on broadcasting reach. It is a medium that ‘frequently transgresses national boundaries’ through international sporting and other events, newscasts’ subscription to international news agencies, details of station ownership, and the international marketing and distribution of television programmes (Hartley 1993 [1987]: 165). Television daily shows itself to be capable of exhibiting an almost limitless range and variety of programming, from a diversity of origins, inviting a similarly limitless spectrum of responses none of which serve to induce identity crises or psychoses in the audiences for them. This suggests at the very least, that expressions of national culture are not necessarily on a collision course with those of cultural globalisation. That they are not is indicative also of the range and diversity of ways of watching television and responding to it. But ‘television’, as Hartley's comments make clear, is not just what appears on the screen and the terms of an audience's engagement with them. Behind these images are boardrooms, corridors and bowels.

Jalan Kita

On the matter of the transnational nature of funding and production, while sitting watching Indonesian television in Darwin I was especially interested to read in the Northern Territory News the story of a local production company that had negotiated a contract with station TPI (Televisi Pendidikan Indonesia) to produce a series of television programmes for children. The show was called Jalan Kita (Our Street) and was said to have been modelled on Sesame Street. In a telephone conversation with Moira Dondas, the head of the production company she called Aloura Productions (but which I have since seen referred to as the NTFC, the Northern Territory Film Corporation), I was told that negotiations with TPI were protracted and that there had been initial concerns about the ability of an Australian company to project Indonesian values effectively, especially those of ‘respect’, ‘harmony’
and ‘mutual cooperation’. There were, however, some other features that both TPI and Aloura Productions/NTFC apparently shared from the start. For example, they both had direct access to government favours. Just as TPI's Siti Hardiyanti Rukmana (Mbak Tutut) had access to her father, President Suharto, Moira Dondas had access to her husband, MHR Nick Dondas, a parliamentarian with the authority to allocate funds from the Territory government's International Project Management Unit (IPMU). Moira Dondas’ company had received in excess of $340,000 of these funds with which to produce a pilot episode for Jalan Kita. The IPMU had failed to pass on much of the information about these grants to the relevant committees. Those details that were forwarded had been withheld from public scrutiny by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) whose own secrecy provisions prevented such information being discussed in parliament (NT News 19 Sep 1996). In addition to being an illustration of how tangled the webs of transnational interaction in the impure world of television can be, it is also an indication of the multiple, largely unseen levels at which these ‘transgressions’ are acted out. In this case, a common thread of political opacity and ethical turpitude lay beneath the agreement to produce an otherwise seemingly innocuous educational show for children. While there may be a huge discrepancy in scale, the affair also forces a recognition that collusion, corruption and nepotism (KKN, or Kolusi, Korupsi dan Nepotisme) are not, as is sometimes suggested, confined to a cultural and political ‘other’.

Yet, just as there are commonalities, differences remain. Even in the case of global media events in which there is arguably a uniform sense of belonging to a public that extends beyond national borders, implicating viewers in discourses of global ‘a-nationality’, certain underlying features of these events, and their collision with the specific contexts of reception can contribute to quite different interpretations of an event's significance. And sometimes interpretation of a text is coloured not only by what appears on the surface of the screen but on what is rumoured to be behind it.

**Princess Di**

The funeral of Princess Diana, for example, was on one level a media event that transcended national sources of identification, producing a sense of global intimacy, a momentary togetherness, related perhaps to what Ien Ang in her study of Dallas and its audiences, has referred to as the ‘tragic structure of feeling’ (1985). The details of Princess Diana’s marriage to Prince Charles, their separation, her selfless charitable work, her search for true happiness, and eventual, blissful courtship with Dodi al-Fayed unfolded to produce a tale of romantic love with apparently universal overtones. The death of the lovers in a car smash in a Paris tunnel brought the tale to a tragic, climactic conclusion. All around the world, stations interrupted regular schedules to carry live coverage of her funeral. Indonesian television was no exception. All commercial stations covered the event. The most extensive coverage took place on SCTV, which broadcast a nine-hour-long live relay of CNN's coverage of the funeral procession to which was added Indonesian commentary from those among its pool of
reporters who were familiar with London or had met Princess Diana during her 1989 visit to Indonesia. The Rp 100 million cost of the telecast was found, moreover, to be more than amply compensated by the revenue from advertisers who clearly had faith that the telecast would attract a sizeable audience (Media Indonesia 10 Sept 1997). Yet it is possible that the meaning of Princess Di's funeral to Indonesian members of the global television audience remained ambivalent. Far from eliciting a predictable, homogenous response from viewers, the significance of her death was perhaps still refracted through the perspective of more culturally specific readings. For cultural critic Veven SP Wardhana (1997a) writing about the broadcast, and musing on possible reasons for the audience's fascination:

If considered from the point of view of culture and the dynamic of television alone, the figure of Lady Di (sic) broke through a number of SARA-like corridors. Not to mention that there are some who have analysed her death as having one of the dimensions of SARA (1997a).^2^  

SARA is the acronym used in Indonesia (especially under the New Order) to indicate a ‘no-go’ category of news items for journalists; that is, any issues relating to ethnic, religious, racial, or group (class) differences (Suku, Agama, Ras, Antar-golongan) (Hill 1994: 45). Wardhana's use of the acronym is presumably a reference to English Princess Di's inter-ethnic, inter-religious relationship with Egyptian Dodi al Fayed. Despite the apparently universal tenor of this ur-tragedy of young lovers whose love for one another is opposed by conventions of family, religion and culture, perhaps the story had particular resonance in Indonesia, a nation periodically racked with violence between different religious and ethnic groups. Under the New Order's formal restrictions and the self-regulatory system of media control it largely relied upon, references to SARA were to be treated extremely carefully so as not to exacerbate antagonisms between these groups. This ‘SARA dimension’ was underscored by rumours that Princess Diana and Dodi al Fayed's deaths had been orchestrated by the British royal family who could not to allow such a relationship to continue on religious and racial grounds. Another rumour suggested that Princess Di was pregnant at the time of her death and that this evidence of their ‘inter-mixing’ rendered their affair even less tolerable. According to Wardhana's interpretation, for some in the Indonesian audience perhaps, the tragedy of the lovers' deaths was that it amounted to a further attack on the possibility of inter-religious and inter-ethnic harmony and the tolerance that had eluded the national experience. The broadcast in this view also tested the limits of the governments’ restrictions on the reporting of SARA-like issues. As Wardhana notes, TVRI conspicuously avoided giving the story too much emphasis (1997a). It cannot be stated with any assurance that this was the reason for TVRI's decision not to extensively screen the funeral procession, afterall, the prohibitive cost or a comittment to provide alternative programming may be more satisfactory explanations. Nevertheless, the range of possible

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^2^ ‘Jika ditinjau dari sisi budaya dan dinamika pertelevision itu sendiri, sosok Lady Di bahkan telah menjebol betbagai koridor sejenis SARA. Kendati ada yang menganalisis kematianinya punya salah satu dimensi di antara SARA itu.’
audience interpretations of the government station's motives should not be denied no matter how scurrilous.

**Popular hybrids and national culture**

The notion of hybridity across its range of applications has a long and chequered past. As Robert Young has outlined in his *Colonial Desire: hybridity in theory, culture and race* (1995), hybridity was originally part of the vocabulary of the extreme Right in 19th century European thinking about race and anxieties about racial purity which claimed that the mixing of races produced hybrids or mongrel breeds. Derived from the model of the mule, the distinguishing feature of hybrids was thought to be infertility if not in the first generation then marked by steadily decreasing fertility over several generations. Even when this was clearly not the case, with ample evidence in many by then well established multi-racial communities in colonised territories, hybrid mixes of ‘distinct’ races were held to produce inferior offspring who would further degenerate over successive generations and either revert to the ‘major parent types’, or lead eventually, if intermixing remained unchecked, to the ‘raceless chaos’ of mongrelisation at the expense of the preferred state of racial purity (15). The use of these theories in discourses of colonial power and the ‘white-man's burden’ to civilise cannot be overstated.

While the consequences of such ideas of racial purity may have proved far more immediately distressing than those attaching themselves to ideas of cultural purity, there are clear similarities, particularly in the belief that hybrids are somehow inferior to ‘distinct’ parent types and part of a tendency toward global, ‘mongrel’ sameness bereft of borders, authenticity, diversity and distinction. Saving hybridity from this moribund conclusion, however, have been those streams of thought that see the ‘cross-fertilisation’ of cultural intermingling as productive of a dialogue between sameness and difference both of which are simultaneously strengthened within hybrids. Bakhtin's (1981, cited Young 1995) theories of linguistic hybridity have been extremely influential on this point. For Bakhtin, hybridity in language is inherently political because it has the potential to destabilise naturalised power structures based on taken-for-granted language meaning and usage, through the juxtaposition of seemingly incongruous forms (21). When performed consciously this amounts to a resistance against political power because it draws attention to the language used to legitimate that power.

The hybrids of popular culture have similarly been the subject of debate around issues of authenticity, sameness and difference at the centre of ideas of cultural globalisation. In Indonesia, as in other nations where *national* culture has involved the subsumation of multiple diverse cultural groups to a national ‘unity in diversity’, the dialogue between sameness and difference has been pronounced both at the level of national integration, attempting to produce a single, national culture from a diverse range of local cultural
values and expressions, and in the nation's assertion of sovereignty and difference in the international arena.

**Kroncong**

A pre-independence instance of the broadcast media's propensity to produce and promote hybrid forms – one which led to a landmark exchange between two prominent cultural critics on the subject of the search for a representative national culture – took place on 11 January 1941, when the Federation of Eastern Radio Societies (*P.P.R.K. – Perikatan Perkoempoelan Radio Ketimuran*) put to air the first of a projected series of live ‘folk music’ concerts. Live concerts were a dominant feature of Radio Ketimuran (Eastern Radio) broadcasts (Lindsay 1997: 108). This was not owing to a lack of 78rpm recordings of indigenous music, and was in extreme contrast to the broadcasts of Dutch stations which primarily featured recorded music (Mrazek 1997: 21). The first eastern station was established by Sultan Mangkunegara VII in Surakarta in 1933 who from 1934 used the radio to broadcast live *gamelan* performances from his palace (Wild 1987: 19). This was part of a democratisation of court culture taking place in Java the 1930s in which radio played a major role. As Jennifer Lindsay (1997) explains, live broadcasts presented the exciting opportunity to incorporate local performance traditions with an embrace of a completely modern medium of transmission, ‘at once localising something modern and modernising something local (108).

At the start of the inaugural concert, Soetardjo Kartohadikoesoemo, the chairperson of the *P.P.R.K.* stepped up to the microphone and announced:

> this is the first ‘Eastern People's Concert’… we begin today with presenting what is usually called kroncong, a music loved by virtually the whole Eastern nation and throughout the archipelago. After the ‘kroncong evening,’ some other time, we may organize a performance of gamelan art of Java and Sunda, music from Minangkabau, Batak, Ambon, songs by the Chinese, Arabs and so forth, and so forth (cited Mrazek 1997: 28–29).

*Kroncong* is a popular music genre which grew out of Portuguese styles from as early as the 16th century and which had become popular among the ‘Eurasian’ underclass before the end of the 19th, especially in Batavia but also Ambon where Portuguese influence had also been strong. In addition to Portuguese and other Western instrumentation, *kroncong* incorporates sung quatrain deriving from *pantun*, a Malay literary and popular verse form (see Hamilton 1959). From humble and declassé beginnings, and associations with an underclass of street toughs and prostitution (origins similar to those of many if not most 20th century popular musical genres – fardo, rembetika, blues, jazz and reggae for example), its popularity spread to reach a mass audience through its incorporation into popular theatre and the recording industry in the 1920s. A star system developed as a means of promoting performances in both these mediums (Yampolsky 1997: 41). In the 1930s, this carried over into the local film industry, most successfully, in a sub-genre of films based on Hollywood's cycle of Dorothy
Lamour ‘sarong-romances’ set in Hawaii. Among these, *The Jungle Princess* (1936) had played very profitably to audiences throughout the region (Salim Said 1991: 25).

The tropical settings of these imported films were readily translatable to the Indies and the Hawaiianised songs (which also display Portuguese influence, particularly in the use of the ukulele, an instrument adapted from the Portuguese *braguinha* in the mid 19th century – see Beloff 1997: 11) that featured in the American films suggested a perfect vehicle for kroncong, which in turn borrowed elements from them. The scenario of *Terang Boelan* (1937) starring the well known kroncong singer Roekiah in the romantic female lead was an adaptation of *The Jungle Princess* and sought to replicate its success. It became the first Indonesian film to attract sizeable audiences across a broad demographic (Salim Said 1991: 26).

By the end of the 1930s, kroncong had become a staple of ‘Indonesian’ radio broadcasts though it was still regarded in some quarters as a degenerate form whose professional performers lived beyond the pale. Rudolf Mrzak’s (1997) evocative work on the impact of modern communications technologies and leisure activities on culture and society in colonial Dutch East Indies cites a popular novel by Muhammad Dimyati in which a man falls hopelessly in love with a kroncong singer he has heard on the radio (17). He is so besotted that he journeys from his home in Bukittinggi to Batavia to marry her, abandoning the village girl he has been betrothed to. Naturally, it all ends in disaster with the protagonist unable to reconcile his radio-fed fantasies with the harsh reality he finds in the city, yet irrevocably alienated from the life he has left behind. Echoes of this theme have been taken up again and again in Indonesian popular culture, particularly in the emphasis on the schism between the traditions of the country and the city's illusory world of glamour and fantasy founded on emptiness and the motivation of greed. The major interlocutor in the tragic tale described above is the radio itself. It is broadcasting's ability to take the bright lights of the city to the country that is emphasised with the transgressive allure of kroncong as the chief catalyst. Nevertheless, as its distribution swelled through the expansion of radio, recording and the cinema in the 1930s, kroncong soon came to be regarded enthusiastically by an enormous, dispersed Indonesian/Malay speaking audience.

During the struggle for independence (1945–48), kroncong songs developed a distinctly patriotic flavour and the genre later came to be associated nostalgically with that era and as the music of ‘people who came to adulthood before and during the Revolution – that is … people in authority’ (Yampolsky 1989: 12; Lockard 1996: 160). More recently it has experienced some rejuvenation in a ‘roots revival’ by younger musicians (see Raharti 1998:52). Kroncong remains a feature of radio and television broadcasts although its popularity since the 1970s was usurped somewhat by the more youthful dangdut, which I will discuss presently.
The 1941 concert was a night of stars. We can barely begin to imagine the anticipation among radio listeners all over the archipelago. Members of the Radio-Federation ensemble, who had adopted the name ‘Botol Kosong’ (Empty Bottle) sat in the background wearing white dinner jackets (Boediardjo cited Mnizek 1997: 28). An audience gathered at the Stadsschouwburg where the concert was about to take place but the larger part of the audience was somewhere else, listening through the soft hum of radio valves. Then, one by one, live in the studio, Indonesia's best known kroncong singers, demurely attired, stepped up to the stage and stood before the microphone to sing the songs their names had become associated with. Beautiful names: Miss Soeami, Miss Ijem, and Miss Roekiah who, following her success in Terang Boelan had been picked up by the blossoming British Malay film industry where she featured in the film Sejoli, alongside the heart-throb P. Ramli. In four years time aged 28 she would be dead. Everywhere people listened, in private and public places. Alone and with friends.

Dr. Sukartono, from Armijn Pané's novel Belenggu, in all likelihood listened alone, listened, in fact, in order to be alone. His estranged wife Tini may have sat in an adjacent room incredulous that he could succumb to the base sensuality of kroncong, muttering, “must want to stir up his blood”, while contemplating the thought of banging on the keys of the piano just to disturb his solitude (see Pané 1941: 42). Between songs the announcer took the stage to introduce the next singer. Elsewhere, others listened in groups outside their houses bathed in the yellow glow of oil lamps, the music from the radio drifting about them until, when it was over, 'the sound of the radio died down; it was quiet on the street. Now and then the light of a bicycle lamp glowed in the dark and vanished' (cited Mrdzek 1997: 19).

But not everyone received the broadcast so warmly. Later that year, in April, a critique of P.P.R.K.’s radio concert appeared in the literary journal Poedjangga Baroe. The critic was Ali Boediardjo, who had been present at the concert. A few years later he was employed as the personal secretary of Sjahrir, Indonesia's first Prime Minister. In the 1960s under President Suharto, he became Indonesia's Information Minister. Among Boediardjo's initial concerns about the concert was that the radio network had a stated agenda of promoting ‘Indonesian arts’, and that it had called January's live broadcast a concert of 'Indonesian folk music'. In Boediardjo's view, the content fell down on both these claims: first, because ‘any Indonesian with even the slightest understanding of the arts would be astonished or angered … and demand to know by what criterion the (term ‘arts’) had been used by the P.P.R.K.’ (252); and, second, because kroncong was not Indonesian but a poor pastiche of European and American music.

we could not possibly believe that the P.P.R.K. would deliberately wish to brand kroncong with the name of art, kroncong. that mixture of false and
shallow romance, that mixture of imitation American jazz and ‘show’ music
(Boedinrdjo 1941:253).³

Boedaidjo's emphasis on the mimetic falsity and superficiality of kroncong, its reliance on elements of jazz and its mixture of styles are all presented as the antithesis of art, and especially Indonesian art. In part, these criticisms can be regarded in conjunction with the universally familiar dichotomy of high culture and popular (or ‘mass’, or low, or ‘industrialised’) culture that persists in some form in all nations but which was powerfully connected in the 1930s and 40s with the expansion of the new mass media of radio, recorded music, cinema, and the prospect of television. The roots of these cultural struggles long preceded the development of these media but it was through them that the divisions between ‘high’ and ‘low’ were thrown into stark contrast and more open competition for hearts and minds. This can be seen to be partly to do with the nexus between mass popularity and the commercialisation of production. But for radio it was also by virtue of ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture sharing space on the one medium if not always the one station. Lesley Johnson (1982) identified the site of a similar struggle in the development of parallel systems of public and private broadcasting services on Australian radio in the 14.MK and suggests that broadcasting, especially the commercial variety,

posed a potential threat to established cultural hierarchies (because) by treating all cultural forms as equal in the marketplace, traditional categories of culture's superiority no longer operated Radio undermined their naturalness' (210)

J.S. Bach and the dog-track both found space on Australian airwaves The constitution of public culture became implicated with the essentially neutral and theretor democratic domain of broadcasting, access to which was limited only by the extent of transmissions and the public's ability to receive them. It is the same characteristic seen on commercial television in Indonesia in 1995 that led one commentator to celebrate that: “Television has led to the rejection of a hierarchy of cultural values: mixing-up the serious with pop, the high-brow with the trivial, the modern with the traditional’ (Dewanto 1995: I l()i Imported programming, Nirwan Dewanto goes on to suggest, may even provide breathing space for the contemplation of national cultural needs.

Yet for Boediardjo in 1941, although his dismissal of kroncong is clearly partly based on an elitist assertion on the form ‘the arts’ should take, and the elevated, civilising purpose they should serve, the primary objective of his criticism is to reassert a hierarchy of cultural values based on the isolation of indigenous Indonesian cultural expressions from those he

³ ‘…kita tidak bisa pertjaja bahwa P.P.R.K. dengan sengadjia hendak mentjap kerontjong itoe dengan nama kesenian, kerontjong, tjampoeran romantik palsoe dan dangkal itoe, tjampoeran jazz America tiroean dan “show” itoe.’
sees as cringingly derivative of foreign styles and forms. To this end, he goes on, ‘kroncong is dangerous’, productive of a false-consciousness, because, once:

- dazzled by the greatness of the West, even if just in the matter of music, people become content with appearances and with dreams …with these foreign tools the only thing that can be created is shallow sentimentality (254).

Rather than kroncong, Boediardjo suggests, Indonesians (and broadcasters) should turn to the gamelan orchestra in the search for the nation's own ‘tonality’, adding that: ‘there is no place in this country for the piercing sound of the trumpet, rather the music in the air is of the slenthem and gender (255). An interesting postscript to this call to recognise the nation's ‘tonality’ in the sound of the gamelan is that this has indeed become the almost exclusive musical trope used to conjure up Indonesia. Watch some footage of a palm fringed paddy field and you might be unsure of the location. Hear an audio track of the gamelan and all doubt evaporates.

A response to Boediardjo's comments came from the writer and critic Armijn Pané (1941), his reply following in the same issue of the journal. Pané picks up on Boediardjo's suggestion that the gamelan would be a more appropriate source of national culture and reminds him that Indonesians include ‘Sumatrans, Menadoese, and Ambonese’: those whose musical traditions are not based on the gamelan orchestra at all but on other ‘tonalities’ (257).

Exposing the Javanese bias that has continued to feature in attacks both on formulations of national culture and the central government's political and economic decision making processes, Pané accuses Boediardjo of wishing to create a culture ‘that closes the door to Indonesians who are not Javanese’ (257). On this basis, Pané pledges support for the P.P.R.K.'s decision to broadcast the kroncong concert to the Indonesian public, while at the same time suggesting that the national popularity of kroncong in Indonesia is enough to recommend it as a national music. It was, moreover, far better placed, he claims, to contribute to a relevant, modern Indonesian culture than Ali Boediardjo's proposal for a music based on gamelan, because unlike gamelan, kroncong had none of the associations with the feudal culture of the royal courts or with ‘adat and traditions that stifle the spirit’ (258).

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4 ‘Kerontjong besar bahajanja. Orang silau melihat kemegahan barat, poen dalam hal moesik. Orang soedah merasa poeas dengan roepa, dengan bajangan sadja … dengan alat-alat asing kita tjoeja bisa mentjiptakan romantiek jang dangkal ini sadja.’

5 ‘… di negeri ini tidak pada tempatnya moesik terompet jang njaring boenjinja, melainkan moesik jang beroedara slenthem dan gender.’

6 ‘… ia seolah-olah hendak menoetoep pintoe bagi orang Indonesia jang boekan Djawa.’

7 ‘… sebab tidak terikat oleh adat kebiasaan, oleh tradisi jang mematikan semangat.’
Armijn Pané’s hope for a future freed from tradition, and his vision of modernity as a state of almost disembodied weightlessness once released from the ‘shackles’ of tradition and its demands is captured perfectly in his celebrated novel Belenggu (Shackles) which first appeared in a triple number of Poedjangga Baroe in 1939–40 (Frederick 1988: viii).

Throughout the text, the telephone, the radio, and the gramophone function as technologies of liberation, which release the voice from the body and unleash a purer, ‘inner’ voice. In Pané’s view, the struggle for independence was manifestly about more than gaining political sovereignty from the Dutch. Only by embracing the more Utopian vision of modernity could Indonesia move toward total independence. Kroncong, floating on the airwaves, or crackling through the horn of a gramophone, was the passionate, Indonesian expression of this. For Pané, it was the very hybridity and fluidity of kroncong and its embrace of scattered Indonesian and foreign influences, rather than clinging to a primordialised past, that made it such a cogent example of national culture. The tensions between tradition and modernity, home and away, self and community persist in Belenggu, but are a source of new horizons for its characters rather than moral and cultural decay.

That Indonesian culture seemed to thrive on the incorporation of such a range of diverse forms gave it its strength and ability to adapt to future demands. What Boediardjo regarded as kroncong’s weakness was in Pané’s assessment its greatest attribute. Pané does not deny that kroncong has appropriated elements from a range of musical styles. Indeed, he starts to list them in a celebration of its inclusiveness. ‘In addition to Western ingredients’, Pané notes:

kroncong also picks/quotes from sources that are Chinese, Arab, Romanian, Javanese, Sundanese, Batak, Menadoese, Ambonese. This demonstrates that kroncong contains a refreshing energy. Kroncong’s embrace extends in all directions, towards the outside and to points within (1941: 259).

Perhaps more than the details of kroncong’s hybridity, it was its dynamism, the ability to grow with changing conditions, that for Pané really captured the essence of what was required of a living, modern culture. William Frederick (1997), commenting on Pané’s passionate commitment to the new media of the day and especially film, notes that Pané saw:

film as an integrative art form in ways that reached far beyond mere technical matters...Writers, producers, actors, even cameramen, had always to be aware that the film medium belonged to no single nation or culture: it was truly a part of world culture, always changing and changeable, and therefore requiring a continuing awareness of the possibilities of integration and synthesis. (62–63).

8 ‘... kerontjong memetik djoega bahan-bahan Tionghoa, Roemenia, Djawa, Soenda, Batak, Menado dan Ambon. Hal itoe memboektikan kerontjong mengandoen tenaga jang segar. Kerontjong memperloeas diri kesegala djeroesan, keloear dan kedalam.’
These are characteristics that are just as applicable to television and the ‘cross-fertilisation’ of popular culture today. Similarly, Pané's assertion that no forced distinction should be made between indigenous and foreign cultural elements and consequently that government institutions should not attempt to restrict or censor foreign cultural products on the basis of their appropriateness to national culture is a view that continues to come up against enormous opposition in the Indonesian national cultural debate. Of course a major issue here is one of authority: who decides what constitutes national culture and to what ends?

As I have noted, *kroncong* went on to become accepted not only as an indigenous form of musical expression but as one patriotically associated with Indonesia's struggle against Dutch colonialism. Yet the process of rejection and eventual acceptance of the incorporation of foreign elements into an Indonesian form has been continually repeated since that time with regard the evolution of other hybrids. As this and other examples demonstrate, notions of hybridity are further complicated in popular culture by popular culture's commercial basis, foundations that are in themselves seen to derive from impure motives and agendas.

**Dangdut**

A more recent hybrid is *dangdut*, a popular musical style that in this case draws heavily from Indian film music (whose own dizzying array of musical references is renown), but also from Malay and Arabic music, and Western ‘stadium rock’. Indian musicals first became popular in ‘B’ and ‘C class cinemas in the 1950s and have since become a regular feature of commercial television schedules. *Dangdut*, likewise, came to exercise an enormous influence on television broadcasts in the 1980s and 90s. Although, relative to its ubiquitousness on the small screen in those decades, its popularity appears to have begun to wane, it is still a highly noticeable and distinctive feature of Indonesian television. It was arguably through television that *dangdut* was able to achieve such widespread popularity and become embraced as a mainstream Indonesian music.

Developing from a form known as *orkes Melayu* in the 1950s, *dangdut* became, like *kroncong* at the turn of the century, the musical icon of urban lower class youth in the 1970s (see Frederick 19829; Piper and Sawung Jobo 1987; Yampolsky 1997; Kartomi 1995; Lockard 1996 for more detailed discussions of the dangdut phenomenon and its development). Also like *kroncong*, but perhaps to a greater degree, *dangdut* was self-consciously embraced in opposition to the more Western tastes of the urban elite. The name *dangdut* onomatopoeically refers to its distinctive beat (Frederick 1982: 105), and it was lambasted by its detractors as an uncouth, derivative music whose insistent rhythms

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9 ‘Frederick's ground-breaking article, ‘Rhoma Irama and the Dangdut style’ (1982), to my knowledge the first academic study of the phenomenon in English and perhaps in any language, appears to have had a considerable influence on debates in Indonesia about the relative worth of *dangdut*, encouraging a reassessment of its national cultural value. It is cited frequently in Indonesian newspaper articles about *dangdut* and many people – fans and critics – I've spoken to in Indonesia about pop music over the years are aware of it.
encouraged lewd gyrations (an accusation not without precedent in the history of popular music internationally).

Under Sukarno prior to 1965, Western pop was officially banned as a cultural manifestation of Western imperialism. Naturally, as a consequence, to listen to it or perform it was a sign of opposition to Sukarno's Guided Democracy. In turn, *dangdut* can therefore be understood as a reaction to the flood of imported Western rock and cover bands that followed the fall of Sukarno and the rise of the New Order. *Dangdut* was part of a search for cultural equilibrium but the music also displayed a political consciousness. This could be seen in many of its lyrics and the fact that much of its initial following came from a young urban underclass. *Dangdut* constituted a form of protest against the social inequities that had accompanied the New Order's orientation toward foreign investment and cultural values that were out of step with the legions of disaffected, especially in urbanised areas (Frederick 1982: 108).

In the late 1970s and 1980s *dangdut*'s popularity moved beyond Jakarta and the major urban centres and soared to reach a national audience through cassette sales, film and television. *Dangdut* movies, especially those featuring the ‘King’ and ‘Queen’ of *Dangdut*, Rhoma Irama and Elvy Sukaesih, constituted their own genre that typically wove a rags-to-riches tale of a struggling, down-trodden musician's rise to stardom, intertwined with spectacular concert footage replete with oceans of writhing fans. *Dangdut* took TVRI by storm and guaranteed the music and its stars nation-wide coverage. The music shows *Aneka Ria Safari*, *Kamera Ria* and *Album Minggu* each dedicated around 50% of their airtime to *dangdut* (*Tempo* 25 May 1991: 51). Rhoma Irama, however, the self-proclaimed originator of the style, was banned from television for most of the 1980s, perhaps out of fear of his potential to mobilise millions of young fans. His music had developed a pronounced Islamic and social justice sensibility in the late 1970s and he had begun to campaign for the Muslim political party PPP, ruling party Golkar's major election rival at the time.

Despite Rhoma's conspicuous absence from the screen, other performers carried the flame. A moment in the resolution to one of Elvy Sukaesih's popular movies, *Cubit-Cubitan* (A Loving Pinch) captures excellently television's promotion of *dangdut* across the nation, uniting fans – and families – along the way. Through a series of disasters that begin with a cheating husband, who after a job transfer from Surabaya to the head office in Jakarta, abandons Elvy for his secretary, Elvy becomes separated from her children. While scouring the city looking for them, she is ‘discovered’ and transformed into a *dangdut* sensation. Her children meanwhile, believing their mother has been killed in a house fire, have been taken in by a kindly old man in a poor kampung. It is only after seeing their mother perform her national hit, the title song, *Cubit-cubitan*, on the kampung's communal TV in the village square, that the three are finally reunited. Elvy's magnitude is truly stellar and extends to
her generosity and powers of forgiveness. Eventually, she even accepts her husband when he comes crawling back to her.

*Dangdut* as a type of music with a particular lower class ethos was performed by street performers as well as those relative few who built successful and lucrative careers as *Dangdut* stars. The tight control exercised over the cassette recording industry by the group of Jakartan producers and businessmen known as the ‘Glodok Mafia’ should serve as a reminder that commercial popular culture, in addition to its dependence on popularity and sales, is also to a degree delineated by the tastes, acumen and biases of relatively small groups of entrepreneurs. While the influence or their decision making relative to the power of the audience (who ultimately decide the fate of the industry's offerings) is impossible to determine, they remain a prominent feature of the equation. Attempts to commercially release a *dangdut* song by Harry Roesli (a composer who makes an appearance at a later stage of this thesis), the title song to Putu Wijaya's film *Cas Cis Cus*, failed, for example, because the Glodok Mafia pronounced it ‘too intellectual’ (*Tempo* 25 May 1991: 53).

In the 1990s, *dangdut* was also embraced by commercial television, in particular station TPI which expressly targeted a socio-economically lower-middle to lower class audience. *Dangdut* was calculated to be still unloved by other sectors of the audience. In contrast to TPI, RCTI which targeted a more affluent upper middle class audience maintained its own market niche by refusing to screen *dangdut*, in one instance rejecting a clip to the song *Bum-Bum* by the rap-house band Papa Wewe because it was felt to contain *dangdut* elements (*Jawa Pos*, 27 Sep 1996). Over on TPI meanwhile, and to a lesser degree on other stations, *dangdut* was allowed to spread itself across the full spectrum of forms and genres, from regular reruns of old Rhoma Irama and Elvy Sukaesih movies, to ads for *jamu*, mosquito coils and instant noodles. TPI screened a *dangdut* quiz show (*Kuis Dangdut*) that tested contestants’ knowledge of *dangdut* performers, song lyrics and dancing ability; a *dangdut* soap opera in which parts of the narrative and characters’ inner dialogues were advanced through *dangdut* songs; music clip and variety shows featuring *dangdut* performers; and each year the station hosted the annual *dangdut* awards.

By mid decade, a number of Ministers and other government officials had begun to heap praise on *dangdut*, not for its irresistible rhythms but for its ‘Indonesianness’ and its consequent ability to unite ‘ordinary Indonesians’ (see Simatupang cited Sutton 1998: 6). In the telecast of the 1997 awards, the front row of the auditorium was taken up not with the platform heels, gold lame capes and egregious charms of *dangdut* performers, but with the somber suits and batik shirts of ministers, their elegantly attired wives, and, of course, Mbak Tutut, Suharto's daughter and TPI's proprietor. A speech by Information Minister Hartono confirmed that *dangdut* had finally, though not perhaps with its rebel roots intact, been added to the roll-call of national cultural belonging. Then, startlingly, Minister of State Moerdiono, since the previous year an unlikely supporter of *dangdut*, was anointed ‘King of Dangdut’.
for 1997. *Dangdut* is perhaps the example *par excellence* of an Indonesian hybrid form that became accepted as a distinctive national music largely through the action of the mass media and especially television. One aspect of this official enthusiasm for *dangdut* as a national cultural form was that it had also begun to be appreciated outside Indonesia, notably in Japan where a number of performers had successfully toured.

Of course *dangdut* is just one form of popular music performed by Indonesians. The protest songs of Iwan Fals, the bad-boy rock of Slank, for example, and countless more recent, less mainstream genres of popular music abound (Sen and Hill 2000: chapt 6). Many of these get an airing on Indonesian national television and therefore contribute to a more inclusive sense of national culture than that presided over by officials under the New Order. These have sometimes been the subject of debate about the constitution of national cultural values. Rap, for example, was publicly criticised by then Minister of Research and Technology, Habibie as ‘lacking in artistry’ and ‘filthy and incompatible’ with Indonesian culture (*Jakarta Post* 14 Jan 1995) Sentimental pop songs epitomised by the hit *Hati Yang Luka* were also targeted (Yampolsky 1989). But for the most part popular culture in Indonesia as elsewhere develops, comes, goes, mutates, away from government scrutiny.

As we can see, in Indonesia as elsewhere, attempts to distinguish the *foreign* from the *indigenous* elements in national culture are exercises in semantics without clear conclusions. A prerequisite part of the process of absorbing foreign elements into other indigenised forms has been the steady flow and eager consumption of foreign media products themselves. Here again the radio and the cinema were the most notable carriers of these in both pre- and post-independence Indonesia, before national television took over the mantle in the late 1970s after the launch of Palapa. The airwaves, especially, conveyed cultural products on international frequencies in addition to those originating in the Indonesian archipelago. One early record of the extent to which the networks of distribution and transmission of foreign cultural products spread throughout the region, and the extent of interest they aroused, can be found in the diaries Sjahrir kept while held in exile by the Dutch East Indies administration (Sjahrir, 1969 [1949]). Among the entries in these was the observation (on 10 June 1937) that in the remote Eastern Island of Banda Neira where he remained until the Japanese invasion at the start of WWII, the local wedding band performed a number of the latest Western tunes they’d learnt note for note from the radio (Sjahrir cited Mrazek 1994: 187). Sjahrir's familiarity with the American cinema of the period is also recorded in an entry (20 January 1937) extolling the quality of films produced under Roosevelt’s New Deal administration (Sjahrir 1969: 151). This suggests not only that Sjahrir in exile had had sufficient contact with foreign films to have gained a highly developed cinema literacy but that the networks of distribution were comprehensive enough to have reached the most remote corners of the archipelago. Sjahrir may have been removed from the realm of Indonesian nationalist politics, but he was never isolated from the rest of the world. He appears to have remained in very close contact with international developments in the
fields of politics, philosophy, and popular culture throughout his long period in exile. Perhaps Sjahrir was exceptional in his level of engagement with these media, certainly his abiding fascination with radio's ability to communicate distant worlds never left him, yet we can assume that he was just one member of an enormous audience for international media during the same period. Before the introduction of television to most nations in the 1950s and 60s, the worldwide distribution of movies remained the primary source of foreign images and entertainment. These came especially from the U.S. In 1948, the year the international community formally acknowledged Indonesian independence, 85% of all films shown in Indonesia came from either the U.S. or the U.K. although from the 1950s the total included a large percentage from India (Tunstall 1977: 243; see also Said 1991). As I noted previously, Indian film music was a major influence on the development of orkes Melayu, the precursor of dangdut. The overwhelming predominance of imported films in the nation's cinemas raised concern among some sectors about the potential influence of the values and lifestyles they displayed. Clearly the struggle to build an independent nation cut free from the colonial past demanded for some a more inward looking focus on the particular needs of the nation. Imported entertainment was an unhelpful distraction from the task at hand. The US. Army Area Handbook for Indonesia (1964), for example, noted that:

> In March 1957 the head of the Film Promotion Board was kidnapped and held for an hour or so by a veterans group which “suggested” that “rock and roll” films be banned because they would divert the attention of the people from the current elaboration of the Sukarno concept of guided democracy. Altogether, the pressures for censorship and control of film content are strong and varied, providing an indirect reflection of the popularity of films and their power to influence public opinion and attitudes (263) [my italics].

It is unclear in this instance who we are to presume is most under the influence of foreign movies: their fans, or the kidnappers obsessed to distraction with the bad influence they are assumed to exert. Nevertheless, the point is that such entertainments have never been universally thought of as value neutral. Sukarno's own attitude to the effect of foreign films, especially those from Hollywood, on his political agenda was somewhat ambiguous. A little less than a year before the occurrence described above, Sukarno had the opportunity to state his opinions on this matter directly to Hollywood.

**Entertainment as advertising as revolutionary discourse**

> …an (Indonesian) entertainment program showing a small boy crossing a busy street alone was considered inappropriate because the impression should not be given that young children are allowed to cross a street without adult help. Yet the American serials show people kicking and beating each other in an excessively violent manner. Material aspirations pose another difficulty. The Indonesian authorities are quite right to be concerned with the possibility of raising material aspirations beyond the means of the audience. Luxury
items, including expensive automobiles, are not permitted to be advertised on television. Yet in the American programs the Indonesian viewers see a lifestyle so luxurious that it befits only a small minority even in the United States. The caution TVRI is exercising to guard the integrity of Indonesian culture is negated by a powerful competitor, who enters almost unnoticed through the back door. (Alfian and Chu 1981: 39).

When the private commercial television station RCTI first began operating in 1989 as a subscriber service restricted to Jakarta, among its first advertisements were those for ‘luxury items including expensive automobiles’ precisely the sorts of consumer goods proscribed before the total ban on television advertising in 1981. The commercial station in this form really did represent a deluxe niche of Indonesian television that allowed those relative few able to receive the service – through geographical location and socio-economic position – to see the very things the government had felt would have a negative influence on the general population. Their display was restricted by an ultra-privatised means of consumption whose ‘raised walls’ and ‘barred windows’ were the encryption and high subscriber rates demanded by government regulators. Barriers of technology, literacy, and the wealth that facilitates access to both, were erected throughout the period of the New Order in attempts to obscure inequalities and minimise strains on national unity. At significant times this was seen as a problem emanating from the divide between the urban and rural populations wherein the solution lay in negotiating contact between them so as not to aggravate the sense that they were worlds apart in terms of wealth, lifestyle and cultural orientation. In the case above, Jakarta's large urban poor population was also excluded from the Jakarta-based service through the demand that members of the audience for the station possess a not inconsiderable income to pay for the set top decoder and a monthly subscription fee. It soon became apparent however, that the negotiated agreement which forced RCTI to launch its service as a ‘limited broadcast’ operation (siaran terbatas) would fail to achieve its objectives because the audience able and willing to pay for it was too small to attract sufficient advertising revenue. Despite the subscription fee, calculations of profit were pinned on the advertising industry's interest in the return of commercial television, whose removal eight years earlier was partly a response to the accumulated evidence that television advertising produced unwanted social and cultural results.

Philip Kitley (2000: 63–72) explores in some detail the range of possible reasons behind the eventual decision to ban all television advertising in 1981. Among these was the opportunity to greatly reduce the power base of Information Minister, and former general, Ali Murtopo who was said to be financing his ‘covert political activities’, with TVRI’s advertising revenue (Kitley 2000: 67). At the forefront, however, and contained in Suharto's speech announcing the ban were concerns to:
focus television more on facilitating the (national) development program and to avoid the detrimental effects (of advertising) which do not promote the spirit of development (cited Kitley 2000: 64).

As Kitley goes on to note, the decision was the culmination of a mistrust of television advertising that had begun to find popular and official expression in the early 1970s. As an example of a more general suspicion of the values carried in imported, mass mediated commercial cultural products, the ban had much deeper roots.

The social divisions that advertisements for luxury items seemed to be a manifestation of, and the social discord that surrounded the critical attention they received had boiled over some seven years before the total ban on television advertising during the Malari riots of January 1974. The riots, which took place on the occasion of Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka's official visit to Jakarta were fuelled by anti-Japanese sentiment and exploited by rival generals Sumitro, head of the security apparatus Kopkamtib who openly gave his support to the protesters demands, and Murtopo, then head of the military intelligence network Opsus, who claimed credit for the eventual crushing of the riots (Vatikiotis 1993: 75). Following the dismissal of Sumitro, Murtopo's further rise to prominence was evidenced by his becoming the principle architect of more draconian government policies that placed severe restrictions on non-governmental activity in the political process, specifically the ‘floating mass’ concept which abolished party-political activity between elections.

The Malari riots were widely interpreted as the consequence of growing dissatisfaction with a regime that enriched a predominantly urban clientalist elite. In its aftermath, all signs of ‘conspicuous consumption’ came to be regarded with suspicion by the government as a major cause of dangerous frustration. In reaction to this, in 1975 the government banned outdoor and television advertisements for:

- fancy cars and luxury housing development projects … At the same time (ad agencies) shifted expenditures to less visible areas of sales promotion and to the print media, which generally were less accessible to poor and rural peoples (Anderson 1980: 1266).

It was not just advertising that seemed capable of disrupting Indonesia's delicate social balance between the relative few who ‘had’ and the vast majority who did not. On television, imported programming, especially in the form of 'entertainment', was also criticised for its ability to communicate values inappropriate to Indonesian national culture or Indonesia's stage of national development (see for example Jusuf 2000: 10; Kitley 2000: 101–102). Materialism, individualism, immorality and lack of respect for figures of authority (governments, law enforcement officers, teachers, parents) have all at one time or another been singled out as elements of negative foreign cultural influence exhibited in imported entertainment. As the opening quote states, the values of imported entertainment
have been felt to slip through the back-door while the Indonesian government was out the front guarding the gate, taking care to restrict entry only to those advertisements and locally produced programmes appropriate to the authority's assessment of Indonesian needs: of education, development, national unity, national culture and political stability.

The lurking belief that imported media products have the ability to perform this kind of negative influence have their roots in the concepts of cultural and media imperialism and the view that television's dependence on inexpensive (relative to locally produced drama) foreign narrative content to fill schedules and capture viable audience numbers allows it the opportunity to ride rough shod over attempts to maintain national political and cultural sovereignty. There are, two quite distinct aspects to this. The first is that which suggests alien media products are capable of influencing Indonesians to adopt certain values or ways of behaving that are culturally inappropriate (un-Indonesian), or able to ‘destroy, swamp or crowd out authentic, local, traditional culture’ (Tomlinson 1991: 36). The second sees foreign media as being capable of threatening the development of a viable national culture from which to achieve an independent national polity. Connected with this is its presumed potential to heighten an awareness of social or global inequalities that are the product of existing, unsatisfactory economic and political conditions. The attacks on advertising billboards that took place prior to the Malari riots were an example of the second of these. Yet Malari was also very clear in its association of cultural domination with economic imperialism. Advertising for foreign goods or that which portrays values and ways of life adjudged to be inappropriate and therefore alien, not mindful of local cultural values and sensitivities, can often be regarded as a complicated amalgam of cultural and economic intrusion. Throughout the discourse of cultural imperialism as John Tomlinson (1991) has noted, the difficulty of discerning actual cultural domination by foreign cultural products causes ‘the cultural’ to be forever ‘deferred’ and displaced by an emphasis on the political and economic aspects of the production and distribution of foreign cultural goods (40).

As evidenced by the response to Malari by government regulators and the advertising industry's compliance in making their products, in particular those for luxury goods, less visible, immediate attempts to prevent these types of upheavals focussed attention on the display of images that were assumed to exacerbate them; that is, by removing the signs of ‘conspicuous consumption’ rather than attempting to address the inequitable access to wealth and opportunities that such images provide evidence of. There are a number of reasons for this. It is obviously much easier to remove the symbols of socio-economic divisions than the structural causes of them. But there is also some conflation occurring between the two whereby such things as advertisements and their influence are seen to have brought about the frustration that was directed towards the government and its policies. Advertising agencies’ reduction of outdoor advertising to focus instead on the print media where it was less likely to be seen by the rural and urban poor, and the eventual ban on TV ads in 1981 were examples of how a major socio-economic division could be maintained under the guise
of protecting the poor and less educated from the predations of the advertising industry, preserving national security and political stability in the process.

Although the language used to protest such conditions has altered since the concept of cultural imperialism was first elaborated in Indonesia in the 1950s, it is an area that concerned both the Sukarno and Suharto administrations in roughly the same degree. While both are conjoined, often sharing space in single utterances, the effects of cultural imperialism can, for the sake of hermeneutic ease, be divided into the two types referred to above: that affecting cultural expression; and that thought to destabilise national political sovereignty. Asserting the division allows us to speak of a relationship between them.

Official rhetoricians of both the Old and New Order expressed the view that foreign media products could give rise to material aspirations with the potential to threaten social harmony and political stability. As the authors of the opening quote suggest, and as I have already noted, one of the particular focuses of regulators’ attention was television advertising, many examples of which were actually local media products (see Anderson 1980: 1259 fn 16) but were nevertheless seen to be affiliated with a consumer culture that was foreign, surplus to Indonesian requirements and productive of material dissatisfaction that could lead to social and political instability. For Sukarno, perhaps owing to the absence of a viable consumer culture or extensive television industry for most of his presidency, it was Hollywood movies and Western rock music, both forms of popular entertainment accredited with the potential to influence Indonesian aspirations. Both, but especially the latter, also became symbols of opposition to the regime. Prior to this stance, however, there was a great deal of ambivalence about what role foreign media and cultural products could play in the establishment of an independent nation.

**Hollywood in Indonesia, Sukarno in Hollywood: hot climate, Cold War**

Little has been written about Sukarno's official visit to the United States in May 1956 but what has been written has been repeated often. Fragments of a speech he made to a group of movie executives during an excursion to Hollywood appeared in Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding the Media* (McLuhan 1967 [1964]), then again in *The Medium is the Message* (McLuhan and Fiore 1967), and have been cited frequently since, most notably by Daniel Lemer (1974, 1977) whose work had such an enormous impact on the study of the media's role in ‘Third World’ development.

Sukarno's visit took place a little more than six years before television was launched in Indonesia, although some close to the president had been pushing for its introduction from as early as 1952 (Kitley 2000: 23). It is nevertheless an early example of the sort of public critique of imported media products in Indonesia that fed straight into television and has continued along similar lines ever since. As can be seen from the earlier discussion of the *kroncong* debate, criticism of foreign, especially U.S., media products, claims about
the superficial mimicry of them, and the threat this posed to authentic expressions of local
cultural realities had long been commonplace rhetorical features of national cultural debate
in Indonesia. In this instance, as is perhaps befitting the perspective of a president rather
than cultural critics like Boediardjo or Armijn Pané, the issue was not so much cultural
expression as the influence of Hollywood movies on political developments. Concern about
Hollywood's effect on political sovereignty and stability was particularly directed at their
displays of material wealth and the domestic comfort of ‘ordinary’ U.S. citizens. Yet the
terms he used were ambiguous: Hollywood movies, Sukarno announced, had the capacity
to spark revolutions.

On 12 March 1956, U.S. Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles had extended an official
invitation to Sukarno to visit the U.S. while on a one-day-visit to Jakarta following Foreign
Minister Anak Agung's formal agreement to the terms of an enormous offer of U.S. food
aid (Feith 1962: 460). U.S.-Indonesian relations had been on a knife edge. The Eisenhower
administration was becoming increasingly impatient with what it saw as Indonesia's naive
neutrality in the clearly divided international political environment of the Cold War. The
steadily growing influence of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) was of concern, as was
Indonesia's refusal to alienate communist China. Nevertheless, the invitation and Sukarno's
acceptance of it was taken as an indication that Indonesia was not yet entirely out of
favour (Feith 1962: 460). It was an extensive tour, combining diplomacy and fact-finding
with pleasure. While throughout the tour relations were cordial, Sukarno remained assertive
of Indonesia's abrasive (non-aligned) role in Cold War international relations. Courted by
a United States that also mistrusted him, perhaps in order to reaffirm his commitment to
independence in matters of international relations, and to reject any suggestion that he had
been wooed by the tour, Sukarno immediately followed up his travels in the U.S. with a
tour of Europe, the U.S.S.R and the People's Republic of China. Whether intended to seek
balance or to aggravate the U.S., it was a move that apparently angered the CIA's Deputy
Director of Plans, Frank Wisner, who is reported to have said in the northern autumn of
1956 (about the time Sukarno was touring the USSR and China), ‘I think it's time we
held Sukarno's feet to the fire’ (cited Blum 1995: chapt 4). One of the alleged methods
devised to damage Sukarno's political reputation was the production and circulation of a
pornographic film and a series of stills featuring a Sukarno look alike and a blonde actress
said to resemble a Russian diplomatic aide who had accompanied Sukarno during his tour
of the USSR and with whom he was rumoured to be romantically linked. Another film
reportedly made use of a Sukarno mask developed by the CIA (Blum 1995: chapt 4).
But these were not the sort of films Sukarno had in mind when he accused Hollywood
of sparking revolutions.

Amongst Sukarno's many meetings and speeches in the United States, the inclusion of a
visit to Hollywood on his itinerary, and his meeting there with a large group of movie
executives while touring the lots was a significant symbolic gesture. It can be seen as a face-
to-face encounter between representatives of the forces of American cultural imperialism, the forward guard of American foreign and economic policy, and Sukarno, recalcitrant anti-imperialist. Significantly, Sukarno later gave his support to anti-Western cultural organisations in Indonesia and, in October 1964, agreed to demands for a total ban on the importation of American movies (see Sen 1985,1994).

From the cursory description of the tour provided by John Legge in his *Sukarno: A Political Biography* (1972), it can be deduced that the state visit was a triumphant and multi-faceted success. He addressed Congress, but also visited Disneyland where he spent a relaxing day with his son Guntur. But perhaps the greatest insight into the sort of impressions Sukarno took back to Indonesia with him is Legge's brief note (in parentheses) that mentions 'he was moved, in particular by the sight of thousands of employees’ cars parked at the Chrysler-Plymouth Corporation works at Detroit’ (270). He was stunned not so much by America's industrial might (its ability to mass produce automobiles), as by the ability of average workers, ordinary citizen-consumers, to enjoy the fruits of their own labour: not by the rate of cars moving along the assembly line, but by the thousands belonging to the assembly line workers parked outside.

Another record of the tour that allows us a glimpse into the cast of Sukarno's intellectual frame (and, I venture, his far-sightedness) comes in the Indonesian official publication, *Indonesia 1961* which includes a photograph of Sukarno holding a press conference in Philadelphia with the caption:

> Indonesia's Head of State expounds a point to pressmen at Philadelphia, U.S.A. World peace will be much closer when every pressman understands the meaning and implications of colonialism and imperialism (Indonesian Department of Foreign Affairs, 1961: 69) [see figure 4]
There is, as I have mentioned, currently a paucity of the sort of details about Sukarno's Hollywood excursion that would make the scene come alive in cinematic colour and enable a thorough investigation of the tensions at work. I do not know what the weather was like, where exactly it took place, who was in attendance. I do not have a complete transcript of his address, nor any of the responses of the addressees. Nevertheless, there is enough to sketch with. The historic symbolism of Sukarno's presence there can be roughly shaded in. In the first place, is the timing of the visit: one year after the 1955 Bandung Asia-Africa Conference at which the notion of cultural imperialism was discussed. Sukarno in hosting the conference highlighted his prominence not only as ideologue, but as performer on the international political stage. Variously described as charismatic or flamboyant, he can also be regarded as Indonesia's first post-independence media celebrity whose fame at home and internationally was due in no small part to his understanding of the power of film and broadcasting and his eagerness to use them to promote his views. Sukarno had become convinced of radio's usefulness to the nationalist cause while Indonesia was still under Japanese occupation. It was the Japanese administration that arguably laid the foundations for Indonesia's broadcasting future through their establishment of a centrally organised radio network and training of many of those who went on to establish RRI (Radio Republik Indonesia) out of the remnants of that network in 1945 immediately following the
proclamation of independence. Histories of the period refer incessantly to his radio speeches and their impact (see Wild 1987, 1991 for a more sustained history of radio in the period).

With the arrival of newsreel film in the 1950s, Sukarno began to appear regularly on cinema screens. He was a ‘movie star’ by his own admission, proclaiming himself ‘an Indonesian film artist in the process of revolution’ during a meeting with a delegation from Indonesia's beleaguered film industry in March 1956 just two months before his visit to the US (see Sen 1985; Kaden 1995: 3). So, Sukarno the charismatic, media savvy star of film and radio, and Sukarno the anti-imperialist both go to Hollywood where, in his address to the moguls, he becomes Sukarno the influential, international ‘communications’ theorist. Influential, because, as I have mentioned, his visit to Hollywood and the theory he expounded to the gathering of movie executives was later cited by two internationally renown theorists of media and cultural change, Marshall McLuhan and Daniel Lerner, to support and develop their own theories.

The Indonesian media not surprisingly reported on Sukarno's Hollywood sojourn. Michael Kaden cites an account taken from Star News – Madjalah Penggemar Film, reprinted in the magazine's 1956–57 annual. It states that Sukarno praised Hollywood as ‘one of the greatest revolutionary powers’ of the time, because:

Hollywood played an important role within the revolutions that raged (throughout) Asia…One of the weapons of colonialism is illiteracy and the deliberate effort to isolate a people from the (outside) world. A (great benefit) of Hollywood is its contribution to overcoming that situation. The film industry (is) a window through which you can observe the world – and colonized people … looking through this window can see things they could never see directly (cited Kaden 1995: 3).

Hollywood films then, offered a mediated view of the world to people whose own view had been insulated by colonialism and the illiteracy perpetuated by it. Sukarno's emphasis on illiteracy here highlights the democratic and educative aspects of mass distributed audio visual culture that allow people to engage with worlds beyond their immediate experience regardless of education. Hollywood, according to this view, is revolutionary because its films open doors that would otherwise remain closed. This Indonesian journalist's report of Sukarno's speech is, however, different from versions appearing in the work of McLuhan and Lerner.

That they concentrate on what appear to be different parts of the same speech, raises doubts about the possibility of ‘pressmen’, let alone Western media theoreticians, ever understanding the ‘meaning and implications of colonialism and imperialism’. The major departure I would argue stems from a different interpretation of the word ‘revolution’. It is a discrepancy that needs to be understood within the context of the Cold War when to American ears and
those of the U.S. aligned West, the syllables of ‘re-vol-u-tion’ had come to resemble the sound of dominoes falling.

According to Marshall McLuhan's initial rendition of the address, Sukarno told a gathering of Hollywood executives that he considered them to be,

political radicals and revolutionaries who had greatly hastened political change in the East’. Hollywood movies he pointed out, portrayed a world in which ‘all the ordinary people had cars, electric stoves and refrigerators’, rarities in 1950s Indonesia. ‘So the Oriental regards himself as an ordinary person who has been deprived of the ordinary man's birthright’ (1967 [1964]: 314).

It is difficult to hear Sukarno's original inflection in this paraphrasing of his words, but taken together with Legge's comments on the visit to the automobile factory in Detroit, and Sukarno's press conference in Philadelphia, we can conclude that according to this version of his speech Sukarno, albeit ironically, congratulated Hollywood and its productions for displaying as ordinary a material way of life unavailable to most of the Indonesian audience, thereby producing a sense of dissatisfaction with global inequalities in the distribution of wealth. This, in turn, led to a heightened awareness of the persistence of imperialist and colonialist forces at work in relations between nations and an appreciation of the need to struggle against them. That revolution was a process that had yet to reach its goals was key for Sukarno's vision of Indonesian modernity. Although he was surely aware of the irony of his words, Sukarno, I believe, was serious in his claim that the effect of Hollywood on ordinary (and especially illiterate) Indonesians was revolutionary because it raised consciousness and brought home an awareness that the struggle against imperialism had yet to achieve its aims. The irony stemmed from the already commonplace view that Hollywood exercised the more pernicious, narcotic effect of a 'dream factory' or that US cultural products functioned as 'counter-revolutionary' propaganda.

McLuhan diverges from this understanding when he interprets Sukarno's address to mean that ‘The film medium’, could thus be viewed as a ‘monster ad for consumer goods’, a description, McLuhan notes, quite at odds with the way Hollywood films are regarded in the U.S. Further, the distinction McLuhan draws is that which lies between the unconscious and the consciousness-raising; the difference between a ‘monster ad’ that massages hidden desires and 'day-dreams', and a catalyst for heightened political awareness with the potential for action. Political revolution and a fascination with (and suspicion of) the wiles of the unconscious, it could be noted, are equally crucial figures in the history and conceptualisation of modernity. McLuhan writes:

In America this major aspect of film is merely subliminal. Far from regarding our pictures as incentives to mayhem and revolution, we take them as solace and compensation, or as a form of deferred payment by day-
dreaming. But the Oriental is right, and we are wrong about this. In fact, the movie is a mighty limb of the industrial giant (1967: 314).

More clearly here, McLuhan's understanding of the word 'revolution' is a sticking point. For McLuhan, revolution is an unstable, chaotic state effortlessly coupled with 'mayhem'. While for Sukarno, the 'Indonesian film artist in the process of revolution', it is a step towards liberty, equality and the 'world peace' that could be achieved through decolonisation without imperialism, and without the exploitation of illiteracy as its major defence. Yet, importantly, what both Sukarno and McLuhan suggest is that information and ideas carried in imported entertainment media have the potential to force the hand of popular aspirations to produce political change.

McLuhan's 1967 reference to Sukarno's speech in the innovatively designed *The Medium is the Massage* (McLuhan and Fiore 1967) directly cites a *Variety* report of the speech and resists further attempts to analyse it. Perhaps not surprisingly, *Variety*'s allegedly verbatim citation appears to occupy a middle ground between the Indonesian journalist's report and McLuhan's exegesis of the speech.

‘Ice Boxes Sabotage Colonialism’

Sukarno: ‘The motion picture industry has provided a window on the world, and the colonized nations have looked through that window and have seen the things of which they have been deprived. It is perhaps not generally realized that a refrigerator can be a revolutionary symbol – to a people who have no refrigerators. A motor car owned by a worker in one country can be a symbol of revolt to a people deprived of even the necessities of life … [Hollywood] helped to build up the sense of deprivation of man's birthright, and that sense of deprivation has played a large part in the national revolutions of postwar Asia’ (cited McLuhan and Fiore 1967: 131).

Daniel Lerner's best known work is *The Passing of Traditional Society* (1958), a book based on research originally funded by the USIA (United States Information Agency) to assess whether US media were successfully competing with Soviet attempts to establish good relations in the Arab states. In its eventually published form, however, Lerner ‘de-emphasised’ the Cold-War agenda of his original brief to stress the potential of the media to contribute positively to the process of ‘development’ (Tunstall 1977: 207). His work subsequently had an enormous impact on the study of the relationship between communications and national development in the Third World (see for example Schramm 1964, Rogers 1969) and exerted a particular influence on studies of the impact of satellite television on rural Indonesia (Alfian 1981; Chu, Alfian and Schramm 1991).

Lerner (1977) cites Sukarno's speech to support his theory that the international distribution of media from the West produces ‘rising expectations’ (158–159) in lesser developed
countries (LDCs), which leads inevitably to ‘rising frustrations’ (159–161), a condition that degenerates into both ‘regression and aggression, both of which are highly counterproductive to development’ (161). The third phase that Lerner, in the bloodlessness typical of macro-analysis, sees as common to all LDCs ‘regardless of cultural variations’ is that of ‘military takeover’ (161). Lerner writes:

Mr. Soekarno … shocked Hollywood by accusing them of being ‘revolutionary’. Well, Hollywood has been called many things (‘Dream factory’, etc.) but not ‘revolutionary’. Soekarno went on to explain that a refrigerator is a revolutionary symbol to people in hot countries who have no refrigerators. An automobile in the hands of a working man is a revolutionary symbol to all those workers who don't even have a bicycle …

He was telling us that the whole relationship, or ratio, between what people want and what they get in the world was out of balance. The new communication media were rapidly leading people to want things they had never even imagined existed before, and to want these things intensely (1974: 10).

Lerner's interpretation of Sukarno's intention, or more correctly his interpretation of McLuhan's interpretation of Sukarno's intention, picks up the thread that McLuhan drops about Hollywood movies being like giant advertisements for consumer goods and lifestyles. In frequent criticisms, the popular cultural texts of imported films and television programmes are, like advertisements, deemed to possess an irresistible potency whose effect is damaging not only to a nation's national cultural project, but to the morals and behaviour of the audience, and the efficacy of government policy.

Examples of narrative ‘entertainment’ are frequently held to ‘promote’ behaviours and the embrace of values deemed inappropriate to the realities surrounding the points of their reception. This is held to be particularly true of sectors of society requiring special protection: children, youth, the poor and uneducated, indigenous communities. The question of ‘reality’ as an essential statement of fact and a prescriptive assessment of ‘needs’ is crucial here. Anthropologist Niels Mulder writing about Indonesian television provides a copy-book illustration of how this happens:

The negative influence on a public discourse that addresses the conditions of society may presently be enlarged by the further spread of electronic media, whether TV or the Internet. These media create a new culture that is divorced from the immediate experience of life. They create a fictive world that is presented as real; it brings the whole world into the living room where people take the fiction they see for (virtual) reality. Fiction becomes reality – a reality in no need of being validated by experience. It is the postmodern world – a world divorced from experience. So, how does one
make a problem of what really happens? It is not relevant (2000: 223) [my italics].

Mulder's apocalyptic vision has no faith at all in the tele-literacy of his subjects so he takes it upon himself to determine the limits of their reality and actual experience. Television (and the internet) here is associated, alongside postmodernity, with the death of the rationalism to which Mulder's own project is dedicated. There is widespread faith in the negative consequences of television's capacity to 'advertise' ways of life ('lifestyles'), raising expectations, causing frustration, dissatisfaction, 'aggression' and 'mayhem' (in McLuhan and Lerner's terms) amongst audiences who for political or economic reasons have no access to them but who are also culturally and psychologically vulnerable.

In conjunction with the Indonesian government's decision to ban television advertising for similar reasons, Chu, Alfian and Schramm (1991) noted that:

There has also been a shift away from the more violent programmes, such as Mannix, Hawaii Five-O, Kojak, and Bonanza which were shown in the early 1970s, to programmes like Mork and Mindy, Charlie's Angels, Flying High, Trapper John M.D., The Waltons and Battlestar Galactica of more recent years … It may be noted that Dallas and Dynasty are not among the American programmes shown in Indonesia (1991: 46–48).

Is Mork and Mindy really an improvement on Kojak, even given the loss of violence? And what about Charlie's Angels? Are three pin-up girls with guns a less violent package than a shaven-headed lolly-pop sucking man with one? Clearly what is claimed to have determined the changeover from group one to group two is a concern to steer behavioural and attitudinal responses toward more acceptable outcomes. This is based on the conviction that television programmes influence the behaviour of their viewers. And once again the viewers who programmers were specifically wanting to protect from this kind of bad influence were the poor, rural majority who had come to dominate the national audience following the launch of Palapa. This was the water-shed separating Bonanza from The Waltons. The outright rejection of Dallas and Dynasty here shouldn't come as a surprise given its established place in cultural imperialism's hall of infamy.

Who killed Ceausescu? JR?

We can compare these various assessments with a still more dramatic vision of popular entertainment's ability to bring about revolutionary and behavioural change. This is outlined in comments made by actor/revolutionary/media theorist Larry Hagman who starred as J.R. Ewing in the globally popular prime time soap opera, Dallas. As we can discern from the observations of Chu, Alfian and Schramm, whose media-as-development-tool perspective was a direct descendant of Lerner's conclusions, the decision not to show Dallas on Indonesian television was taken consciously for reasons whose merits were clear and self-evident. The
background to the decision is left hanging, unspoken but implicitly understood. Although Indonesia was possibly not the only nation not to air the series, its absence in the 1980s, given its otherwise near universal spread in that decade, is in itself significant. It has left a shadowy hollow where for countless others throughout the world, for better or worse, cigar-sucking tycoons and glamorous women stalk opulent mansions. *Dallas* is doubly significant.

In addition to its near international distribution was the international consternation this gave rise to among critics and government ministries of culture. *Dallas* emerged as the ‘perfect hate symbol’ of cultural imperialism (Michelle Mattelart cited Ang 1985: 2). The profound contrast between the series’ enormous international popularity and the committed belief that this popularity flattened cultural diversity, threatened authentic local expressions of cultural identity, or led to the adoption of regrettable and inappropriate manners and values, also provoked a serious questioning of the sorts of paradigms and categories used to naturalise these assumptions. Without *Dallas*, media studies would also be poorer.

When asked to comment on the global popularity of the show during the course of an interview, Hagman said:

I'm big in Romania! To show the corruptness of America, the reigning dictator Ceausescu put *[Dallas]* on TV. The people saw [the Ewings’ lifestyle] and said, ‘Hey, why don't we have that?’ So they took Ceausescu out and shot him. Today Romanians come up to me with tears in their eyes, saying, “JR saved our country” (cited *WHO* 2000: 20).

Such a belief in the ‘(counter) revolutionary’ impact of entertainment from the U.S. endorses the view widely held on the communist side of the iron curtain during the Cold War that Hollywood movies and programmes like *Dallas* functioned, and were effective, as capitalist propaganda. From the U.S. perspective of course this was interpreted as evidence of the liberating qualities of American media whose popularity was regarded as a symptom of yearning for the democracy and personal freedom they put on display.

*Dallas*, perhaps more than any other television show in the history of the medium, became the site of agitated critical debate that in its own way advanced important paradigms for the study of television (see for example Ang 1985; Katz and Liebes 1985). Some criticism came from those who saw in *Dallas’* kitsch, melodramatic aesthetic a particularly unworthy contributor to American cultural hegemony and imperialism (see Lang cited Ang 1985: 1). In connection with this were claims that the world-wide popularity of *Dallas* was representative of the global homogenisation of culture. In response to these accusations, analyses of audience responses to the series sought to highlight the socio-cultural specificities of textual engagement and an appreciation of the ‘polysemy’ of meaning, the view that a single meaning is not embedded within the text rather that a multiplicity of readings are possible limited only by the variety of socio-cultural and individual circumstances of the text's reception.
Ien Ang's analysis of letters written to her in response to a classified ad she placed in newspapers in Holland found that all respondents regardless of whether they loved or hated *Dallas* showed an awareness of the dominant ideological discourse surrounding the critique of mass culture (Ang 1991). Even fans of the programme were compelled in their letters to justify their love of it through reference to the dominant critical position that declared *Dallas* to be ‘bad mass culture’ (121).

All approaches to the critique of *Dallas* that began with a recognition of the enormous international popularity of the programme looked at its relationship to local cultural identity and notions of authenticity: on the one hand, its appearance on TV screens all over the world seemed to invoke the spectre of an homogenous (and homogenising) global culture at the expense of local diversities; on the other hand, the range of viewing experiences and interpretations of the programme and its pleasures bespoke of the rich diversity that existed between and within nations; while on yet another, a third hand, the popularity of Dallas suggested to some a universality of themes that seemed to indicate that culturally diverse audiences derived the same pleasures from a single text.

Ceausescu's decision to allow the state owned television channel to broadcast *Dallas* was, according to Hagman's theory of media effects, not simply a concession to the global spread of the programme, but an attempt to expose the decadence and ‘corruptness’ of America that backfired. The result, according to this scenario, was that instead of being disgusted with the way the Ewings and therefore Americans lived, the *Dallas* audience were made to feel frustrated and deprived and, blaming the Romanian political system for their deprivation, took matters into their own hands, demanding not fridges nor Texan mansions, opulence or sordid family dramas, but direct participation in the political process through the determination and pursuit of their own needs: ‘So they took Ceausescu out and shot him’.

In short, the testimonies of Sukarno and Hagman, without wishing to disregard the obvious penchant for hyperbole they shared in their triple capacities as ‘media celebrities’, ‘revolutionary leaders’ and ‘media theorists’, emphasise that there is nothing inherently neutral or ‘non-ideological’ about entertainment or its consequences. These examples propose as commonsensical the idea that ‘entertainment’ carries ideological values with the potential to influence political values and behaviour.

Once again, a distinction can be drawn between the conscious, violent political action claimed to have been a direct influence of watching *Dallas* and the sorts of unconscious, ‘subliminal’ effects popularly attributed to advertising. Yet, the way that products and fashions and their associated lifestyles are embedded in the narratives of advertisements can differ little from their placement within movies, sit-coms and soap operas. Consumer goods as ‘props’, whether appearing as mundane elements in daily routines (toothpaste, soap) or as features of the conscious public projection of style, taste and identification (clothes, interiors), simultaneously occupy a range of textual systems, slipping unhindered between
lived reality, the promotional universe of advertisements, and making their appearance in other televisual and cinematic fictions. Consumer goods, although having their own narrativising vehicle in the advertisement – ‘the inner fortress’ of the sponsor (Barnouw 1978), are hypertextual in this sense, leaping from text to text, from show-room floor to background detail in a Hollywood movie. How these features are interpreted and what audiences do with those interpretations will depend largely, according to the schema of Hagman and Sukarno, on the historical contexts of their reception.

**Ice box**

Although claiming to cite McLuhan's quotation of Sukarno's speech to the movie moguls as his source, Daniel Lerner later elaborated yet another variation of the address in which the Indonesian President refers almost exclusively to the iconic status of the refrigerator, a household item, Lerner/Sukarno notes, that appeared in nearly all Hollywood films. Lerner also says that Sukarno ‘blamed foreign communications’ for the rising frustrations of Indonesians rather than seeing them as a result of ‘the failure of his own communications policy’. He does not, however, go on to offer specific advice as to how Sukarno's communications policy could have been improved. Lerner recounts that:

Sukarno explained that (Hollywood executives) were ‘unconscious revolutionaries’ because in nearly all of their films somewhere or other a refrigerator appeared. Indonesian moviegoers were naturally curious about these big white boxes and found out what purpose they served. They were delighted with the idea of boxes that would keep foods cool and, quite naturally, wanted them for themselves. Sukarno concluded that, in a hot country like Indonesia, a refrigerator is a revolutionary symbol. In two hours any of these films can stimulate desires for more refrigerators than Indonesia can produce in twenty years (1977: 160–161) [my italics].

It is typical of criticisms of the influence of advertising on consumer behaviour that Lerner/Sukarno should refer to the advertising function of Hollywood as one of ‘stimulating desires’, a somewhat louche expression that conveys a sense (and sensuality) other than that of communicating the practical applications and real benefits of ordinary people owning refrigerators; seducing rather than exhibiting their usefulness through the construction of rational argument or demonstration.

An article in the *Australian Financial Review*, referring to the ban on television advertisements in Indonesia in 1981 and the prospects for the soon to be launched RCTI, mentions that field studies seeking to ascertain the impact of television in rural communities noted that advertising had convinced some villagers to purchase refrigerators despite having no electricity (*AFR* 30 September 1988). That that was the case is never doubted in the report. It is accepted as well within the bounds of credibility given the seductive power of advertising and the quaint naivete of rural villagers everywhere in the world. It
is also seen as a perfectly understandable reason to ban television advertising, evidence that the persuasions of television advertisements produced non-rational responses from which rural villagers required protection. The source of the information is not mentioned beyond that it came from the results of a field study. We can picture the refrigerator sitting incongruously in the corner of a simple village dwelling as a leitmotif that recurs intermittently throughout the history of the analysis of the negative influence of advertising and imported entertainment programmes.

Perhaps, in the final assessment, this is actually because the idea of a refrigerator ‘in a hot country like Indonesia’ is such an overwhelmingly potent image for the Western imagination. The refrigerator has an established and taken for granted place in the suburban home in the West. So much so that it has, like Stephen Heath's claim for television, a ‘seamless equivalence with daily life’ (1990: 267). Once an awareness of the ‘big white box’ and its function is established, how could it be ignored? Especially in a hot climate. Surely a fridge provides instant solutions to some of life’s most pressing daily problems in the tropics. Not only does it keep food cool, it keeps it fresh for longer, minimising spoilage and infestation by insects and other vermin. A fridge in a tropical environment once experienced, even vicariously, is surely not a luxury but a life breathing and life shaping necessity. But this ignores that the benefits of domestic refrigerators are not owing to refrigeration per se but to its integration with all other aspects of life, especially suburban life. The refrigerator is crucial to the autonomy of domestic environments.

It is true that in some parts of the world, in the suburbanised nations of Western Europe, the United States, Canada and Australia for example, the demand for fridges has been part of a social revolution, not because fridges keep things cold and fresh, but because in doing so they enable different patterns of consumption to emerge, patterns which derive from, and lead to the reorganisation of social spaces and public and domestic life. Once these changes and patterns are in place, the refrigerator becomes difficult to live without. The refrigerator, the car and the television form a triumvirate that makes suburban domestic life possible. They are both ‘the consequence and cause’ (Silverstone 1994: 63) of major social changes to where and how people live. Citing James L. Flink's discussion of the ‘automobile-refrigerator complex’, Silverstone notes that:

> The car, together with the range of domestic technologies that had the refrigerator at its head, transformed shopping and food preparation. The consequences were profound both for the retail trade (the supermarket replaced the local store) and for domestic life (64).

This he asserts, created the social and cultural fabric for broadcast television. John Hartley (1999) similarly notes the changes to shopping and consumption the refrigerator brought about (99–103). He is clearer still about the connections between the refrigerator and television noting the convergence between television advertising for branded goods on
supermarket shelves and the refrigerator required to keep the weekly shopping fresh. More important still was that the fridge was the lynchpin in the ‘ideology of domesticity’ (99) that television relied upon and much of its content promoted.

Yet, in Indonesia, the option of living without a refrigerator in any but the most suburbanised areas outside major cities is still a comfortable enough prospect. Because although one-stop-supermarkets are numerous, so too are produce markets and mobile streetside vendors selling snacks, cold drinks and fresh fruit and vegetables. Homelife is less divorced from social spaces for many in Indonesia than it is for those in suburban housing estates. And it is common also, not just socially acceptable but socially expected, with even a modest family income, to employ a live-in domestic helper, young women usually, to cook, clean, mind children, but also to run errands and do the daily shopping. By maintaining these supply lines a maid renders a refrigerator less necessary. Maids in this way can be seen to act as the daily conduits between domestic spheres and social spaces (markets and the street). It has also become common and something of a status symbol in the luxury residential areas of the big cities to have two kitchens: the ‘dirty kitchen’ (dapur kotor) out the back of the house near the servants quarters where the real work of food preparation is performed; and the ‘clean kitchen’ (dapur bersih) inside the house where the microwave sits next to a refrigerator stocked with ‘soft drinks and wines and packaged foods to which the family can help themselves’ (Sen 1998: 56–57).

If refrigerators in Indonesia were ever ‘revolutionary symbols’ they certainly appear to have lost their potency. Today, when advertisements for them are as ubiquitous as their appearance in films and TV series, whether imported or domestically produced, not to have one is less an incitement to take part in mass demonstrations. Refrigerators it seems rank below television sets when it comes to day-to-day necessities. Pam Nilan (2000), in the introduction to an ethnographic study of soap-opera audiences in Bali, writes that when she moved into an empty house where she was to live for a few months while conducting ‘fieldwork research on social change and popular culture’, she intended to employ a maid to help with the cooking and cleaning as the place had no ‘modern conveniences’ (120). Her friends advised her that maids expected to be able to watch television while they carried out their household duties and that she should therefore consider purchasing a TV. But to their disbelief, she decided to buy a fridge with her money instead (120). This greatly diminished her chances of ever securing the services of a maid. Nilan employs this anecdote as evidence that even young women from poor villages in Bali expect to be able to watch TV. Perhaps it can just as readily serve to show that ‘Westerners’ (and Southerners like Australians), even those studying television audiences, when forced to make the choice, prefer refrigerators.

**Different homes, different addresses**

Clearly, one of the most important hurdles to be overcome before television viewing could become a domestic practice in Indonesia was the generally slow rate of electrification in
areas outside the main centres. When televisions were supplied to villages without electricity as part of the government sponsored programme in the 1970s and 1980s, generators were also supplied and these tied television viewing to communal spaces at times when the generator was operating. The general supply of electricity to villages, then, increased opportunities for the inclusion of televisions (and refrigerators) into domestic settings. But, as John Hartley has pointed out for the case of television in other parts of the world, there is clearly a connection between the development of television watching as a domestic, household activity, and improvements in standards of housing (1999: chapt 8). This is no less true of Indonesian circumstances. Academic studies of the Indonesian ‘middle-class’ in the late 1980s (see Dick 1985; Tanter and Young 1990), despite their inconclusiveness on the question of a clear demarcation of the parameters of the categorisation, recognised a useful primary distinction isolating that socio-economic sector from others. This turned on the extent of relative engagement with communal and privatised domestic spheres. It is a distinction that can also be usefully employed to explain the major differences between the state objectives of TVRI and the guiding principles of televisi swasta that developed in opposition to them.

*Kampungan* is the adjective used to describe the characteristics (values, tastes, habits, social organisation etc) of those who live in *kampung*, literally villages, but also referring to the neighbourhood units that make up larger communities of towns or cities. *Kampung* are most usually the residential areas occupied by the poorer population. The adjective *kampungan* is also sometimes used with negative connotations to signify things or people that are thought to be distastefully ‘lower class’, base or sentimental. Conversely, it is used by *kampung* dwellers themselves as an expression of pride. Forms of popular music, most notably, *dangdut* and *kroncong*, as I have discussed, were in the past regarded as *kampungan* by their detractors, but as celebratory of honest, communally-loyal *kampungan* values by their admirers. More generally, *kampungan* has come to be used to describe an elemental community governed by values and practices of mutual self-help, dictated by poverty but sentimentalised and officially valorised as archetypically ‘Indonesian’ in essence.

*Kampungan* values are set in diametric opposition with those of the *gedungan*, people who live in *gedung*, brick or concrete buildings. The differences between the two groups are sources of identification that derive from living standards and housing stock and which, more than socio-economic indicators, define patterns of life or ‘lifestyles’. The root ‘structures’ contained in each concept, *kampung*, ‘community’, and *gedung*, ‘building’, serve to accentuate that the basic distinction between the two is one of relative social interaction; communities and the extended relationships that comprise them are here contrasted with the material figure of the ‘building’, a structure that contains and excludes and is therefore productive of private domestic space that prioritises the contained nucleus of the family over wider community membership. Many newspaper advertisements for housing estates in the mid 1990s emphasise this. One striking example, for ‘Dream Hills Estate’, features a full
A colour view of a hillside suburb at night. The streets are lined with pencil pines. Lights from distant houses, those of a kampung perhaps, are strewn in the valley below. And in the foreground, through a lounge room window, we are allowed a tantalising glimpse into Dream Hills Estate nuclear family life: a man, a woman and two children, one boy and one girl, sit before a roaring log fire in a quarry-stone fireplace (*Kompas* 20 May 1994: 18). That we gain this view through a window emphasises that privacy and insular domesticity are pivotal features of their domain.

Of course a major point of conflict around the growth of these suburbs and the associated recreational facilities of golf courses, was that they displaced countless people from kampung communities and occupied valuable arable land in areas close to cities. Most often without adequate compensation. This effectively ‘privatised’ national resources for the benefit of a socio-economic elite whose exclusivity was highlighted by the high walls and security posts of their enclaves. The majority, kampung dwellers, and the displaced, were literally excluded from enjoying even a fraction of the gains of national economic development enjoyed by these *gendungan*. It should be pointed out, however, that not all *gedungan* live in the sorts of luxury housing estates I have mentioned here. For most the division separating housing stock, amounts of disposable income and residential location from those of the *kampung* is far less pronounced, on a sliding scale at best.

Howard Dick in his studies has posited that a major determining feature of *gedungan* lifestyle that separates it from the life of the kampung community is the ‘privatisation of the means of consumption’ (1985: 75). This suggests that it is not wealth and material possessions that set the *gedungan* apart but the ‘a-social’ manner of their consumption. While members of a *kampung* neighbourhood may acquire television sets, for example, in the *kampung* they are shared, neighbours being at liberty to visit and watch along with the owner whose ownership is therefore less private. In the case of the *gedungan*, however, ‘fences are raised, doors locked, and windows barred’ (Dick 1990: 64). Isolation from the immediate community is also the result of greater social mobility and a tendency to associate more with people from outside the *kampung* such as work colleagues, accentuated by the tendency for *gedung* to face onto the street rather than be absorbed into the *gangs* and narrow lanes, and the comings and goings of the kampung (Murray 1991: 41).

This division has rough parallels in the different ways TVRI and *televisi swasta* addressed their audiences. A major shift occurred as television moved from a single channel regime whose agendas were based around official aspirations for national unity, to a competitive multi-channel system in which the quest for ratings and advertising revenue saw the introduction of new modes of address not based on membership of the national community of viewers. TVRI following the launch of Palapa had the aim of reaching communities. The government programme of supplying villages with television sets and installing them in communal areas where everyone could come together to watch emphasised this. Some
programmes too were perhaps therefore assumed to be watched communally, as part of a school class or community group, especially those with kelompencapir in mind. Even if the particular features of such programmes cannot be clearly drawn, the government's supply of televisions to villages can only have produced an altered model of the typical audience, a model to be borne in mind by government officials, producers and programmers in the course of their work.

With the advent of televisi swasta, urban and suburban environments and differently constructed notions of identity and domestic life came to dominate. The vast acreage of well-to-do suburbs that sprang up around the major cities in the 1990s prior to the collapse of the rupiah from around August 1997 were gedungan havens. Their growth was matched by that of television and advertising revenues over the same period. Unlike magazines and newspapers whose advertising can be seen to more specifically target the particular socio-economic sectors and niche groups that make up their readerships (see for example Sen 1998 for a discussion of these), it is less easy to make assumptions about the audience for free-to-air broadcast television. While other people watched and a wide cross-section of socio-economic/cultural groups appear to have been consciously appealed to by some stations, it is reasonable to assume, given their economic status, that middle-class gedungan were – and continue to be – a significant target audience for commercial television. Representations of them were also an increasingly prominent feature of its programmes and advertisements.

It was, afterall, the growth of the middle class and projections of their future growth throughout Southeast Asia, China and India that had attracted transnational satellite broadcasters in the first place and that had led in turn to the beginning of commercial broadcasting in Indonesia. Urbanisation, industrialisation, marketisation and incorporation into new image and consumer markets were productive of new cultural affiliations that were not contained by the New Order's formulation of national culture.

**Telenovela, Bollywood movies and chop-socky**

In the living memory of Indonesians, huge gatherings in the streets have been associated with some kind of (expected) significant social change. Although the everyday lives of most Indonesians have always been highly communal, gatherings on the people's initiative have tended to excite and intimidate New Order authorities. Precisely for this reason the New Order, capitalising the martial law-like stability and order framework, has minimised gatherings which it does not sponsor (Heryanto 1990: 296).

August 24, 1996. National Television Day, and the anniversaries of the establishment of stations TVRI, RCTI and SCTV. Pandemonium on the streets of Jakarta as thousands gather outside the luxurious Hotel Mandarin on Jalan Thamrin. Across the road in the centre of the large roundabout stands Monumen Selamat Datang (the Welcome Monument) built for
the 1962 Asian Games at which TVRI was officially launched exactly 34 years before. The crowd comprising mostly women is there to catch a glimpse of a guest on the 26th floor; Ariadne Sodi Miranda, alias Thalia, the Mexican star of *Maria Mercedes* and *Maria Cinta Yang Hilang* (Maria's Lost Love – originally *Maria La Del Barrio*), two of Indonesian television's most popular Latin American telenovela and among the highest rating television programs of any category (*Jawa Pos* 14 May 1996). Following the runaway success of *Maria Mercedes* in 1994, film-maker and critic Garin Nugroho described her thus:

Maria Mercedes, whose real name, Thalia, is no less beautiful, has suddenly become the collective dream of loyal television viewers: Independent, faithful, unconventionally beautiful. She is part of the mystical communal psychology of stars (1994: 107).

The clamorous enthusiasm for Latin American telenovela and their stars that reached a peak in Indonesia in the mid 1990s but continued throughout that decade was the subject of much comment in the print media. It was at a decisive period in the history of television in Indonesia when competition between commercial stations could no longer be avoided as had been the case in the years prior to 1994 when stations were confined to particular geographic locations. A 1993 ruling permitted all stations to begin to establish national networks of transmission. The launch in January 1995 of the Salim Group's *Indosiar Visual Mandiri* (IVM – although later simply referred to as *Indosiar*) with technical assistance from Hong Kong's TVB, access to that station's video library and plans for an enormous capital investment into a studio complex complete with ‘stable’ of actors and production staff added pressure to adapt to a new competitive regime. There were concerns, hotly denied by Indosiar management, that advertising for the Salim Group's products which includes food and beverages such as Indomie instant noodles, a product with one of the highest annual advertising expenditures in Indonesia, would be pulled from other stations (*Citra* 15–21 Aug 1994: 15). Among the pre-emptive attacks on Indosiar by spokespeople from other commercial stations was the accusation that its ties with TVB, which included the employment of personnel from Hong Kong in technical advisory positions, opened the floodgates to Chinese cultural values on Indonesian television. This was an accusation that could be expected to arouse an exceptional sting of popular outrage in Indonesia where members of the Sino-Indonesian minority are among the most economically powerful (and politically well-connected) and the most persecuted. FVM, according to its detractors, stood for *Indosiar Visual Mandarin*. Indosiar's preparations were reported extensively in the press in the six months prior to the station first going to air and clearly worried other stations who up until then seemed to have negotiated a transitional truce while they prepared for more open competition in an already tight advertising market.

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10 ‘*Maria Mercedes, yang nama aslinya tak kalah eloknya, Thalia, tiba-tiba menjadi impian kolektif pemirsa setia televisi: kemandiriannya, kesetiaannya, kecantikannya yang urakan. Ia adalah bagian dari psikologi komunal mistis para bintang.*’
All private stations were looking for cheap programming to capture audiences and fill airtime, especially between the non-prime daytime hours of 9am to 5pm. The abundance of inexpensive programming from the major film and/or television production centres outside of Hollywood – India (especially Mumbai but also Madras), Hong Kong and Latin America (primarily Mexico, Brazil and Venezuela) supplied the ideal solution. The widespread popularity of these genres from television production hubs outside the US complicated the too simple assertion of American imperialism in the world market. That all these genres were becoming such prominent features of television broadcasting in many parts of the world in the 1980s and 90s is also testimony to the vastly increased demand for content that followed the establishment of private stations throughout the world in countries whose television had previously been tightly regulated. The establishment of televisi swasta in Indonesia can be regarded as part of a worldwide trend towards the marketisation, privatisation and commercialisation of broadcast television. The demands of content hungry airtime and competition for audiences within the same national cultural space, were likewise those that shaped television in Indonesia at the end of the millennium.

The need to adjust to the new competitive conditions was perhaps greatest for SCTV which until 1993 was RCTI's twin in Surabaya, sharing programming. The shift of its headquarters to Jakarta, a national audience, and competition with RCTI for both audience and advertising forced the station to search out and establish its own market niche. This was not open competition then, but an agreement to differ and thus avoid competition for the same target audience. By 1994, SCTV appeared to have already found its identity in telenovela and its niche audience in ibu rumah tangga or housewives. Certainly this had become its reputation. By 1995, the station was already strip-programming up to six episodes of dubbed telenovela each weekday between 9am and 6pm. One popular version of what the letters SCTV stood for was Saluran Cerita Telenovela (Telenovela Channel). The station's reliance on telenovela was also jokingly rumoured to be the reason why the station's news program, Liputan 6 was, for the first year of its broadcast, shown at 7pm: it would cut into telenovela schedules. A more likely reason is that RCTI's top rating news program Seputar Indonesia screened at 6pm and SCTV and RCTI had, as I mentioned, agreed to minimise ‘sibling rivalry’ (Wardhana 1997b: 25 fn3).
Figure 5: FANS ALSO HAVE CELEBRITY STYLE Once upon a time telenovela were watched by women in housecoats. But nowadays the latest telenovela are enjoyed by all groups, including executive women with celebrity style. Don’t let this potential market pass you by!

Just as SCTV became associated with telenovela, TPI focussed on ‘Bollywood’ Indian musicals, and Indosiar with Hong Kong, ‘chop-socky’ films and series, although none of these programmes were confined to any particular station. As each genre became popular other stations set out to capture some of the audience for them. The popularity of telenovela and their steady supply scarcely abated. By 2000 they were being strip programmed on
almost all commercial stations in the mornings from 9.00 to 12.00 and again from 4.00 to 7.00 in the evenings. This led one critic to complain that the lack of variety between those hours was simply a ‘TV Pool in another form’ (Kompas 20 Feb 2000), referring to the New Order's occasional demand that all stations broadcast the same programme simultaneously thereby removing the audience's ability to choose an alternative.

Telenovela were accused of reducing the productivity of domestic workers who were unable to tear themselves away from the screen. The rags-to-riches tales that are typical of their storylines may have been both a reason for the fascination and an additional cause of concern for their employers, but that they created so much controversy at least partly seems to be because telenovela quickly became associated with another readily identifiable audience segment, that of ‘housewives’ (ibu rumah tangga) and maids (Forum Keadilan 8 September 1997; The Jakarta Post 11 August 1997; Vista-TV June 1995). As we have seen, their enthusiasm for the genre put the fanaticism back into fan culture.

There is no sure guarantee that other people weren't part of the audience for telenovela. But because these programme types predominated from late morning to late afternoon in the daily television schedule, the audience for them were those who were at home during those parts of the day. People fitting the description of ‘housewife’ were clearly among these but there were others. One article sensibly – and more inclusively – offers the descriptor, ‘orang rumah’; ‘house people’ but the article goes on to note that all of these programs being dubbed means that, ‘house people … can watch while cooking, cleaning, or looking after children – without having to be distracted by subtitles’, activities all still commonly attributed to women (Forum Keadilan 13 April 1995) whether housewives or domestic helpers. Certainly this is the understanding of Pam Nilan (2000, 2001) whose study of ‘soap opera’ (a term she sees as interchangeable with Indonesian sineiron or Latin American telenovtla) viewing in Bali suggests broad similarities with soap opera audiences in other parts of the world in terms of audience make-up, viewing practices, and the sense that these dramas ‘validate’ women's expertise in the maintenance of husband-wife and family relationships. However, as Mark Hobart has pointed out and Nilan notes,

a lot of men, in Bali and elsewhere, also watch soap operas, sometimes just incidentally, but sometimes with high levels of concentration. Older men who remained in the home during the working day are particularly likely to do so (Hobart cited Nilan 2001: 96).

Perhaps more to the point, and clearer than attempts to ascertain the veracity of the assumption that daytime audiences, and therefore those for telenovela, comprise women, is the perception of television industry professionals. SCTVs former operational director Indriena Basarah stated that telenovela were scheduled in the mornings and afternoons because the audience segment watching at that time comprised housewives and women (Vista-TV Jun 1995). Telenovela in terms of thematic concerns and target audience can,
with a nod in the direction of men who enjoy them and women who can't stand them, be termed a woman's genre, and women's genres are overwhelmingly daytime genres. As Tania Modleski has noted:

The formal properties of daytime television…accord closely with the rhythms of women's work in the home. Individual programs like soap operas as well as the flow of programs and commercials tend to make repetition, interruption and distraction pleasurable…since the housewife's 'leisure' time is not so strongly demarcated, her entertainment must often be consumed on the job (Modleski cited Silverstone 1994: 73–74) [my italics].

And this is perhaps the defining feature of soap-opera and other daytime genres like talk shows: their characteristics of structure, theme and formulae bear a direct relationship to the modes of viewing they are subjected to. They need to accommodate the possibility of other distractions, of sequences missed or half watched, through repetition and a comfortable level of predictability. The ability of audience members to predict is based on habitual familiarisation over a long period with the characters, relationships and settings of programmes. Their concentration on interiors, meanwhile, reflects, but for the inclusion of glamorously beautiful people and sometimes sumptuous decor, the interior settings of the viewer's engagement with them. The high level of “redundancy” is also a feature of how slowly storylines unfold in soap-opera and telenovela. In both, narrative-time passes in realtime’ unlike prime-time dramas and sit-coms that can compress days or even weeks into one 30 minute episode (see Allen 1985). All these characteristics together produce a heightened equivalence between the programmes and the routinised viewing practices accorded them. These are in turn supported by the assembly line of their manufacture. Because daytime television does not attract the high ratings of prime time, although it nevertheless accounts for a steady and sizeable proportion of stations’ income through advertising, it is most usually studio bound, featuring a regular ensemble cast, and committed to only modest production values. These factors, in addition to contributing to soap-opera's sustained familiarity, allow it to be produced cheaply, in large volumes over long runs.

**Dubbing and double-talk**

Of more concern to critics than any specific characteristics of these imported daytime programmes, and generating immense regulatory confusion, was the dubbing that enabled them to be so thoroughly and widely enjoyed. As I have noted, the typical characteristics of daytime television programmes closely accord with the way they are watched: that is, in ways that do not preclude the simultaneous performance of other domestic duties. Only by dubbing telenovela was this congruence between text and ideal manner of engagement possible.

The intricacies of what dubbing meant for different sectors of the public (housewives, domestic employees, children, the hearing impaired, the illiterate, the educated) unearthed
the realisation that the national audience contained a multiplicity of different expectations, demands and uses of television. This had broad implications for the government's fiercely guarded construction of a singular, uncompromised national culture and became the topic of copious journalism and parliamentary deliberation. Some film and television practitioners and government regulators felt that the dubbing of programmes into Indonesian was, by making foreign programs more readily accessible, also facilitating the entry into consciousness of foreign value systems and ways of behaving that were not only not Indonesian, but non-Indonesian. The issue had therefore to do with essentialising notions of Indonesianness and emphasised the role that language played in the maintenance of cultural parameters. The question of what to do about dubbing raised far more complicated questions than the government's rhetorical inventory could cope with.

In the absence of any clear guidelines from the government meanwhile, dubbing had by 1996 developed into a sizeable and profitable sub-industry of its own with a large workforce of dubbers, translators and sound recordists (*Vista-TV* June 1995: 72). Dubbed imported content, predominantly from Latin America, India and Hong Kong, but also from Japan, Egypt, the Philippines and Thailand (*Media Indonesia* 10 September 1997) also became among *televisi swasta's* most popular and profitable programmes. The excitement caused by the public appearances of telenovela stars in Jakarta was a good indication of how enthusiastic the fans for those shows were and a visible, physical representation of the ratings and revenue they generated. By the end of the 1990s, the assessment that many among the audience for telenovela were ‘as well heeled as the stars’ raised the prospect that the value of telenovela's audiences to consumer markets and therefore to advertisers had previously been vastly undervalued (see figure 5).

Although there were regular articles in the press commenting on the increasingly noticeable presence of dubbed programming on commercial stations from mid 1995 (see for example, *Forum Keadilan* 13 April 1995; *Forum Keadilan* 4 December 1995: 111; *Vista-TV* October 1995), the television dubbing debate began in earnest in May 1996 when Information Minister Harmoko and Minister for Education and Culture Wardiman Djojonegoro announced on behalf of the government that by August 17 that year all imported programs were to be dubbed into Indonesian. The shared announcement was made in connection with the launch of a new Indonesian language education plan by both ministers on the occasion of National Education Day and was placed as a proposal into the long-awaited draft broadcasting bill then being prepared for deliberation.

On one hand this may have been an attempt to assume control over a problematic practice that had gathered momentum without formal government consent. It could also be seen in conjunction with a continuing programme aimed at purifying the linguistic environment by ridding it of foreign words and expressions that were becoming increasingly commonplace. The English names of new housing developments springing up on the outskirts of Jakarta (or
such as the Dream Hills Estate I mentioned earlier, were a particular target. These were also instructed to change their names to Indonesian ones by 17 August. The announcement drew a variety of responses from all quarters. For the rest of May, newspapers carried articles, opinion columns, and reports of conferences and seminars on the issue almost daily. Notably, many self-described members of the television audience also contributed their points of view in the letters-to-the-editor sections.

We should immediately note that press articles and letters-to-editors were not wholly representative of audiences’ response to the dubbing debate. Particularly because the matter of functional literacy, that which enables newspapers to be read and letters to be written, was precisely at issue here, with dubbing – as opposed to subtitling – understandably preferred by anyone with a low level of literacy. It was also preferred by those whose daytime activities – whether owing to family responsibilities, or connected with paid domestic employment – negated the ability to give television their full attention, listening or half listening but perhaps not always watching, hovering in the vicinity of the activated television set but only employing all senses and entering into undivided engagement when it seemed that something was about to happen on the screen that needed to be seen and heard. Such viewing practices, familiar to anyone who has lived with television, were perhaps regarded as insignificant, not worth thinking too deeply about or facilitating. Or perhaps also as suspiciously aberrant to those who railed against the Ministers’ proposal; those for whom television was either on or off and watched or not watched, not occupying an abstracted, transitional range of partial attention. As we have seen, there is general recognition within the industry of the significant niche audience assumed to be watching and therefore a strong sense of the market for advertisers, but this segmentation of the audience was not a consideration for a government that, when not using television to communicate its messages to a mass audience, kept an eye on any programming that might be perceived to contradict its formulation of national cultural values.

Kompas, in a manner of acknowledging the steady stream of letters it was receiving and the enormous public interest the ministerial announcement had stirred up, ran a special collection of letters on the topic in the last week of May [Kompas 26 May 1996]. At this stage in the debate – which continued unresolved with fluctuations in intensity for the next two years, until petering out in the wake of May 1998 – the issues were relatively simple. No contortions around the question of when a foreigner who appears to be speaking Indonesian starts to complicate the notion of what it means to be an Indonesian. And as yet no mention of Indonesian cultural integrity and the threat of negative foreign influence. The letters appearing in Kompas in May 1996 can be roughly divided as belonging in one of two camps: those that saw dubbing as having an impact on language education and therefore with broader social ramifications, and those that wondered about its implications for their own participation in the television audience. A regular complaint of both letter writers and
columnists was that English language content, especially films shown on television, should not be dubbed. English language imports, with the exception of children's programs, unlike non-English language material, had up to that point been rarely dubbed into Indonesian. An article written before the ministerial announcement suggests that this is because the target audience for English language films and series was a predominantly urban and ‘upper-class’ one that wanted to see the film as it would appear in a cinema, with only the subtitles to aid comprehension. The article goes on to say that this sector of the audience was also that most interested in learning English and because of higher levels of education among them, was less likely to find the necessity of having to keep up with the subtitles too much of a distraction (Forum Keadilan 13 April 1995). The same article states that viewers from the middle classes and below prefer programmes to be in Indonesian whether imported and dubbed, or locally produced. Clearly then, the proposal that all foreign programmes be dubbed was going to have the most obvious effect on English language programmes and this is where many commentators’ attentions were focussed. Those who criticised the plan claimed that English was an important international language, and that broadcasting English language shows with their original voice track was of benefit to those trying to learn the language. A second, related concern was with the technical quality and artistic integrity of the original, one letter writer suggesting that dubbing films on television would lessen the quality of their dolby soundtracks. But as I have mentioned, the ministers’ proposal was directed firmly at the wish to extend the usage (vertical, horizontal and expressive) of Indonesian through the national media. That the issue of national unity was the driving force behind their proposal is further evidenced by the stipulation that it be carried out in time for the anniversary of Independence celebrations that year (Kompas 12 May 1996).

One of the New Order's stated reasons for extending the reach of television via satellite to all Indonesians had always included the goal of promoting the use of the Indonesian language, making it part of the daily linguistic environment. Many Indonesians remain fluent in a language other than the national language (see Cribb 2000: 37) but broadcast television has arguably done more than any other medium including the state school curriculum to ensure that colloquial, conversational Indonesian is heard and understood throughout the archipelago. And yet allowing foreign programmes to be dubbed seemed to open up the possibility that the national language, the very vehicle promoted to secure common cultural identity, could become an avenue along which foreign cultures could travel and infiltrate. The joke doing the rounds was that: ‘Nowadays, Indonesian is an international language. People from India, Mexico, Japan, and Hong Kong, for example, all seem to speak it fluently’. A number of government and television industry critics, however, didn't get the joke and saw the quip differently; it was not that foreigners appeared to be speaking Indonesian, but that foreigners, because they appeared to be speaking Indonesian, gave the impression they were Indonesian and that their values and behaviour were therefore acceptable. A version of the (by now very unfunny) joke as told by a critic of dubbing might be: ‘nowadays, it's apparently acceptable for anyone who speaks Indonesian to live together before marriage,
engage in extra-marital affairs or treat their parents and husbands disrespectfully’. The barrier of language according to this view, did not just restrict comprehension, it prevented a state of cultural confusion by ensuring that each range of cultural behaviours and values was clearly confined to a particular language. Ali Shahab, Chairman of the Association of TV Production Houses (Asosiasi Rumah Produksi), the director of a number of films in the early 1980s, including two satirical reworkings of popular imported television programmes\(^ {11} \), stated at a seminar in September 1995 that ‘foreign programmes which have been dubbed encourage viewers to immediately embrace foreign cultures and philosophies’ (Vista-TV Oct 1995). These comments need also to be seen as part of the rhetoric employed to defend the value and viability of the local television production industry. The cost of domestic production could not compete with the much cheaper imports which even with the additional cost of dubbing were only a fraction of the price to stations (ref. and some figures). Yet they were also indicative of the powerful cultural function languages are held to perform in non-anglophone nations.

Slamet Rahardjo, a director from the less commercially, more critically acclaimed end of the film-making spectrum went further, stating emphatically that:

> Words are the medium through which we know (have knowledge of) a nation. That is, language is loaded with (a system of) ethics, and a philosophy of life. Therefore if a story portrays a view of life that is not appropriate to Indonesia, then to have that story in Indonesian is wrong (cited Kompas 12 May 1996: 8).\(^ {12} \)

This idea that the incomprehensibility of foreign languages performed a positive function as a barrier to foreign influence was taken up repeatedly by politicians and social commentators. DPR member Oka Mahendra was clear about the line in the sand that languages drew and certain that dubbing would erase it:

> Dubbing all foreign programmes would mean that cultural attitudes that are restricted to foreign cultures will be conveyed through language and taken on by us. The influence of foreign culture will be absorbed more easily. Foreign culture is then no longer felt to be something that is foreign. Sooner or later this is going to influence our own national attitudes (Kompas 20 June 1996: 10).\(^ {13} \)

\(^ {11} \) *Manusia Enam Juta Dolar* [Six Million Dollar Man] (1981) and *Gadis Bionik* [The Bionic Woman] (1982).

\(^ {12} \) ‘Kata-kata adalah sarana mengenal bangsa. Artinya, bahasa itu bermuatan etika, bermuatan filosofi hidup. Jadi kalau ada cerita yang secara pandangan hidupnya tidak sesuai dengan Indonesia, maka penggunaan bahasa Indonesia di situ menjadi salah.’

\(^ {13} \) ‘Dengan disuluhsuarakannya semua tayangan asing, berarti sikap budaya yang membatasi budaya asing melalui bahasa, kita singkirkan. Pengaruh budaya asing akan lebih mudah merasuk. Budaya asing sudah tidak dirasakan lagi sebagai sesuatu yang asing. Cepat atau lambat ini akan mempengaruhi sikap bangsa kita.’
From these sorts of analyses we can see the dubbing debate as a reflection of concerns about cultural identity and national sovereignty over the right to establish the terms of that identity, as a response to the larger issues of globalisation. Popular, commercial culture is the site on which these issues are most captively arrayed. Dubbing allowed texts to straddled the fence between what was and was not acceptable to Indonesian culture.

In the opinion of other commentators, the dubbing of foreign programmes was wrong not because it facilitated the entry of foreign values but because it destroyed the opportunity to gain a better understanding and appreciation of foreign cultures and value systems, knowledge of which was essential to Indonesians in the era of globalisation. An assistant to the Rector of Atma Jaya Catholic University in Jakarta taking part in a forum with Oka Mahendra was fearful that the proposal to dub all foreign programmes would produce a ‘small minded nation’ (*Kompas* 20 June 1996: 10). These broadly ideological concerns were in contrast to those of viewers’ whose letters framed the dubbing proposal primarily as either bad, because television programmes in English were a boon to the study of that language and to dub them would deny the audience the opportunity to hear nuances of expression and pronunciation; or good, because it would extend comprehension and therefore enjoyment and education about other ways of life to a wider section of the community.

The second phase of the debate was issued from the government camp approximately one year after the first. To call it a riposte might be appropriate since it was manifestly a thrust in exactly the opposite direction. If it is true, as was rumoured, that Harmoko was removed from his long standing position as Information Minister because of the President's displeasure over his draft broadcasting bill that included the proposal to dub all imported programmes, then new Minister Hartono clearly thought it advisable to do the reverse of everything his predecessor had done. But ultimately it was a victory for those critics of the previous proposal who claimed that the entry of negative foreign influences would be facilitated if dubbing into Indonesian were allowed to continue, much less demanded by law.

Hartono's byzantine proposal, replacing that of Harmoko, was that all dubbing into Indonesian be stopped. In its place, all non-English imported programmes were to be dubbed into English and supplied with Indonesian subtitles! As we shall see, commercial stations’ negotiated refusal to conform on economic grounds meant that the policy was only ever implemented for a brief period at the start of 1998, and never totally. Conditions in the first half of that year were not conducive to attempts to monitor the media too closely and the system sprang more leaks than the government, preoccupied with other more pressing issues, could plug. Yet that the policy was ratified at all can be read as a victory for representatives of educated middle-class moral and educational interests. With the new policy formally in place, the ‘egalitarian’ (*Enzensberger 1970: 20*) potential of television took a backward step as the decision was made to limit the comprehensibility and enjoyment of a large proportion of programming to a relative minority. More incomprehensible too was that this group did
not constitute the core audience for daytime television, that part of scheduling most affected by the policy. Ultimately the act set out to replace the practice of listening to Indonesian with the practice of reading it. The all-or-nothing approaches of both Harmoko/Wardiman and Hartono furthermore exposed a lack of understanding of the equilibrium that television scheduling had already apparently reached.

When hope of any alteration to the bill's stand on dubbing had been surrendered, it was the dubbers themselves who emerged defeated from their studios. This was the tail end of the debate about what dubbing meant, now framed primarily in terms of the right to earn a living, but also promoting the idea that dubbers were in fact protecting Indonesian national culture from the entry of negative foreign values.

On 21 August a delegation holding placards and banners mounted a protest on the steps of the House of Representatives where they were met by members of the Armed Forces parliamentary faction. The banner most prominent in the Jakarta Post photograph of the demonstration read ‘Sulih suara dapat menyaring ungkapan-ungkapan bahasa asing yang tidak sesuai dengan budaya bangsa’ – ‘Dubbing can filter out expressions that are inappropriate to national culture’ (22 August 1997). Such sentiments, and their prevalence since the beginning of the debate, indicated a turning away from the world to focus inward.

Despite public criticism from many members of the audience and protests by station operators demanding a chance to at least exhaust their remaining stocks of dubbed programming and employ enough dubbers and translators with the required level of English proficiency to fulfil the requirement that all programmes be dubbed into English, the regulation remained intact and was included in the broadcasting bill approved by parliament and ratified by President Suharto at the end of September. Adherence to the bill, however, was not immediately forthcoming as stations sought, and were granted, a grace period through which to exhaust their stocks of dubbed programming and prepare material that adhered to the new regulations.

The deadline for compliance was finally extended to 1 January 1998. When it came, the change was dramatic. But by then the monetary crisis was at its peak and television stations were increasingly unable to maintain schedules at their current levels. Airtime was slashed, staff were cut, stations shelved first release material and turned to repeat programming to weather the storm and little-by-little dubbed programmes began to reappear. The government was in no condition to do anything about it.

**Dart Sabang Sampai Merauke**

Like any place, Jakarta has its share of stupid and clever slogans. An example of the first reads: ‘To join the Family Planning Program is to support the success of the National Five Year Plan’. The second type of
slogan reads: ‘Get rid of your haemorrhoids by using …’. A clever slogan speaks to us as people, as individuals who first and foremost think of ourselves. A not-so-clever slogan is one that has the idea that ‘national discipline’ or ‘the national plan’ is already part of the inner consciousness of people, while in fact I doubt that such an internalisation of the meaning of these words has taken place (Goenawan Mohamad 1994 [1982]: 7)

Sometime in the 1990s, during the first few years of that decade, a ‘virus’, at one time officially eradicated, began to assume the shape of nationalistic discourse, implanting its codes into host texts to produce subtle changes in national cultural metaphors. Once the virus had entered, key moments in national history took on other hues and a softer focus, established concepts like ‘merdeka’ and ‘unity in diversity’ gained a fuzzy yet sunnier perspective, and patriotic anthems came to resemble jingles, expressing the same old sentiments but with less gravity and more melodic hooks. The mutations produced were transmitted along airwaves to lodge in the minds and tongues of members of the commercial broadcasting audience. The changes they wrought, although not life threatening, were far-reaching and unstoppable. ‘The name of the virus’, according to DeTIK, the controversial political tabloid that would be banned in less than a year, was ‘television advertising’ (DeTIK 15–21 September 1993; see also Wardhana 2000b). The DeTIK article recited an inventory of behavioural aberrations attributed to the watching of television advertisements. A small boy, for example, had shut himself in the refrigerator to visit the ice-cream man he’d seen on a commercial. But it was the confusion created by television ads’ use of nationalism to sell products that seemed most indicative of the viral nature of their effect.

High-level state bureaucrats, meanwhile, went about their duties apparently unaware that a system of symbols mimicking that which supported their own activities, and exploiting the very communications network that had been initially established to promote the official discourse of national development and unity, was reaching some of the most geographically and culturally removed communities in the archipelago. That advertising was felt to be as influential as a viral infection is perhaps a reflection of the great store placed, both by the Indonesian government and the nation's social commentators and journalists, in the ability of mass mediated texts to shape a national public according to specified agendas. All nations are dependent on the dissemination of texts with which to promote the sense of a culturally and ideologically defined community. Advertising and the symbolic armoury of nationhood wielded by a nation's leadership, it seems, have more in common than is often acknowledged. Both frequently set out to win over the hearts and minds of people through reference to abstract concepts, and emotional appeals to senses of belonging whether to family, local community or the nation.

One of the periodic responsibilities of government ministers and other state officials in Indonesia is to tour the regions to affirm their instrumentality in the implementation of
any development projects their departments have administered and to generally ensure that their activities in the capital or other major centres are recognised as having a tangible influence on the lives and welfare of scattered and sometimes distant populations. Visits like these (usually to places closer to home, Javanese villages and their small-scale agricultural development projects) were a familiar sight to most Indonesians because they were covered daily on the state television network, TVRI. In fact, coverage of official visits was a prominent feature of TVRI’s national newscast, Siaran Berita, constituting a distinct category of ‘development news’ (see Alfian and Chu 1981, Sumita Tobing 1991, Kitley 2000), though perhaps more indicative of attempts to instil a sense of the state's omniscience than to illustrate the benefits of development projects themselves. The television coverage of these visits typically focused more on the uniformed or Golkar-yellow jacketed state official14 and his or her statements on the development projects being opened or inspected than on any attempt to understand their benefits from the local point of view. Philip Kitley (2000) has noted the ceremonial nature of more than half of all TVRI news reports and the preponderance of state officials taking centre stage (182). He has also detailed what he regards as the three dominant ritual forms of items appearing on TVRI news: the report (laporan), the meeting (rapat) and the visit (kunjungari) (193–198). Of the last of these, Kitley notes that:

The visual trademark of the visit ritual is the close focus on the key actor in the midst of what is often a visually exciting location. The viewer is held back from enjoying the visualization of all sorts of craft activities, manufacturing processes, and the like by the camera's insistent swing onto the key actor and his apparent interest and enthusiasm for what he is inspecting.

In some visit rituals, the high status of the visitor and his entourage is expressed by including shots of people from the field site performing welcoming rituals such as dances and presentations (197).

Televising these visits carried the function of highlighting the range and reach of the government's administrative responsibilities and the authority with which a diverse range of local needs were addressed. Siaran Berita was dominated by the central figures of the President, the Vice-President, ministers, or high-level officials engaged in ceremonies at which TVRI camera crews were present by request. The accompanying voice-over narration to reports were most frequently citations of the official speeches they covered.

TVRI, under the Directorate of Film, Radio and Television, itself contained within the Department of Information was, without hesitation, a mouthpiece of government. Under the

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14 In the two years leading to the 1997 General election, the overwhelming predominance of bright yellow, Golkar’s signature colour, on television screens was part of what many commentators referred to as the ‘kuningisasi’ (yellowisation) of public space.
terms of regulatory policy in place until September 1997, TVRI had a monopoly on the production of news. Commercial stations’ morning, afternoon and evening bulletins were officially *not-news* despite their fulfilling all the loosely defined criteria that contribute to a common understanding of what much television news looks and sounds like outside Indonesia, and the methods by which it narrates an ever-unfolding, serialised world of current events presented in such a way as to appear factual and of concern to its audience. On one level, to claim that what the commercial stations broadcast in the news time slots of their daily schedules was *not-news* was to be ensnared in a perverse state of denial. But it is perhaps more correct to say that TVRI had a monopoly over the determination of what *constituted* news, thereby establishing its own newscasts in a position that was paramount in a hierarchy of televised truth regimes. The commercial newscasts did not directly explore the activities of the state and its ceremonies (although occasionally reports of the same ceremonies were included in their schedules), thus they did not broadcast independent assessments of government development programmes or the performance of ministers. What can be asserted is that TVRI’s *Siaran Berita* narrated the world through entirely different news values than those exhibited on the commercial networks.

Whereas TVRI focused on the activities of officialdom, *televisi swasta’s* magazine/current affairs shows spent more time dealing with issues that were arguably at the quotidian, human end of official policies. These utilised the narratives of people ‘on the street’; eyewitnesses, disgruntled market stallholders, dissatisfied consumers, people often as little prepared to comment as TVRI’s ‘news-maker’ government leaders and spokespersons were rehearsed and routine in their relationship with the television cameras and microphone. TVRI news crews were likewise well rehearsed in their coverage of official events and all reports were structured according to an unerringly regular system of shots whether established by rote (the daily repetition of work practices, schedules and deadlines) or, as Kitley has suggested, more identifiable as deference to politico-cultural rituals that confirmed the hierarchical structure of power (2000: 193).

While *televisi swasta’s* newscasts habitually followed their own codes of practice, storytelling and modes of address, thereby constructing the parameters of their own audience and discursive worldview, their style was overall more exploratory and, according to the principle of competition for the audience, responsive to the perception of audience demand.

To the contrary, TVRI appeared to change little from the early 1970s, until responding gradually to competition from the commercial networks in the mid 1990s, despite constant criticism throughout that time about the boring repetitiveness of its content (see Kitley 2000: 180–181).

The imminent arrival of important state visitors and their entourage to a far-flung region required detailed preparations coordinated between officials at each administrative tier from the district to the sub-district down to the * lurah*, the representative of state authority at
village level. Yards and streets were swept, decorations mounted and, depending on the status of the visitor, performances planned. Sometimes these consisted of an exhibition of dances and music traditional to the region by suitably attired locals. At other times, officials were honoured with the singing of the national anthem or patriotic songs, perhaps by an assembly of school children.

It was during one such official visit to a remote Eastern province that the insidious action of the advertising virus was said to have been detected in a village some distance from the site of its production and distribution. Its sudden appearance here of all places indicated the virus’ propensity to be vectorally transmitted to any point at anytime.

The story goes that a high official from Jakarta was visiting a remote village in the eastern part of Indonesia, where, as usual, the folks gathered in the village square to welcome the honored guest. The iurah’ (village chief) spoke to the gathering crowd and said, “well folks, let us sing a song that you are all familiar with. You know the song *Dari Sabang Sampai Merauke* ?,” he asked.


*Dari Sabang Sampai Merauke* (From Sabang to Merauke), a patriotic anthem written by R. Surarjo, is a map in lyric form that plots the extent and diversity of the Indonesian nation, from Sabang, a town on the tiny island of Weh off the northern most tip of Aceh in North Sumatra, to Merauke, a centre located in the vast swamp of Merauke (sometimes spelt Meroke) on the Southern coast of Indonesian West Papua, near the border with Papua New Guinea. These were points on a map of Dutch colonial manufacture which, as Benedict Anderson (1991: 170–178) discusses, became the ‘map-as-logo’ of Indonesian nationalism. The song and map both gained particular revolutionary significance in the early 1960s under Sukarno when the president's rhetoric of ‘continuing the revolution’ was specifically concerned with Indonesian territorial claims over ‘Irian Jaya’, as it then became known, which the Dutch had refused to include among the colonies handed over to the Republic when Indonesian independence was ratified.

The expression ‘From Sabang to Merauke’ is used in official rhetoric, journalese, and colloquially to mean ‘right across the nation’ or ‘everyone in Indonesia’ and to take in, in that single sweep, all its richness and diversity. When the first Palapa satellite was launched, the telecommunications system it enabled was inaugurated with a telephone call between the governors of Aceh and Irian Jaya, and from Suharto to them both, because this was the surest way to both symbolically and practically demonstrate that Palapa had fulfilled its promise of uniting all the territories claimed to have once been part of the Majapahit empire, the ancient historical (some would say mythical) basis for the extent of the modern Republic.
Much later, after RCTI had established a nationwide network, one of its promotional slogans was the rhyme: ‘RCTI Oke, dari Sabang sampai Meroke’.

So here, in the 1990s, in the remote Eastern Indonesian village was the government official, whose presence there was itself owing to another even more extensive and established network cris-crossing the archipelago; that of the New Order government, its regulations, bureaucracy and administration.

Everything seemed to be following its expected course. In the mind of the visiting official who stood waiting in the village square for the assembled chorus to start singing *Dari Sabang Sampai Merauke*, perhaps the next stage of the tour was underway already, so predictable and well rehearsed was the routine; a song or a welcoming dance, the inspection of the new irrigation or sanitation project or school with the lurah and his wife. A photo opportunity as the dignitary turns the valve raising the lock-gate on the irrigation channel, or, wearing the conical hat of an agricultural labourer, painted Golkar-yellow, ceremoniously harvesting a clump of peanuts and holding the stalks and pods aloft. This might be followed by a sampling of some local produce or delicacy, a round of farewells, then back into the waiting car. So already, the official was perhaps getting ahead of himself, ready to mouth words of praise for the fresh green spears of rice plants swaying above the newly irrigated field of a successful transmigration settlement. Until…

The lurah raised his hand and the crowd began with ‘Dari Sabang Sampai Merauke’ all right, but something was just not right. It was not the martial song that stirs the hearts of Indonesian patriots. Instead of continuing with ‘Menjajah pulau-pulau,’ (Traversing islands) the crowd went on with ‘Dari Timor sampai ke Talaud’ (From Timor to Talaud) and finished with ‘Indonesia tanah airku, Indomie seleraku.’ (Indonesia my homeland, Indomie my favorite) (*EBRI* 1994: 38).

Here is a comparison between both.

### Dari Sabang Sampai Merauke

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dari Sabang sampai Merauke</th>
<th>From Sabang to Merauke</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Menjajah pulau-pulau</td>
<td>Traversing islands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sambung-menyambung menjadi satu</td>
<td>Coming together as one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itulah Indonesia</td>
<td>That is Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia tanah airku</td>
<td>Indonesia, my homeland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aku berjanji padamu</td>
<td>I make a promise to you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menjunjung tanah airku</td>
<td>To respect my homeland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanah airku Indonesia</td>
<td>My homeland Indonesia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Indomie ad

| Dari Sabang sampai Merauke                          | From Sabang to Merauke  |
This was not an isolated incident. An infant school pupil in Yogyakarta, asked to stand in front of the class to sing *Dari Sabang Sampai Merauke*, also sang ‘not the martial song that stirs the hearts of patriots’, but the Indomie jingle that appeared to have displaced it (*DeTIK* 15–21 September 1993). Whether these anecdotes have a firm foundation in fact or whether they are both part of a myth-making moral panic about the insidiousness of television advertising is of little importance. ‘Simple villagers’ and children, the very innocents that critics of television and advertising had long sought to protect, and in whom the government had strived to instil its own vision of national belonging, seemed to have unwittingly provided evidence for their own vulnerability. Yet the anxiety these anecdotes were apparently meant to elicit suggested that it was the New Order's own discursive basis that had been exposed as vulnerable. It appeared that the ‘work’ it had put in to maintain and manage the feeling of national identity was working against the grain of the work being carried out by private enterprise and their commercial promotions. The government's decision to licence domestic commercial television stations had been taken to offset the possibility that satellite broadcasts emanating from outside the nation's borders would attract an Indonesian audience seeking alternatives with the potential to damage national interests. But ‘the Trojan horse of media liberalization’ (Sinclair, Jacka and Cunningham 1996: 2) contained intruders with other agendas. Furthermore, advertising's use of official tropes of patriotic nationalism and unity highlighted uncanny similarities between them and their methods. Indomie's association of national identity with the consumption of its noodles and the anecdotal evidence suggesting that confusion between them was rife led station RCTI to announce its withdrawal of the commercial (*Tempo* 18 September 1993). This was a decision that must have been quickly reconsidered because the ad and others like it soon reappeared. The competition for advertising revenue was becoming too great and the commercial television industry's reliance on companies like Indofood, enormous manufacturers of food and beverages, meant that stations were not in a position to reject their commercials.

**Indonoodles**

The name *Indomie*, the biggest selling of the three brands of instant noodles manufactured by *Indofood*, itself one of the largest food processors in the world, is synonymous with instant noodles in Indonesia, a foodstuff that since the early 1980s has become an Indonesian staple second only to rice. By the mid 1990s, Indonesia had become the second biggest consumer of noodles after Japan although only the fourth largest consumer per capita, with each Indonesian on average estimated to eat around 29 packets per annum (*EBRI* 3 February 1996). This figure, however, somewhat distorts the real significance of instant noodles to the consumer market in Indonesia since it is not ‘all Indonesians’ who primarily consume them or who are therefore targeted by Indofood's marketing strategies. In the same year, the
valuable middle and upper class market sector have been estimated to account for around 90% of the total consumption of instant noodles in Indonesia (EBRI 15 May 1996)

The company is also a major exporter of noodles, a factor used in 1995 to argue for permission to increase the number of its domestic manufacturing plants in Indonesia from 22 to 26 despite its domestic share already exceeding limits previously set by the government. Permission was eventually granted with the proviso that the additional output was headed for export (EBRI 3 February 1996). Indofood has also managed to maintain its virtual monopoly over the production of noodles through its parent company's control of flour milling in Indonesia: the Salim Group, the conglomerate headed by Liem Sioe Liong (also known as Sudomo Salim) took over most flour milling operations in the 1980s and, being able to set the price and adjust the supply of the major ingredient in instant noodles, quickly bought out its competitors. Indofood eventually took over the Bogasari flour milling operation, Indonesia's largest, through an internal acquisition from the Salim Group's subsidiary Indocement in 1995 (SWA 5 (11) August 1995).

Despite its unassailable position as market leader, Indofood's advertising campaigns for all three of its major brands of instant noodles – Indomie, Supermi and Sarimi – have a high rotation in the television schedules of all stations. While their ingredients all appear to be identical, there is a marked differentiation between each brand in terms of their respective advertising campaigns and target markets. Through branding, all major market sectors can be effectively targeted. Indomie, the company's 'flagship' noodle, is tailored as the most upmarket brand, aimed still more specifically at middle and upper-class consumers. So it is unsurprising that Indomie are Indofood's biggest selling noodles, and significant that this predominantly urban sector are delivered, in television advertisements for the brand, colour-drenched images of pre-modern life in a lush and fertile proto-Indonesian rural cornucopia.
Advertising for Indomie in the 1990s was notable for its nostalgic representations of agrarian labour as idyll, an observation that allows insight into the connection between the self-perception of the steadily growing ranks of the urban middle class, and a sentimentalised view of rural life. These wistful visions of rustic simplicity are figured as containing traditional values that remain as residual elements in the national psyche despite their being based on ways of life that have been left behind in the transformation to urban, capitalist modernity. Paul James (1993) sees such representations as evidence of the contradiction that many in the metropolitan world find themselves caught within, torn:

between a breathless adulation of all that is global, cosmopolitan and Export-Oriented, and a whimsical sometimes naive nostalgia for all those remnant places and practices which appear to remain untouched by global connections. These are the slow, quiet places, places apparently uncolonized, bypassed by the capitalist fast-lane; and unself-conscious, self-absorbed practices in which the local people are almost oblivious to the television lights we have turned upon them (30) [italics in original].

Indomie's 1996–97 television advertisement was the perfect encapsulation of this. We can contrast the nostalgic view it offers of places bypassed by the ‘fast-lane’, with the disdain shown for such places 35 years earlier during the revolutionary struggle for modernity.
under Sukarno, when the past was literally torn down to be replaced by things ‘larger and taller’ (Indonesian Department of Foreign Affairs 1961: 90).

The ad opens with the arrival of a steam train at a country station. The toot of its whistle segues into the first note of the familiar jingle rendered on this occasion as a softly tinkling instrumental. The station is dark and shaded in muted tones; a peripheral junction lost in time whose neglect is the melancholic price of progress. It is a bitter-sweet dream that oscillates toward sentimental yearning for an imagined past, and the untrammeled innocence of childhood. The steam train is itself redolent of the nostalgia regularly contained in outmoded technologies and ways of life, and its sudden anachronistic appearance (puffing smoke, steam and ash into the air) highlights the sterility, speed and efficiency that seems to mar present circumstances. It is an effect underscored by the disembarking from that train of a boy around the age of ten wearing a bright red T-shirt, a red base-ball cap turned backwards, baggy pants and trainers. His attire indicates something of the cosmopolitan cultural milieu he has journeyed from which, while not wholly definitive, stands for a source of identification that is globally connected. Not that this seems intended to parody what the urban middle-classes have become, set adrift from the land, its people, and their links with past. Rather, he is an envoy sent to affirm the existence of an umbilical life-line between the urban middle-class and its ‘earthy’ origins. He is the present and the future sent back to show that the past and its landscape are not forgotten, but cherished for the sustenance they continue to provide. His clothes, nevertheless, in particular the backwards baseball cap, that arch symbol of despair for the future of cultural diversity, do seem intended to indicate the irrevocable loss of ‘tradition’, the cultural continuum that the nostalgia of the ad posits has literally been left behind, in the past.

The boy is greeted on the platform by another boy about the same age – his country cousin – wearing shades of beige and the country boy's mother dressed in kebaya and sarong. The scene is set immediately by this encounter. It is an instantly familiar scenario that emphasises the emotional, familial and nutritional links that remain between the populations of the city and the country despite their different trajectories in other regards. Other advertisements, especially around Idul Fitri, the celebrations at the end of Ramadan, feature similar reunions. Idul Fitri is a time when vast numbers of the population return to their families and this is often portrayed as a movement from the cities back to the countryside, of the return of the urbanites to pay homage to their parents and the rural village communities of their childhood.

Once the three – the mother and the two boys – have greeted one another at the train station, she sends them off to play in the fields where the city boy's red shirt against the backdrop of lush young green produces an effect that is electric. In contrast to everything and everyone else in the scene, whose clothes blend with their surroundings by appearing to be of the earth and of the past, the visitor from the city is clearly from another time and place. The boys frolic laughing, pushing about and riding on an old black bicycle while
the jingle swells and builds. Here and there they stop to cursorily help with the labours of those they meet on their way, winnowing rice, feeding chickens, emptying a harvester's basket of chillis. Until finally, at the end of the day's play, the city boy hitches a ride on the back of a horse-drawn cart laden with rice straw while the country cousin, sitting on the bicycle, holds on and is pulled along.

Through an optical effect of concentric ripples rolling outwards from the centre of this final image, the scene dissolves and we see the city boy at home sitting at the dinner table, gazing off, chin in hand, thinking back dreamily on the day, or perhaps he's been dreaming all along, until his reverie is disturbed, but not unpleasantly, by the bowl of noodles his mother places before him. At that moment, the jingle, which can build no more, gushes: ‘Indomie, seleraku’ (‘Indomie my favourite’). Just on the brink of closing, a voice-over informs us that the ad (and the noodles) was ‘bersembahan Indofood’ (presented by Indofood). Not simply an advertisement then, for a packaged, processed foodstuff, but the stuff of life wrapped in a vision, presented respectfully by a corporation that cares about more than mere sales figures or even brand loyalty.

The ad, like much if not most corporate advertising, tells us nothing about Indomie noodles themselves, nor anything about price or details of their availability. Corporate advertising is more directly ideological than other types of advertising, more concerned with establishing a favourable, frequently nationalistic, image for the company than supply details of the product itself (Sinclair 1987: 2). Wheat, the major ingredient in Instant noodles, is not even among those crops we see during the boys’ adventures in the countryside. Rice (and paddy fields), not wheat, is the classic visual trope of Indonesian agricultural activity and the rural landscape. In any case, the Indofood/Indomie advertisements are more intent on showing chickens, chillis, onions and pepper berries, all of which may form part of a ‘serving suggestion’ for Indomie and are perhaps contained in the meal that lands in front of the boy at the conclusion of the advertisement, but the things that make up the product itself are absent. What is shown are associations and accompaniments, ingredients for a bowl of noodle soup perhaps, of the sort served by warung kaki lima (mobile food vending stalls) all over Indonesia where the nationwide addition of instant noodles does not interfere with the diversity of the final product. This is in keeping with Goenawan Mohamad's confidence in the continuation of Indonesia's gastronomic diversity despite national unity when he states that:

at least in biological matters – namely our stomachs – we refuse to be standardised. Despite the glorious Youth Vow of ‘One Indonesia’, we still, to this very day are not prepared to vow that soto-soup a la Madura, Kudus

15 ‘Selera’ is predictably enough a word that appears frequently in advertisements. Contributing to the predictability of advertising's attraction to it is that its meaning is slightly ambiguous. Although I have translated it here as ‘favourite’, its literal meanings are: ‘taste’ (in both the sense of flavour, and the taste that marks a preference for one thing over another), and “appetite”. 
or Bandung should unite to become sow Indonesia (1994 [1985]: 16) [italics in original].

The Indomie ads and many others like it on Indonesian television can be classed as what Noel King and Tim Rowse (1983) describe as ‘humanity’ advertisements in which the ‘principal ideological work … is not to constitute viewers as distinct individuals but as members of a common humanity’ (38). Attached to this is the sense of ordinary people's involvement in the processes of being Indonesian; that is, of everyone contributing to the sense of what attaches to the state of being Indonesian and therefore to the constitution of national identity. Another characteristic of humanity advertisements noted by King and Rowse, is that when humanity ads are for commodities, little is actually said about the product or service, because their main intention is to ‘identify a product’ and to represent it as ‘common property’ (39). A sense of mutual responsibility to one another is also a theme which like that expressed in the Australian ‘humanity’ ads King and Rowse describe, more often implies ‘a benign sense of fellowship rather than of obedience to some authoritative expression of national will’ (40). Certainly symbols or images of government are largely absent from these Indonesian representations despite their confluence with the sorts of images and emotions drawn upon by official government disourses of the nation.

The aim of these campaigns is clearly not to inform Indonesian consumers of the noodles' availability or to establish the name Indomie above its competitors, although this may still be its stated agenda. It may be to ensure that Indomie instant noodles are firmly established as a ‘natural’ part of Indonesian life and tradition. Yet only for an instant do instant noodles feature prominently in the scenes that unfold in these ads. The Indomie television advertising campaigns of the 1990s all pay homage to Indonesia's rural landscape, and emphasise that this is both the source of Indofood's products and that of the empathetic selves of the consumers. In their sentimentality, these television commercials also invite a bitter-sweet yearning for an imagined past that has been lost to the urban middle-class that Indomie promotions target. A packet of Indomie noodles may list the main ingredients as wheat flour, water and salt, some food colouring and spices added, but their flavour, tasted as the jingle floats toward its cadence, is an earthier yet almost spiritual essence of homeland and the slow pattern of life at its rural heart. And perhaps more important still is that these advertisements place their final emphasis on the warmth of domestic family life in the sorts of privatised spaces in which the ad I have described closes; the suburban family enjoying their meal of noodles, together ingesting their love of the land and its riches. Another Indomie ad shows father and son studying a map of Indonesia in an atlas together while sitting on a balcony overlooking a scenic rural aspect. Their wife and mother appears with lovingly prepared bowls of noodles and together, meltingly, they eat.
Indomie, Indofood and the nation are shown to share the same fundamental origins. This was quickly established as the company's ‘strategic positioning’ through advertising. In the words of one agency worker:

> The chicken, the onions as well as the chillies are all taken from Indonesian soil. Such effective positioning makes it difficult for competitors to pose a challenge (SWA Khusus 4 1994: 36).  

A commonly used poetic expression for the Indonesian homeland is *tanah-air* which literally translates as ‘the earth and water’. It is this elemental connection between the Indonesian nation, and the land and water it comprises that underpin the emotional appeals utilised by Indomie commercials. Indomie is grafted onto those same roots. In fact, as we have seen, the relationship Indofood constructs between its own representations and the image and idea of the nation was so close that they began to merge. ‘From Sabang to Merauke, from Timor to Talaud,’ the jingle crooned, Indomie noodles were everybody's ‘favourite’. Not only did Indomie and Indofood become national institutions through this process. As the anecdote set in the remote Eastern Indonesian village suggests, they also began to assume authorship over the same national textual institutions utilised by government.

Indonesia's celebration of its 50th Anniversary of Independence in 1995 was the impetus for numerous nationalistic corporate advertisements and dedications. The words ‘*Dirgahayu Indonesia Merdeka*’ (‘Long live Indonesia the Free’) began to appear with increasing regularity on the small screen in the months leading to August 17. Banal nationalism ceased to be so banal as surviving revolutionaries were trundled out of their forgotten corners and anniversaries on the national calendar throughout the year were celebrated with a more profound sense of their significance than in other years.

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16 ‘Ayamnya, bawangnya juga cabenya diambil dari bumi Indonesia. Dengan *positioning* yang tepat seperti itu, maka kompetitor tidak mudah merebutnya’ [italics in original].
Figure 7: Indomie advertisement: 50th Anniversary of Indonesian Independence
Dirgahayu Indomie-sia Merdeka

The Indomie advertisement produced for the 50th Anniversary of Indonesian independence in 1995 was a quite extraordinary contribution to television's participation in the celebrations and one which gave Indofood the opportunity to plant the character of its activities firmly in the heroic past of the popular imagination. The ad opens in tones of sepia, a close up of pepper berries hanging from the vine. As the scene begins to unfold, we hear a particular female voice with a timbre and intonation familiar to anyone who has regularly watched Indonesian television. It is similar to the voice (by which I mean similar qualities, not necessarily the same speaker) that can be heard as master of ceremonies over public address systems during official parades and ceremonies screened on Indonesian television both under the New Order and since. It is clearly a voice invested with great authority. At the same time there is a breathy reverberation and solemnity to it indicating an ancestral spirit. I have heard, other similar voices in Indonesian horror movies screened on late-night television whose long, drawn out vowels verge on a deep moan. While the voice I am attempting to describe is not tortured or haunted, it shares with that of the ghostly spectre, a primordial timelessness. It is, in short, a voice commanding respect and a sense of the eternal that is immediately recognisable. Slow and measured, the voice says:

The scent of spices and Indonesia's natural environment attracted the world's attention for centuries. We lost our freedom because of it. Until 50 years ago, when it was returned to the hands of the men and women of Indonesia …

Still in sepia, the images accompanying this voiceover show women walking through the countryside, languidly picking pepper berries and dropping them into the cane baskets they carry on their back. They wear kain batik and kebaya and the smiles of those who know only paradise. This is clearly pre-colonial Indonesia. Yet, it is only a hiccup away from rural conditions in independent Indonesia if we note the similarity between these representations to those of the later Indomie commercial described above.

When the voiceover mentions the loss of freedom the scene changes to instead show men, their sinewy bodies straining to push uphill a railway gurney on which sit three white colonial overlords, bespectacled, jack-booted, wearing white linen suits and pith helmets. One of these Dutch colonisers, his head held ridiculously high in a rooster-like attitude of extreme arrogance, hands planted firmly on his hips, kicks one of the men and we cut to a close-up of the veins in their calves full and pulsing from a lifetime of overwork as their feet dig in to the gravel bed of the tracks in order to do the colonizers bidding and push still harder. Outmoded rail technology here does not represent a halcyon past as it did in the advertisement I described previously, but the brutal logistics of colonial exploitation whose only form of locomotion relies on the sweat of slaves. When the voice-over reaches its

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conclusion and speaks of the return of the nation's freedom (merdeka – a word meaning independence and freedom whose origins contain the explicit reference to freed), the sepia image floods with colour. A chain joining manacled hands that are plunged into a basket of pepper berries, disintegrates; a white dove bursts from its cage; freedom fighters in khaki fatigues stride forward in a rank toward the camera holding enormous Indonesian flags, and the jingle begins, sung by women working in the fields once again:

Bersyukur pada ilahi  
Nikmati alam kemerdekaan  
Indonesia tanah airku  
Majulah negeriku  
Majulah Indonesiaku.

Give thanks to God  
Enjoy the state of freedom  
Indonesia my homeland  
Advance my country  
Advance my Indonesia

Superimposed across the images of countryside and wholesome agrarian labour over the first line of the jingle is a pan across the faces of two men holding out their hands in Muslim prayer, with the superimposition faded away the rural images again dominate: a duck-herd leading his line of ducks along the bank of a paddy field, children running to hoist a kite, and more women, always women, working while singing in the fields, picking onions and pepper and filling baskets with long red chillis.

Following a key change the verse is repeated by workers (again mostly women) in a packing room at the Indomie plant as they fill cartons with packets of noodles at the conveyor belt and stack them on pallets. A helicopter shot has already established the scene by gliding past the mirrored facade of the Indofood skyscraper, the company's Jakarta head-quarters.

Then again, in a third change of scene, the verse is repeated, this time by hundreds of young men and women dressed in white ‘safari suits’ and wearing black kopiah, – ‘a black fez … symbolic of national consciousness’ (Wertheim 1956: 150) – outfits echoing the garb of earlier nationalists and standing for the struggle for independence. Each bears an Indonesian flag as they rush to the summit of a peak, the plateau of a dead or dormant volcano. Once arrayed on top, they open red, white or yellow umbrellas and, as the camera takes to the sky, we see they have formed themselves into the official emblem of the 50th anniversary.

Indofood thus occupied the high ground of national belonging and proclaimed a new land, a new nation whose membership was united through history, language, production and consumption. Indofood's narratives expressed the thread of commonality that linked the scattered islands of its territory, from Sabang to Merauke, and the name of the nation was Indomie-sia.

Naturally, Indomie/Indofood was not alone in attempting to assert the Indonesian national identity of its corporation. This we should remember is the primary concern of these advertisements; not to promote goods but to promote an identity. The names ‘Indofood’
and ‘Indomie’ already carried a strong sense of Indonesianness in the compounds of their trade names. Their advertising campaigns sought to more graphically define the idea that the corporations were common property, implicitly ‘of the people’.

A second example comes from Sampoerna, one of the major kretak (clove cigarette) manufacturers, that takes the form of a cross country relay race (surprisingly, given the obligatory health warnings on cigarette packs but such is the paradox of cigarette advertising and sponsorship across the world) superimposed across the face of Indonesian history since independence in the form of a concatenation of archival footage difficult to read in total but featuring enough stand-out images to understand its representation of the passage of time from a popularly historical perspective. The advertisement begins, appropriately, with the athletes in the starters’ blocks preparing for starters orders. As the race gets under way the first runner strides across layers of rear projected and superimposed images, photographs and black and white film footage first of the Japanese occupation then the struggle for independence. At the first baton change we see a grainy but still recognisable photograph of Sukarno the original document of the proclamation of independence superimposed over him. The race continues over barely discernible imagery whose black and whiteness and graininess nevertheless distinguishes it as taken from historical archives. Clearly there are topics best avoided in this passage of history and so they are avoided, through compression, abstraction and obstruction. The next baton change takes place over an image of Suharto pledging his presidential oath. The runner streaks past a black and white television displaying a news reader; a late 1960s Indonesian pop group, their long hair a further indication that it is the New Order – long hair on men was banned under Sukarno; teenagers rock-and-roll dancing over the image of a rock group performing on stage; a classroom scene. The next change takes place over images of a satellite; a rocket launch; a newspaper clipping announcing Indonesia's first test tube baby. Susi Susanti, Indonesia's badminton champion is shown; then Suharto again; finally, before an enormous row of red and white uniformed school children superimposed like titans across the sky, the final baton change is set to take place. But tragedy strikes, the runner about to hand on the baton trips and falls. The receiver stops and turns back to help his fallen team mate to his feet. Together, arms around each other they slowly limp away towards the finish line.

While the intention of these advertisements seems not to be to undermine allegiance to the nation in any way, they do insinuate a version of patriotic feeling more in keeping with the needs of an urban consumer culture, thereby shunting sideways the absolute authority of official articulations. I should point out that both examples I have described are advertisements presented by Chinese-Indonesian corporations. Indonesians of Chinese ethnicity have been periodically, almost continually, persecuted largely on the grounds that some ethnic Chinese companies (the Salim Group for example) control a significant percentage of the nation's wealth. On these grounds alone there would seem to be clear benefits to Chinese-Indonesian owned corporations to promote an image of national pride.
It should be stressed that large, highly profitable corporations, not just multi-national or ethnic Chinese ones, are constantly at pains to emphasise the benefits of their activities to their home, or host, nations.

**Plesetan: spillage and slippage in the gutters of meaning**

If nations are fictions authored to generate collective meaning, we can think of them as having the qualities of texts, the autonomy and ‘organic unity’ of which is challenged by the idea of intertextuality. This proposes that the nation can be seen as a ‘mosaic of quotations’ (Kristeva 1986: 37). Nations, like texts, are constantly being rewritten and written over. This is carried out by commercial enterprises wishing to connect with semiotic and institutional systems by grafting their own symbols and narratives on established ones, and by successive governments who assume a mandate to apply their own features to the national landscape. As we have seen from the discussion of nationalistic advertising in Indonesia, pre-existing texts used by governments to give symbolic form to the nation, such as well known patriotic songs, can be taken by advertising companies and reinscribed with emphases that transform the original in the manner of a palimpsest. The figure of the **palimpsest** is useful to visualise the *hypertextual* qualities of nationality and to see how examples of popular culture (including advertisements) are part of this process of constant renegotiation of the meaning and constitution of a nation. A palimpsest, according to *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, is: ‘a manuscript in which a later writing is written over an effaced earlier writing’. According to the entry in the OED, George Orwell's metaphorical use of the idea of the palimpsest allowed him to write in *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* that ‘all history was a palimpsest, scraped clean and re-inscribed exactly as often as was necessary’, to allude to the ways in which the slate of history itself can be erased and rewritten in accordance with the changing demands of the present. But even erasure can leave tell tale traces, an observation that allowed Jawaharlal Nehru to suggest that India is:

> like some ancient palimpsest...on which layer upon layer of thought and revery had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously. All of these existed together in our conscious or subconscious selves, though we might not be aware of them. And they had gone to build up the complex and mysterious personality of India (Nehru cited Ames 1992: 141).

As Genette (1997) has stressed in his comments on the uses of bricolage, pastiche and parody in literature and their transformation of existing texts, also contained within the metaphor of the palimpsest is the notion of a superimposition which ‘does not quite conceal but allows (the previous text) to show through’ (399). The resulting text, in this way invites a ‘relational reading’…

> the flavor of which, however perverse, may well be condensed in an adjective recently coined by Philippe Lejeune: a **palimpsestuous** reading. To
put it differently, just for the fun of switching perversities, one who really loves texts must wish from time to time to love (at least) two together (399) [italics in original].

The ‘relational’ or ‘palimpsestuous’ reading of texts layered in this way is a feature of the literacy required to read television. Television ‘really loves texts’. Insatiably. And so, I would suggest, do its audiences. Although reading texts may not be the sole aim of watching television, the pleasures of which do not pivot on the processes of textual interpretation, recognition, even if unconscious, of allusions and cross-references to other texts, other media, and other events and practices, is a competence taken for granted by many of the examples I have described already. The Indomie advertisements and those of the 50th anniversary celebrations generally require relational readings between the ads themselves and the texts and stereotypes they refer to; patriotic anthems, established rural idylls, and narratives of popular history. The symbols of nationalism contained in these commercials allude to those espoused by more official and popularly accepted expressions of the nation. The idea of palimpsestuousness and relational readings allows us to regard the television commercials I have described as being characterised by their ‘hypertextuality’.

Another form of hypertextuality is parody. It too demands for its effect a palimpsestuous reading that juxtaposes the original text with that composed with reference to it. Parody has been theorised as a subversive form of popular resistance to hierarchical authority especially in its connection with Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1984) theories of carnival and the ‘carnivalesque’ which he developed most fully in his study of Rabelais and his milieu. For Bakhtin the carnival was in essence a ‘world turned upside down’ characterised by ‘its celebratory enactments of the overthrowing of authority, and its militantly anti-authoritarian debunking of sacred and official rituals and languages’ (Dentith 2000: 23). For Simon Dentith, parody in light of its association with Bakhtin, ‘is both a symptom and a weapon in the battle between popular cultural energies and the forces of authority which seek to control them’ (2000: 23) [my italics]. These are practices Dentith notes that are not confined to places with a carnival tradition such as the one Bakhtin specifically describes. Certainly in their broad sweep they are comparable to Indonesian ones.

Specific to the Indonesian case is the practice of plesetan, a type of rhetorical or literary punning that subverts the meanings of pre-existing texts and practices often to expose the absurdity at their basis. In the words of Ariel Heryanto (1994), ‘plesetan, from the root word pleset (to slip)’, is a form of deconstruction that ‘stress(es) and celebrat(es) the arbitrary and unstable relationships between signifiers and signified, and between both and referents in the world’ (15–16). Although plesetan is a national pastime whose targets range from the mundane to the profane, frequently it does appear to be employed as an act of defiance or resistance to political authority, sometimes in the form of a ‘hyper-obedience’ to it (15), wielded as a kind of victory in defeat. The New Order’s penchant for acronyms and the
duplicit and obfuscation of official language they manifested were a particular foil for plesetan word-play. Importantly, however, the object of plesetan is not to necessarily produce different meanings but rather to deflate the original of meaning. As Heryanto states, ‘One popular form is the anarchic freeplay of arbitrary displacements of phonemes, morphemes, syllables, or words from familiar statements, but without reconstructing them into coherent and fixed statements in lieu of the deconstructed’ (16, fn 15)

More elaborate plesetan in the form of street theatre or mock rituals can propose a poetics of power that denaturalises the demands of authority by subverting submission to them. A notable example of using plesetan to explore loopholes in laws, and in so doing draw attention to the absurdity of the legal system that produced them, was devised in Yogyakarta during the election campaign of 1992. Political party rallies under the New Order were notoriously chaotic, rauous and often dangerous spectacles whose effect was enhanced by the creation of as much noise as possible. The Pesta Demokrasi (Festivals of Democracy) as they were called, were taken as opportunities for public displays of extreme and outlandish behaviour associated with festivities, or the carnivalesque of Bakhtin's conception: a ‘world turned upside down’ in this case through the seizing of the streets by ‘the people’, those whose usual experience of power is as subject to it. A prominent component of the overall noise factor in party rallies was the typical presence in the parade to the rallying point of scores or perhaps hundreds of motorcycles – usually small-capacity two-stroke commuters – with their mufflers removed. These weaved in and out of the other participants, engines revving through open exhausts, deafening and terrorising onlookers. Fuelled by this noise, the tensions, overheated emotions and general sense of anarchy that rallies brought to the campaign process were perhaps considered too uncontainable by the authorities. Violent clashes between supporters resulting in deaths were not uncommon. In 1992, just prior to the beginning of the campaign period, in an effort to bring a sense of calm and order to proceedings, the government banned the use of motorcycles in party rallies. In response to these attacks on vestigial rights to at least extract some enjoyment from election campaigns, a number of rally goers devised an artful plesetan response by making recordings of muffler-less motorcycles and playing these at full volume from a squadron of becak that circled the city (see Susanto 1993).

Ariel Heryanto, with reference to this action, uses Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum to make the point that these simulations served to heighten the widely held view that elections under the New Order were themselves simulations of popular participation in a democratic process, performed only to paper over the decidedly undemocratic cracks in Demokrasi Pancasila (1994: 14)

Heryanto (1996) also notes that the order to conduct political rallies more ‘peacefully’ was tied to repeated proposals by several high level officials that campaigns in the future be conducted entirely through the mass media. Watching the ‘Yogyakarta incident’ on
television, Heryanto suggests, adds another layer, producing the ultimate simulation: becak playing recordings of muffler-less motorbikes while campaigning for a political party in a simulation of a democratic election recorded by TV cameras and broadcast on television (1996: 107–108).

Plesetan slips between the sheets and ruffles meaning. The idea of ‘slipping’, of accidentally loosing ones footing or grasp on the bonds between signifiers, the signified and their referents is one also frequently employed in the verbal performance of plesetan: this takes the form of a feigned slip of the tongue which is then hastily, but theatrically, with a wink, corrected.

In order for slippage to occur, you need something to slip on and that, I propose, is spillage of the sort created by leaky categories like television (and the ads it carries) that spill out into the world. We can regard the villagers’ and the school pupil’s confusion as examples of unintentional plesetan. Not tactically intended perhaps but nonetheless instances of the modes by which official invocations of the nation-state and its symbols are ruffled or resisted. The ‘polytheism of scattered practices’ to which de Certeau refers (cited Wark 1994: 66), which includes rumour, parodies, jokes and the sorts of popular deconstructions manifest in plesetan, could in view of this be expanded to list slips-of-the-tongue, malapropisms, wandering thoughts or short attention spans, mistaken identity, bad reception, accidental mis-readings, ‘Freudian’ slips, apathy and other non-intentioned lapses that cause the meaning intended by the addressee (author) of any text to fail to form correctly in its addressee or achieve the desired response. If resistance can be unintended then it is through these very human foibles that official discourses may most often encounter resistance: from a public whose attention is turned elsewhere. That the people of the unnamed village sang a jingle instead of the patriotic anthem can be considered not so much evidence of the power of advertising as the failure of official attempts since Sukarno to construct a dedicated, compliant nationalism wholly focussed on goals defined by distant, centrally located governments. That alternative transmissions along the communication pathways established by the state could appear to so quickly unseat the secular congregation of national community is an indication of the weakness of official programmes and textual systems in the face of competition. That there was clearly confusion between them, that one could so easily stand in for the other, however, also suggests that neither the patriotic song nor the patriotic jingle were really paid much attention, their intended meanings never fully comprehended.

Despite the non-intentionality of the villagers’ error, striking similarities can be noted between that incident and the very deliberate public performances of Harry Roesli, a composer, musician and budayawan18 whose compositions combine borrowings from diverse

18 Budayawan is a Sanskritised word originally meaning something like ‘cultural practitioner’ or anyone involved in the arts. Since the 1980s the word has began to be also used to describe a cultural
sources with the aim of upsetting the boundaries between them and provoking new insights into the arbitrariness of their meanings and categories.

Two examples of his performances are particularly pertinent here: during a televised extravaganza to celebrate Indonesia's 50th anniversary of independence, a spectacle featuring a veritable who's who of Indonesia's glitterati performing both stirring patriotic anthems and more up-beat showbiz numbers, Roesli and his orchestra took the stage to perform an extended medley of nationalistic advertising jingles, including that of Indomie.

In the second, more recent example of his work (and notoriety), Roesli, performing at the presidential palace before an audience of invited guests, on the occasion of the anniversary of Indonesian independence in 2001, sang a *plesetan* version of the patriotic song by Sudarnoto, *Garuda Pancasila*, with the words:

**Garuda Pancasila by Harry Roesli**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Garuda Pancasila</th>
<th>Garuda Pancasila</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aku lelah mendukungmu</td>
<td>I'm tired of supporting you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sejak Proklamasi</td>
<td>Since Proclamation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selalu berkobaran untu</td>
<td>Always making sacrifices for you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pancasila dasarnya apa?</td>
<td>What is the basis of Pancasila?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rakyat adil makmurya kapan?</td>
<td>When will righteous people prosper?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pribadi bangsaku</td>
<td>My own nation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tidak maju, maju</td>
<td>Does not advance, advance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tidak maju, maju</td>
<td>Does not advance, advance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tidak maju, maju</td>
<td>Does not advance, advance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Garuda Pancasila by Sudarnoto**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Garudu Pancasila</th>
<th>Garudu Pancasila</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akulah pendukungmu</td>
<td>I am your supporter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patriot Proklamasi</td>
<td>A proclamation patriot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sedia berkobaran untu</td>
<td>Prepared to make sacrifices for you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pancasila dasarnya negara</td>
<td>Pancasila is the basis of our nation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rakyat adil makmur sentosa</td>
<td>Righteous people will prosper in peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pribadi bangsaku</td>
<td>My own nation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayo maju, maju</td>
<td>Come advance, advance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayo maju, maju</td>
<td>Come advance, advance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayo maju, maju</td>
<td>Come advance, advance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*critic or someone who comments on politics and society through the medium of culture. The word now commonly appears in the brief biographical notes that conclude substantial articles or opinion pieces in the print media. *Budayawan* are a late New Order period phenomenon that indicate the importance of culture – but more specifically, the arts – as a field from which an oppositional elite of artists and intellectuals could launch critiques of the New Order with relative impunity.*
Like that of the villagers, it is clear that Roesli’s performances achieve their effect by playing havoc with an audience's expectations and thus engage in a dual dialogue: one with the original texts to which his performances refer; and the second with the context.

RCTI's Station Idents

The emergence of competition between stations for audiences (and their measurement as ‘ratings’) and advertising revenue brought about concerted efforts to establish individual station identities with which to better target lucrative audience sectors. In order to achieve this, stations broadcast programmes selected specifically to appeal to those ‘niches’. But in addition, stations began to promote themselves as having characteristics and values that were shared by the target audience. This is particularly important during primetime hours when advertising rates are at their highest and competition between stations was of most consequence. Primetime ‘flagship’ programmes produced by the station, especially newscasts and current affairs shows which are conventionally scheduled at the start of ‘primetime’ in the late afternoon and early evening, are important to this endeavour because it is here that the station can lay foundations of trust and reliability and to seek station loyalty on that basis. The trustworthiness and personability of the presenters of these programs are vital. A station's ‘personalities’ have to be liked, trusted and perceived to hold values that are shared by the target audience. It is at the point of eye-to-eye contact, the modulation of voice, and
the sense of intimacy that ensues between personalities such as ‘news-readers’ (who, when it all boils down, just read the news) and the audience, that a station seeks to personalise its relevance to the audience and instil a level of faith not just in the news, but in the media organisation itself. Newscasts are also an important site in which to establish the ‘mode of address’ employed to express the relationship of respect and trust between the broadcaster and the audience. Indeed, as Philip Kitley's (2000) interview with RCTI's long time senior advisor, American Peter Langlois revealed, televi swasta's keenness to produce their own newscasts was not in anticipation of the high ratings such shows might attract, but for their ability to clearly differentiate stations from the competition, ‘and attract and hold audiences for the nightly lineup’ (256).

Another venue in which stations set out to more thoroughly implicate its own ‘identity’ with that of the overall ‘product’ of their broadcasts and therefore with the character of its target audience is in the form of corporate logos and slogans often appearing together on station identification spots (‘idents’). By making these connections, the audience thus addressed is invited through flattery to share in common the station's self-professed qualities: qualities that can range anywhere through, sophistication, intelligence, good taste, down-to-earthness, national or local pride, good humour, cosmopolitanism, domesticity (etc.). As Peter Meech (1996) has noted in his study of the history of Scottish broadcasters’ use of logos and corporate identity to establish a sense of regional pride, station idents are not advertisements in the strictest sense because they do not occupy paid-for airtime.

Rather, they constitute a hybrid form of both promotional sign and commodity sign. From their introduction they have performed cognitive and affective functions. They have informed or reminded viewers of the channel they have selected (but) whether in still or animated form, they have also sought to express – visually and audibly – aspects of the broadcasting company's self-perception as an organization in the hope of creating a favourable image and attitude among its audience (69).

At first glance, the series of RCTI station idents that began screening in 1995 and continued at least into 2000 might be seen as little more than visually and aurally pleasing confections. They are sophisticated, colourful, beautifully crafted, and relaxed spaces between programmes aimed at letting us know that the station we are watching is RCTI and that ideally, we should keep it that way. And yet there is something moving beneath their surfaces. With the application of even a modicum of inquiry they begin to appear puzzling and resistant to easy, categorical interpretation.

Each in the series follows the same formula: a camera (or rather, me, the viewer, since the camera positions me in a first-person relationship with the screen) moves through a scene to arrive at an individual or group of people none of whom is me but any of whom could conceivably be among ‘us’ the audience. When these people notice the camera (me)
looking at them they look back, smile and give RCTI the thumbs-up, the station's adopted sign of audience satisfaction, to indicate that RCTI is ‘OK’. The musical accompaniment to these ads is a lilting, gradually rising crescendo, each example marked by subtle changes in ‘instrumentation or the inclusion of sound effects appropriate to the scene or cultural milieu of the people the camera is ‘visiting’. The series ranges across a variety of environments and people engaged in activities which, even when ‘work’ related, are pursued in a leisurely manner in picturesque surroundings.

If the general intention of these ads is to lay claims to the demographic, regional cultural, and geographic range (the ‘Unity in Diversity’) of RCTI's audience, there are some examples among them that also problematise the practice of watching television as a natural, taken for granted part of daily life by drawing attention to its strangeness, even incompatibility with certain aspects of those environments. The series of ads can be divided into two distinct categories with approximately equal numbers in each: those that show people watching television, and those that don't. In the latter, we are taken, much as I have described, through the site of a gathering, work or leisure activity to settle on an individual, or group of people who turn to the camera and raise their thumbs in appreciation. The freezing of this final image makes way for the insertion of the station's logo which rolls across the frozen still and is followed by a black screen bearing the slogan: ‘Kebanggaan bersama milik bangsa’. Ambiguity in the form of punning, intertextual referentiality, and other practices inviting relational readings and (at least) double meanings is a hallmark of slogans and headlines, and RCTI's slogan is no exception. It is an ambiguous phrase I will translate as ‘Justly proud to belong to the nation’ yet carrying with it the possible connotation that the nation, as audience, belongs to the station.
Figure 9: RCTI ident: a quiet village.
The word ‘bangsa’ is also important here as it configures ‘the nation’ as the equivalent of ‘its people’. This is not unlike the sentiment contained in the series of station idsents for Australia's public broadcaster, the ABC, that screened from 1992 until 2000, in which groups of people are encountered from a range of different walks of life, ages, and ethnic, cultural, and occupational backgrounds. A member of each framed group moves (or is pushed) forward to draw, with their index finger, the ABC's continuous waveform logo across the screen which then displays the slogan, ‘It's your ABC, to the accompaniment of a distinctive three note cadence, to indicate both the sense of common ownership of the network and its relevance to a diverse and multicultural Australian public. In those of RCTI, the camera tracks through: a floating produce market; a high society garden party; and an underwater scene in which a scuba diver, swimming amongst the coral and colourful fish, gives the ‘thumbs-up’ to the camera.

In those of the second category in which people are shown watching television it is the weird juxtaposition of that practice within different settings that is emphasised. This can on one level be understood simply as another claim to the station's geographical reach: people everywhere in Indonesia, in the strangest of places, are watching RCTI. The places themselves are also, just as they are in the category I have outlined briefly above, all articulated as typically Indonesian in their diversity and it is here in the search for representations of the typical that the insertion of television watching produces an alienating effect. I will venture to describe an example of these, the first of the series I recall seeing, to better explain what I mean.

A camera floats through a Batak village in a single fluid movement, swooping down from the tree tops. It glides past two rows of men gracefully performing the plate dance, while at the village well, a steady stream of women fill their earthenware vessels and carry them away. It is a site of varied activities, of work, ceremony and leisure and, ultimately, of communal engagement with each of those activities. Smoke rises from cooking fires and hangs in wisps in the jungle clearing that appears to contain the village. We follow a boy who climbs a ladder to the elevated entrance of a traditionally crafted wooden house. Through the entrance we see inside, a family sitting watching a large-screen television. They turn as one to look into the camera (and through the camera to look at us), and give the ‘thumbs up’. The logo unfurls and is followed by the slogan: Kebanggaan bersama milik bangsa. The extended crescendo of the jingle peaks and is subsumed by the honeyed chorus: ‘R(airr)-C(chay)-T(tay)-I(ee) O(oh)K(kay)’ (RCTI Oke).

What is wrong with this picture? Most obvious is the observation that the community looks decidedly like a pre-television village, even pre-colonial. There are no cars, motorbikes, bitumen, Western clothes, power poles, refrigeration, antennae or satellite dishes. Yet, like a punchline at the end of an elaborate allegory, a television appears and winks back at us; anachronistic in the midst of so much effort to recreate in detail an ‘authentic’ picture of
a time before, and a community without television. The family shows no awareness of this incongruity that in another, Western intellectual context has been employed to provide an unsettling juxtaposition and be understood as a comment on the pervasiveness of television and its inherent threat to traditional ways of life.

John Tomlinson (1991) uses a similar seemingly incongruous image of a Walpiri family watching television outside their home in Australia's Tanami desert to begin his critique of the discourse of cultural imperialism. The image, he tells us, comes from a Christmas card sent out by a British television company that bears the text: *Dallas and Sale of the Century...* beamed to the Australian deserts by satellite’ and goes on to note that the Walpiri Media Association (which the sender of the cards supports) has been set up ’to try to defend its unique culture from western culture’ (1991: 1). But what is it about this ‘very ordinary domestic scene, a family watching television – something millions of us do every evening’, Tomlinson asks, that strikes such an ‘exotic note’.

The image is so similar to those of RCTI's idents that when I look at the photograph now I imagine the family turning to look at me, smiling then giving me the thumbs up. Why shouldn't they? TV is, afterall, ‘OK’. But how is it that exactly the same sort of image can be used to convey (at least) two such contradictory messages? One answer is that cultural imperialism is a discourse that is about other cultures and their right to flourish, but one that circulates primarily in the heart of the ‘imperialist’ West. ‘Cultural imperialism’ is a critical discourse which operates by representing the cultures whose autonomy it defends in its own (dominant) Western cultural terms. It is a discourse caught up in ironies that flow from its position of discursive power (Tomlinson 1991: 2).

Images such as these when used in RCTI station identification spots complicate the suggestion that television is a destructive influence whose presence impoverishes the lives of people who enjoy it precisely because they are used as promotions. It is difficult to wrestle with the withering of tradition in the vortex of imperialist technology and hegemonic domination when a family in a village nestled in the jungle clearing are shown to be enjoying it so thoroughly. A crucial similarity between the two, between the image as promotion and the image as critique, is that in neither case can we clearly see what is being watched and found so entertaining. The images on the screen in each of the scenarios are indistinct, nonspecific, generic glimpses, a ‘baleful glow’. *Dallas and Sale of the Century* it is implied, are typical of the fodder they are tuned to but these too are generic tropes for the sorts of programmes poor indigenous communities are considered ill-equipped to process and whose influence is tricky to avoid. Perhaps this is because a Lerneresque warning of ‘rising frustrations’ persists at the heart of theories of cultural imperialism. Both programmes
glory in the pursuit of material gain above all else and thus do not cater for the particular needs of marginalised minorities.

In both instances, that celebrating television viewing as an enjoyable activity and that criticising it as a threat to more authentic, ‘traditional’ activities, what is being watched is not as important as where the watching is taking place. ‘Place’ in these images is still the major determinant of cultural identity and differentiation from other cultural identities despite the technology of satellite television linking them all.

A second example again constructed of a single sweeping shot, this time from a helicopter, illustrates this further. It begins by flying us over the sea to the coast travelling a short way up a stream to a lush, green paddy field fringed by coconut palms. In the middle of the field stands a small open sided bamboo shelter consisting of an elevated bamboo platform and a rough roof of dried palm fronds. The camera starts to circle the structure and just as it banks to the right we see a family of four sitting inside, watching a wide screen television. They look up to the camera, smile and give the thumbs up. I can't tell what they are watching but the screen is flickering signs of something so it's not a case of a rural family having bought a large consumer durable despite having no electricity. Nevertheless, I do have trouble suspending my disbelief and start to wonder where the power is coming from. It bothers me. Like the last ad I described, in all other details the scene is entirely devoid of the technological or cultural means to support their activity.

A third example finally allows some light into the possibility of an interpretation at least less troubled by the persistent after-image of the apparent cultural inappropriateness of watching television. In this example, the camera sweeps over Jakarta at night. We know it's Jakarta because the camera quickly picks out the floodlit Senayan sports stadium, the venue coincidentally of Indonesian television's first official broadcasts. The camera dives down to take us to the centre of the sports field where two children are sitting watching television. And this is perhaps the ambiguous point of this and the other station identification spots: not that RCTI is watched in those places, but rather that that station takes us to those places, to a museumified Batak village, to a bamboo hut surrounded by palm trees and paddy fields, and to sporting events at the Senayan stadium. Kebanggaan bersama milik bangsa – RCTI is throughout the nation and the nation in all its diversity is throughout RCTI.
Watching Politics

Simulating television: on the ground not on air

The pro-government bias of the television and radio networks during the first weeks of May was, in a sense, too obvious to be of very much use to the government. The huge discrepancy between what was actually going on in the streets and the factories and workplaces and what was allowed to appear on television, was too apparent. The lesson of May, from the point of view of the government, must therefore-be that in a relatively ‘advanced’ society, based on the principles of mass education and mass literacy, what is almost more important than the control of the mass media is the creation of public confidence in those media, and the skillful negotiating of the susceptibilities – and the code of ethics – of the professional journalists. (Harvey, May ‘68 and Film Culture 1980: 8–9).

In a confused moment of double-take, it is hard to believe that what is referred to here is not the Indonesian electronic media's coverage of the student demonstrations in Jakarta in the month leading to Suharto's resignation in May 1998, but that of the protests and strikes in Paris, in May 1968. Admittedly this is partly owing to the expectations I have established. But it is also because the circumstances share a resemblance that transcends their differences and the space of thirty years separating them. The lesson governments are invited to learn from both experiences is the same. Heavy-handed censorship of the media's reporting of damaging political issues is ineffective as a means of securing public support because it arouses distrust both of the media and the government that seeks to constrain them. We can see in this echoes of Foucault's understanding of liberalism as coming with the realisation ‘that if one governed too much, one did not govern at all – that one provoked results contrary to those one desired’ (1991 [1984]: 242). Importantly, the blatant control of information by governments seeking to maintain the legitimacy of their rule, self-interested media proprietors or, more commonly still, a collusive arrangement between both, can activate suspicions that are ever present, loitering below the surface. In Indonesia in the week immediately prior to Suharto's resignation in May 1998, television's ability to graphically show events was constrained by the demand that it carry instead the government's own authored account; that is, a version of events that made the government seem less besieged, more in control, and acting with the support of the majority of Indonesians, a few thousand student demonstrators notwithstanding.

People living in a society ‘based on the principles of mass education and mass literacy’ are just as likely under these circumstances to become suspicious of the mediated reality offered through these channels, either because it contradicts other trusted sources of information and opinion or because the manipulation of it, and therefore, the level of ‘authorial presence’ detected by the viewer (Nichols 1991: 128) has become impossible to ignore. Media bias,
objectivity, balance in reporting, and giving equal time to opposing points of view are all parts of the same ongoing issue for news media everywhere. All relate to the ethical claims of public affairs programming and the implicit request made of its audiences: it asks to be believed. Yet the news and current affairs media have simultaneously within them the potential to inform, to explicate, and to deceive. Their ‘power’ lies in the wider conditions supporting media professionals and organisations’ claims to pursue and deliver an accurate representation of the truth, ‘the result of countless processes of reproduction in talk, belief, and action, both by media producers and by media consumers’ (Couldry 2000: 39). The scepticism that undermines these truth claims is just another aspect of their believability because to be sceptical of something entails a relative evaluation of its veracity.

The actual events covered by television news can be considered the raw materials. These pass through several decision making processes before appearing on newscasts: which scenes to attend; where to aim the cameras; how to edit; what commentary to add. Accordingly, what is at issue is how events are handled, or literally manipulated, not whether they are. The manner of their manipulation is not the only factor effecting believability. Suspicion of the motives of government or media proprietors, whoever it is that exercises ultimate authority, or literally authorship, over the news discourse can also serve to raise levels of scepticism.

In addition, however, and inadvertently perhaps, at a tangent to its author’s intentions, the opening quote poses other questions about the ability (or desirability) of what appears on television to ever accurately concur with the ‘actuality’ of events. There is always, it can be assumed, ‘a huge discrepancy’ between what actually happens on the streets and what it is possible to show on television, not just permissible. This is not only because of inadequacies or bias of coverage, whether the result of commercial interests, government censorship, or the constraints of time, resources, and entrenched conventions and work practices. It is also because television possesses the extraordinary capability of seeming to construct a total picture of an otherwise difficult to apprehend event, with multiple camera positions and the development of a narrative through editing and commentary, that immediately differentiates ‘reality’ from its televisual representation. This is particularly true of ‘media events’ such as those in Paris and Jakarta when the unfolding of situations of such enormous scale, national importance and public interest result in an escalation of media use to levels far beyond that of usual daily routine. In these cases the media, and particularly the instantaneous mediums of radio and television, have the potential to become electronic fora lively with updates, live crosses, opinion and analysis. Such an integrated whole transcends the single point-of-view accessible to an individual participant or witness actually present at an event. It is the negation of the necessity of co-presence to enable audience members to simultaneously see and hear events and performances that makes television such a potent medium.
Contrary to the idea that actual events and their representation on television can and should be the same as one another, television broadcasts have the potential to be multi-perspectival productions that combine the highlights of an assembled crowd's-eye-view with eye-witness commentary to allow audience members in their homes to experience the event in ways not available to those physically present. There is a huge discrepancy between what it means, looks and feels like to stand in the midst of an enormous, surging crowd or political demonstration, for example, and what it means, looks and feels like to watch the same event from the vantage point of television. Which is the more truthful account? An early study of the gulf between an event and television's mediation of it is Kurt and Gladys Lang's ‘The Unique Perspective of Television’ (1953), which examines General MacArthur's civic parade through the streets of Chicago. It compared the point of view of those present, with that presented by television. For the former the event was found to be an often uncomfortable and unsatisfying experience, MacArthur passing by in a blur after hours of waiting. Television's production of the event on the other hand kept MacArthur centre-screen throughout and succeeded, through close-ups, editing and judicious commentary, to transform the parade into a spectacle with enormous political significance. For the Langs, the ‘real’ experience of the event was bound to physical presence at the parade. Television's coverage of it was seen to have been an artifice crafted for the purpose of eliciting a specific response from the viewer, a response the ‘real event’ had failed to produce (see Corner 1995 for a detailed discussion of Lang and Lang's essay).

What television news cameras covering a political rally are allowed to show and what it is possible for them to depict may be two different things. Yet they are equally instances of the ways television constructs events out of actual occurrences. Both are attempts to harness what we might think of as the epistemographic potential of television; that is, the power that inheres to the assumption that ‘the camera doesn't lie’, that it appears to provide graphic evidence for the truth. The editing of news footage – the mixing, matching, adding and subtracting of sound and image to produce a discursive context for that footage – is simultaneously engaged in supporting this potential by making its transitions appear invisible and seamless. The addition of commentary finally, explains and makes ‘natural’ sense of what is shown. What is at issue is the ability of news discourse thus constructed to seem self-evidently true.

Amongst the throng of demonstrators calling for Suharto's resignation, mingling with the placards and crowds of chanting students facing off against police in riot gear, were small groups of three or four who formed themselves into mock television camera crews, playacting in the manner of plesetan the motions of ‘recording’ the scene not for the world and the nation to see, but largely for the benefit of fellow demonstrators, any media workers present and, no doubt, the riot police: TV cameras constructed of cardboard boxes impaled
with one litre plastic Aqua\textsuperscript{1} bottle ‘lenses’ scoured the crowds, while their accompanying ‘reporters’, armed with smaller hand-held drink-bottle-microphones attached to sticks, fired questions (see figure 10, my simulation of the mockups).

By parodying the behaviour of camera crews and their manner of relating to the world via the framing devices of their equipment (devices that are themselves necessarily excluded from the spaces they frame), these plesetan cameras hollow out the meaning of actual television cameras, raising questions about the nature of television's signifying practices. That these cameras are quite clearly crudely constructed of a cardboard carton and a plastic bottle, that there is no attempt to make them look more like a camera beyond being a box with a protuberance, serves only to accentuate the immediacy and bluntness of their satire. The cruder the construction, it seems, the more hollowed of authority the thing it refers to.

The precise intended meaning of these cameras, however, is ambiguous. This is in part because the meaning shifts depending on who is captured in their ‘sights’. If the mock cameras were pointed at the students we could infer that they are drawing attention to the ‘performance’ of their demonstration, questioning their desire for publicity. If the cameras turned to scrutinise the security forces, they may be regarded as a reminder to them – in a mocking way – that there are witnesses to their actions. The ‘cameras’ in this case may

\textsuperscript{1} Aqua is Indonesia's most commercially successful brand of bottled drinking water. So ubiquitous that the word ‘Aqua’ has become a neologism for any commercially available bottled water.
be intended to mimic the security forces’ own video taping of the demonstration, a standard practice of documentation and surveillance carried out by police in such circumstances. And if the cameras swung round to aim into the lenses of television news crews present, the mock crews could be seen as an attempt to draw attention to the media's construction of reality.

I watched one of these crews in action on an Australian ABC television report on the demonstrations that went to air in the days before Suharto's eventual capitulation. At the time I thought the performances were intended to parody the presence of the international TV crews covering the event, indicating to me an acute awareness on the part of the demonstrators of how political protests can be spectacularised and commodified by the global media. The deadpan mimicry captured perfectly for me the other-worldliness of TV crews caught in the act of gathering news. When television crews are encountered in the outside world, the sheer artificiality of manners that goes into constructing a news story and making it seem ‘natural’ is graphically laid bare; the pieces to camera, the retakes, the ‘noddies’. In the setting of a demonstration or any other event in a public place, camera crews themselves become the spectacle, one rarely exposed on television.

(I saw a camera crew today in the city while waiting to be picked up as arranged in front of the book shop. I had just bought a copy of MacKenzie Wark's *Virtual Geography: Living with Global Media Events* (1994) which, having eschewed the offer of a brown paper bag, I held exposed in my hand. On the other side of the street straight across from where I stood, four men in a cluster moved as one. A camera operator, heavy Betacam television camera balanced on his shoulder, eye glued to the eye-piece, walked backwards guided by the sound recordist who'd hooked a finger through his colleague's belt-loop. With the other hand, the sound recordist, headphones clapped over his ears, held a microphone on a boom above the heads of two men, one appearing to interview the other as they strolled up the street past the shop windows. As the sum of its parts this was an eight-legged creature scuttling along the footpath. Pedestrians who happened upon the spectacle veered wildly in their trajectory to avoid being trampled under foot while the interviewer and interviewee feigned oblivion to the observation that they formed the back half of an enormous mechanical spider.)

When mock crews met the real thing during the Jakarta demonstrations – as I witnessed on the ABC report – and matched-up face-to-face, the televised result was a comic redoubling of absurdist proportions; ‘interviewers’ interviewing interviewers interviewing ‘interviewers’ and ‘cameras’ filming cameras filming ‘cameras’.

I almost forgot as I watched this (but the mock camera succeeded in its task of reminding me) that unseen by me (because I was seeing through it) was another camera recording the scene from the same position relative to the action as mine was to the screen. My eyes become the camera's lens when I watch television – my eyes see what the camera sees – separated only by the field of albeit frequently interrupted space between my eyes and the
screen. It is impossible to position myself entirely outside of television. This is especially true since I cannot clearly recall a time when it wasn't a feature of my daily life. So this forgetting then reminding myself about the action ‘behind the scenes’, switching on and off and on again from engagement with the narratives taking place on the screen to ‘the space where contemplation move(s)’, in Walter Benjamin's evocative turn of phrase (1997 [1928]: 89), is fundamental to the process of consciously thinking about television as a purveyor of constructions whose methods and representational devices set out precisely to cover the evidence of their manufacture. It is a paradox, but at the same time an insight into television's commitment to *seamlessness* – rendering invisible the manner of its own construction – that the camera least obvious in the televised encounter between the real TV crew and the mock-up, was the camera that recorded the scene and enabled me to witness it.

‘Professional media-brokers,’ as MacKenzie Wark (1994) has written, ‘always try to build event horizons that exclude the space in which their constructor actually stands’ (27). We can take this space to mean both the physical space, the point on which the constructor (the camera operator) ‘actually stands’, and the textual space that is framed by the professional media-broker's interpretation of an event and its insertion into larger sense-making discourses. In this, television shares a feature with the vast bulk of academic writing; that is, both pursue their aims from a position that allows all traces of the intellectual and technical processes that bring it into being to be omitted or erased. The final result has been reordered according to conventions of sequential logic that we can think of as narrativisation, at which point, the author succumbs to a metatextual authority and the stories of television news and academic writing alike take on fictional characteristics: not because they aren't ‘true’ or because the ‘facts’ are fabricated, but because they are constructed in accordance with the accepted narrative conventions of particular genres and professional story-telling in order to appear ‘naturally’ true. Similarly, the person sitting at the word-processor writing a thesis is, like the person behind the television camera, the one most usually absent from the finished product. Absent; or rendered outside the Field and process of inquiry; or wearing a cloak of uninvolved objectivity. Of course this is more frequently questioned now but it remains a fundamental demand of academic rationalism. As historian and cultural theorist Sven Lindqvist writes:

I have never created a more fictional character than the researching ‘I’ in my doctorate...a self that begins in pretended ignorance and then slowly arrives at knowledge, not at all in the fitful, chancy way I myself arrived at it, but step by step, proof by proof, according to the rules (cited Wright 2001: 11).

The simulated camera crews that became a feature of protests in Indonesia throughout 1998 on the other hand are all about the processes of construction because they produce nothing. Or, put another way, the performance of the process *is* the product. They are cameras that are *made to be seen*, to draw attention to themselves, not to be *seen through* or to enable
other things, people, and events, to be shown or represented. They are pure *reflexion*, and as such, ‘emphasize epistemological doubt’ (Nichols 1991: 61).

TV cameras in public places are, despite their relative unfamiliarity to most of us, still understood as portals to the expanded public world of broadcast television. Camera lenses are routinely covered over by the outstretched hands of people not wishing to appear on television. To the contrary, this evasive tactic seems to guarantee an appearance on the news precisely because not wanting to appear on camera in these circumstances automatically conveys having something to hide. Others go out of their way to get in front of a television camera. Unselfconscious children, especially, can sometimes be seen leaping about or pulling deranged faces in the middle distance behind television journalists on location (see figure 11). In addition, demonstrators and other participants in events at which television news crews have been present can rush home or in other ways gather around television sets at news time to assess whether an event has been interpreted accurately and fairly, or to spot friends or themselves in those shots of the crowd that make it into the edited and necessarily abbreviated coverage. The organisers of demonstrations typically inform television news crews of their plans in the hope that they will be in attendance and that the concerns of demonstrators will receive wider publicity and support as a consequence.

Yet just as there is a discrepancy between events and their representation, with an incumbent Habermasian ‘distrust of representation’ (Peters 1993) weighing heavily on
negative assessments of television's ability to profitably contribute to a ‘public sphere’, there is also the accusation that television crews provoke incidents in order to produce ‘camera fodder’. This amounts to the idea that there is a readily discernible discrepancy between what happens in the world and what happens when there are TV cameras present, and that in the latter it is the incident itself that is to be mistrusted, not just television's representation of it. Hans Magnus Enzensberger (1970) muses on just such a possibility when, in a bracketed aside, he acknowledges the need to ‘develop further’ the theory that the ‘reality in which a camera turns up is always faked, e.g. the moon-landing’ (35). Accusing protesters of performing for the cameras is sometimes a way of calling into question the validity or sincerity of their protest. Writers commenting on student demonstrations in the US in the 1960s similarly found that television camera crews exercised such a powerful presence that they quickly become implicated in the character of events they purported to record, helping to shape proceedings rather than simply document them. Sampson (1970) observed that:

All too frequently during the term one may see the noontime corps of photographers and TV camera crews waiting around Sproul Plaza for the action to begin. Eagerly or so it begins to seem, students, administrators and faculty look forward to seeing, hearing and reading about themselves. The person acts at noon, goes to class until four, then rushes home to watch the five o'clock news to see how he (sic) looked on TV … (In the presence of television cameras), (p)arties on all sides begin to play more to their potential audience “out there” than to the people at the negotiating table (15–16).

From the perspective of those who wind up on the screen, however, the transformation from participant in a public rally or protest to actor in a mediated event can be a frustrating, even distressing, experience. As Nick Couldry (2000) notes in his study of encounters between ‘ordinary people’ and the media, demonstrators’ first hand observations of news media practices and the process of narrativisation – witnessing news crews at work and later watching the results as an audience member – can culminate in ‘the denaturalisation of the media frame’, whereby the media's power to naturalise its discourse through stereotypes, editorial control, and paradigms of newsworthiness is exposed as the ideologically- and generically-driven construction of reality rather than ‘factual’ or ‘objective’ reportage. Individuals who make the decision to participate in demonstrations as a matter of deep-felt commitment to a cause can watch on television as they devolve into media stereotypes while their concerns are relegated to the margins.

The mock crews' confrontation with actual TV news crews during the Jakarta demonstrations can, in this light, be seen as an attempt to interrogate the process by turning a camera back on those who wield the real apparatus of media power and authorship. That the camera used for this purpose is clearly, unashamedly, a bricolage fake only serves to more keenly satirise
its subject, lending an unlikely power to the impotence suggested by the flimsiness of its construction and the futility of its cause.

But the satire also drew attention to the relative absence of news crews and the unwillingness of domestic stations to devote more airtime to the demonstrations and their demands for political reform. This was true at least in the last week of Suharto's presidency. Prior to that, from March 1998, following the unanimous re-election of President Suharto and up into the first weeks of May, commercial television news had become increasingly open in its coverage of the student protests and speeches made by prominent pro-reform figures at rallies often held on university campuses. This was almost to the exclusion of other news. According to cursory content analysis conducted by a Kompas journalist, up to 95% of the duration of televisi swasta newscasts was taken up with stories related to those issues (Kompas 17 May 1998). Since the concept of news is a relative one, it can be considered that what was happening on the streets and in the stalls of government opposition was the only news.

As pressure on Suharto to step down escalated, the political news on morning, afternoon and evening bulletins was supplemented by the less formal more democratised engagement of talk shows featuring debates between politicians, political analysts, academics, journalists and budayawan. A viewer phone-in was a regular feature of these shows which, while limited in terms of the potential for interactivity between the audience at home and the panel in the studio, emphasised the openness and importance of ‘talk’ as a way of arriving at assessments of information about current events seen or heard on radio and television or read about in the newspaper or on the internet.

News coverage culminated in broadcasts showing scenes of demonstrations at Trisakti University on May 12 in which four students were shot dead by security forces and many others injured.2

Station SCTV, whose afternoon bulletin (Liputan 6 Siang) also included a controversial and highly popular interview segment, was particularly unflinching in its coverage which was long and less edited. In the days following Trisakti, Jakarta erupted and television cameras raced to the conflagration, transmitting video images across the archipelago: shots of looting, rioting and the city in flames.

Margot Cohen (1998), one of Far Eastern Economic Review's Indonesia correspondents, noted of the footage that ‘looters seemed to take particular pleasure in carting off wide-

2 Coverage of this event was in extreme contrast to that of the protests and violent clashes between students and the armed forces two days earlier in Medan which was barely covered at all. This suggests both that regional events are, for reasons of resources and editorial bias, given less attention by the national media than similar events in the capital; and that partly owing to this, the regional media and the events they cover are more easily censured.
screen TV sets, among other booty’ (18). We can only imagine the ripple that went through the fabric of household reality when looters saw on the television images of themselves making off with the very TV set they were watching: a feed-back loop of vertiginous effect.

Other accounts similarly point to the television set as one of the objects most often seized from smashed store fronts in moments of personal weakness afforded by these extreme conditions of public disorder. James Siegel (2001) piecing together eyewitness, victim and participant accounts of the violence in May 1998 alludes to the connection between television as a medium commonly accused in Indonesia (as elsewhere) of promoting material desires and dissatisfaction by showing ‘on the news, in the soap operas, how much luxury some people have’ (cited Siegel, 2001: 97), and the television set itself as the object of desire (99). For ‘Nyaris Berdosa’ (Almost Sinned), the pseudonymous writer of a letter to a religious advice column in the Islamic magazine, *Panji Masyarakat*, the temptation to participate in the looting was only barely overcome when the large-screen television he held in his arms began to weigh too heavily on his conscience. Was this, he asked, a sin? And to whom should he ask forgiveness?:

On May 14th I nearly joined the looters. Maybe because of the influence of the masses, I lifted a twenty-inch television set in an electronics store. As a matter of fact, for a long time I had wanted to change my fourteen-inch television [for a bigger one]. But suddenly, both hands and feet started to tremble. I thought of God. “Ya, Allah, how can I take responsibility for this?” (cited Siegel 2001: 99).

Television in the last days of Suharto began to take centre stage for its ability to broadcast graphic images; of student demonstrations, the brutality of the armed forces, of rioting and looting. But it also appeared frequently in its ‘inanimate’ form, as the thing carried off by looters for whom the price tag and the law was, in the heat of the moment, no longer a barrier to its acquisition. In this way, television the consumer durable (the TV) that is taken from its carton and styrofoam packing, and oriented toward the eyes of the audience, became the subject of television the receiver and broadcaster of ideas and images; of news, soap-operas and advertisements. It is fitting in this unstable political context and general chaos on the streets that the gripping scenes of looting on television displayed and perhaps promoted an alternative means of procuring a set, and that some transgressive members of the audience, as I have suggested above, may have found themselves in a starring role, captured on camera in the act of acquiring the means with which to watch their own performances and witness their own crimes (see figure 12).
Their transgressions were thus twofold: first, into the realm of criminality, and second, across the line separating audience from performer. Yet coming so closely after the television audience had witnessed the security forces’ ‘crimes’ in the name of state security, the footage of rioting and looting by ‘ordinary’ members of the audience also exposed a flip-sided duality of television; that is, that the ability to witness events through television contains within it the potential to be monitored by it, both by the general audience and the authorities. The opportunities for these discursive interplays were, however, short-lived, not because the looting and rioting stopped, but because in accordance with government demands, television began to construct news narratives that made it appear to have stopped.

On the night of May 14, while elsewhere in the city ‘Nyaris Berdosa’ continued to watch his 14” screen and perhaps rue the intervention of his conscience earlier in the day, a letter (SK Menpen No. 210) written in consultation with General Wiranto, the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, was dispatched from the offices of Information Minister Alwi Dahlan to the directors of Indonesia’s six television stations. The letter called for a halt to the coverage of rioting in the capital ostensibly for reasons of national security because it was feared such reports, particularly live bulletins, could ‘spark copycat riots in other areas of the country’ (Cohen 1998: 18). On the following day, a meeting held between the heads of
all stations and the newly appointed Director General of Radio, TV and Film, Ishadi SK, quickly reached agreement on the demand.

The meeting set about establishing the terms of the TV Pool. Each station was to send a single camera crew to TVRI at 9.00 every morning to receive instructions as to what they should cover. Once completed, these reports were to be submitted back to TVRI for clearance and lodgement with the Pool. All stations were required to broadcast the Pool's 30 minute bulletins twice daily, once in the morning and again in the evening. This regime of news production was first implemented on the morning of 16 May.

With the TV Pool in place, news reports bore little resemblance to those broadcast immediately before its establishment. On day one of the new television news regime, Prabowo made a televised statement denying allegations that he helped engineer the rioting, while claiming that order on the streets had been restored. In a relatively brief segment, video footage showing clean-up operations in progress seemed to confirm this; all fires had apparently been extinguished, and an orderly queue of looters watched over by their arresters were filmed moving on their haunches up a ramp onto the covered tray of a waiting truck. Some carried in their arms an item of stolen property, electrical goods mostly, a portable TV among them, forced to bear the irrefutable material evidence of their own misdemeanours. In reports later in the week more stolen goods reclaimed by police appeared in tagged batches, grouped together with items of like kind. Televisions once again formed a conspicuous core, lined up in a row on the station floor. The accused were marched single-file with their hands on their heads into police headquarters for questioning; down a corridor and up a flight of stairs to another corridor in an Escher-esque floorplan. As the week wore on an amnesty was declared, so that by 20 May people were asked to return any stolen goods, no questions asked.

Just as television news had only a few days earlier shown near total social decay, it now constructed images of its total reconstruction: fires extinguished, crowds dispersed, stolen goods returned, ‘criminals’ arrested, streets swept. Under the terms of the ‘TV pool’, all news stories were authorised, or more literally authored, by a representative of the government's interests. Footage and edited constructions that narrated a different story to that officially espoused could in this way be thwarted from the outset. This was to be the New Order's last gasp attempt to absolutely control authorship over national narratives that had in the past been used to legitimate its power and any actions deemed necessary to maintain it. Although there were claims from the Ministry that the TV Pool did not represent an absolute ban on commercial stations broadcasting their own political news and thus did not constitute a threat to stations’ editorial independence, this was the ultimate effect. There was

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3 Ishadi had been appointed to the position that day (15 May) following the sudden retirement of Dewabrata. It is perhaps a strange twist of fate that his first responsibility was to oversee the establishment of the TV Pool given his long-standing commitment to the value of broadcasting in Indonesia and his sometimes troubled relations with government regulators.
a clear distinction made between the rioters, referred to as ‘the masses’ and the student
demonstrators calling for political reform (see Siegel 2001) and this supported the claim
that the TV Pool was not directed against reform news. Newscasts showed that students
continued to occupy the grounds of Parliament and reported that they were addressed by pro-
reform leaders but these were, for the most part, long-shots short on detail. Long-shots of the
students and their supporters around parliament, by emphasising their mass, also lent greater
anonymity. With the regime's displeasure at the way stations had conducted themselves made
so blatantly apparent, television professionals and management were understandably loathe
to test the length of their leash. But the TV Pool and reliance on stations’ self-regulation
in this crumbling political climate offered no certainty. There were ample opportunities for
leaks in the system.

On May 17, SCTV's afternoon news bulletin, Liputan 6 Siang, opened with a live interview
with ex-Minister for the Environment Sarwono Kusumaatmadja who responded to the
question of how to solve the crisis with an analogy from dentistry: ‘if you have a toothache,
the only way to fix it is to pull out the whole tooth, roots and all’.4 The interviewer, Ira
Kusno, attempted to shift the topic to less controversial territory with a question about the
cabinet reshuffle but Sarwono refused to answer, continuing instead with a more direct attack
on Suharto's leadership (Suloyo 1998).

During the first ad break, up-beat satisfied mothers ensured their babies grew strong with
supplements, and drippy starstruck lovers sang odes to their deodorant. But none of this
could erase the persistent, troubling after-image of a bloody, rotten molar/wriggling Suharto
clenched triumphantly in dentist's pliers. SCTV’s Managing Director, Peter Gontha, was
already on the phone demanding angrily that the interview cease. In the aftermath, Liputan
6's producer Sumita Tobing was replaced, acting producer Don Bosco stepped down in a
show of solidarity, and interviewer Ira Kusno took stress leave (Kompas 19 May 1998). In
any case, the regular live interview segment was immediately dropped from the programme.
As was usual in these sorts of cases, station management denied that the changes had
anything to do with political pressure, insisting they were related to routine internal business
matters entirely unconnected with the interview everyone was talking about.

On the question of why interviews were to no longer be a feature of Liputan 6's afternoon
and evening bulletins, SCTV’s Corporate Secretary, Riza Primadi, claimed that the station
had received a number of phone calls, and that their removal was simply a response to
audience demand, stating that ‘in an interview, opinions are naturally expressed, and not all
viewers agree with these opinions’ (Kompas 19 May 1998). The comment left readers (and
viewers) to ponder which particular members of the audience might have been so offended

4 Sarwono’s use of an analogy from dentistry seems to refer back to a famous joke made by General
Sumitro when appearing before a parliamentary commission to elaborate his proposal for a system
of greater political openness (keterbukaan): ‘if you have a toothache’, he said, ‘you have to go to
Singapore to see a dentist because you can't open your mouth in Indonesia’ (cited Lane 1991: 33).
by Sarwono's painful yet efficient solution. Reference to the ‘phone calls’, moreover, served as a reminder that telephone lines into television stations remained a tool of censorship as well as democratic interactivity.5

The enforced uniformity of domestic televisual representation of demonstrators and their demands in Suharto's last days may have impeded the complete entry of students’ demands into the national airwaves6, yet the protesters’ plesetan of plastic bottles and cartons drew its potency from the mockery it made both of the relative scarcity of local television crews and the perceived need for them. How could journalists from the domestic stations, so weak in the face of government threats and demands, ‘telephone-culture’, and the pressures to self-censor ever be expected to help their cause was the rhetorical question these mock-ups proposed. Television, in succumbing to government- and self-regulation, had become complicit with presenting only the official rendition of events, effectively taking leave of the public conversation by obliterating (rendering invisible and inaudible) the claims of some of its most vocal interlocutors from the millions of small screens across the nation.

The defeatedness of the media was captured perfectly by activists defiantly wielding constructions of discarded boxes and plastic bottles in demonstrations whose message reached across the archipelago and around the world despite its belated, forced removal from the domestic television networks’ airtime. The simulated cameras were like the news bulletins produced by the TV Pool, representing nothing so much as an absence. For all the benefit they were to the principles of openness and popular participation that the student protesters were attempting to affirm, television crews might as well have been using equipment made of plastic bottles and cardboard boxes. Both were form without substance.

When the real TV cameras disappeared from the scene and mock-ups sprang up in their place, life, for a moment, began to simulate television. Then two things started to happen. Viewers at home, unwillingly cast back to the regular, and suddenly unsatisfying, schedules of daytime telenovela and carefully constructed images of order on the streets sought alternative sources of information about the political impasse that continued to unfold. And student protesters on the move began to include the head offices of television stations on their itinerary.

5 ‘Telephone culture’ (budaya telepon) is the expression used to describe the informal method of censorship commonly exercised under the New Order. It refers to the phone call media enterprises received as a warning when they had printed or broadcast anything deemed damaging to the government’s interests.

6 It could be argued that radio stations and the internet played a major role in keeping the lines of information open, during this time. Sen and Hill (2000: 194), for example, make sweeping claims about the internet's role in Suharto's downfall. Yet neither of these mediums can be truly considered ‘national’. Not radio because stations other than the government's network, RRI, were legally restricted to moderately powered transmitters that confined them to a limited broadcast range; and not the internet because although important for the organisation of student protests and the transfer of information across the nation and around the world, the number of internet users must have been tiny compared with the potential audience for television when we consider factors of expense, literacy and the limited coverage of the necessary telecommunications infrastructure.
SCTV's *Liputan 6*, the newscast that appeared to be most committed to maintaining a semblance of editorial independence throughout the crisis, carried as its closing story on the night before Suharto's resignation, that is the newscast's very last item of the New Order era, a news wire report from Taiwan about a dog that had become surrogate mother to an orphaned baby monkey, allowing it to suckle alongside her own litter of puppies (see figure 13).

Figure 13: Dog and monkey

This may be regarded as an indication of how quickly television shifts its address, particularly commercial channels. The feelgood story at the end of newscasts is a classic feature of the genre where it serves to wrap-up the news on a light note. It is a final punctuation point to affirm that there is no more news, that the day's events have been fully covered, and that not all is bad. It perhaps settles the audience for other more relaxed modes of address in the programmes to follow. SCTV had become especially noted for its human (and animal) interest stories at the end of newscasts. This was an element in *Liputan 6*’s overall strategy to attract viewers away from the programme's competition on other channels and hold them. SCTV’s newscast was expanded to one hour from its usual 30 minutes. It commenced at 6pm but for the first 15 minutes ran ‘lukewarm’ stories, building up from there so that the hottest items of the day were in full-swing at 6.30 when rival newscasts – especially *Seputar Indonesia* – were starting on other commercial channels. Running a human interest story at the conclusion, according to Riza Primadi, was so that the audience
would not be left too tense by the serious news and the hour long duration of the show (Kompas 19 May 1998).

Unlikely as it may at first seem, there remains the possibility that the ‘animal-interest’ story of the orphaned monkey and its adoptive canine mother was not simply inserted as part of a feelgood strategy; but was a plea for harmony, charity and tolerance. TVRI’s evening newscast, Siaran Malam, that same night uncharacteristically included two musical performances whose lyrics more pointedly called for calm and national reflection. Watching each newscast one after the other suggested parallels between them.

Initially I found the footage of the dog and her monkey that night strangely grotesque but also unusually flippant given the tone of the rest of the domestic news. It made me feel anything but warm and fuzzy. And yet the longer its impression lingered, and it was still with me the following morning before Suharto announced his resignation, the more significant it seemed. Perhaps my response to it was an indication of the cultural distance between me and the broadcast and my alienation from the imagined audience, just one example of the many details, nuances and textures that I failed to keep in proper perspective.

To state that this tale of surrogacy was intended to induce contemplation on the matters of love, giving, mutuality and tolerance in the face of chaos, violence and mounting tension may be an act of willful overinterpretation, going out on a limb may never have been so precarious, but this is how it seemed to me reflecting on the story as I walked through the university car park in Darwin that crisp, early dry-season night.

To dismiss it on the other hand as an insignificant though surreal afterword to an otherwise weighty newscast and to assume that the Indonesian television audience also regarded it as such would be to stray into equally contentious terrain. Discerning between the significant and insignificant features of any cultural text, practice or artefact placed under a spotlight is an indeterminate process without clear guidelines, but to render invalid all subjective responses to the material and make shaky claims to objectivity and assertions of likelihood risks closing off to all but the most ‘commonsensical’, familiar and therefore unexamined observations.

On the dog and monkey story I can only state with impunity that to me it was weird and unsettling and yet, strangely poignant and appropriate in the context of mounting insecurity and impending upheaval. Academic objectivity is ill equipped to explain the moods produced by television and the afterimages it leaves. They are affective and allusive, inviting a subjective response that discourages solid, objective analysis. This is an important issue for this thesis because it seeks to encroach upon a liminal zone between the global or universal and the culturally specific, between textual analysis and ethnographic method, and between objectivity and subjectivity.
Television dreams and dystopias

Precisely! Oh, how do I yearn in my heart for that moment, one day in the future, when my revolutionary nationalist fellow countrymen, with the help of that most modern means, will just silently watch on television how the last imperialist rolls up his colonial mat (Soeloeh Indonesia Moeda, 9 August 1928 cited Mrazek 1997: 33).

These words appeared in a Dutch East Indies still fourteen years away from the end of colonial rule and 34 years before television was first broadcast in what was by then the independent Republic of Indonesia. They are thus part of Indonesia's pre-televisual and pre-national longing, a conceptualisation of what ‘seeing from afar’ might offer the nation on the cusp of independence. The description indicates that an idea for the uses of television well preceded the establishment of television broadcasting, just as the affirmation of Indonesian nationalism and shared national identity preceded the proclamation of the Indonesian nation as a political entity. It is also indicative of the elevated role projected for television: an invaluable feature of future television was that it would enable an expanded number of people to witness history as it takes place. What the imaginary audience of 1928 is watching is live coverage of what might now be called a ‘media event’. For Dayan and Katz (1992) ‘media events’ are distinguishable from the ‘news events’ contained in daily newscasts not simply because they break from regular broadcast schedules, but because they disrupt the daily routines of the whole of the audience, the members of which are drawn together by the urgency (that which urges audience members away from their dispersed daily routines to instead focus on the media event), simultaneity and instantaneousness of coverage that promises live footage and frequent updates interspersed with analysis.

This is our earliest sketch of the Indonesian television audience; sitting quietly, eyes fixed on the screen as an event of astounding historical and political significance unfurls; ‘as the last imperialist rolls up his colonial mat’. That the television audience described here only existed in the imagination is of no concern to us since that is where, on one level, all television audiences reside. Nevertheless, as we shall see, brief as it is, the image conjured by the 1928 description bears features repeated in other descriptions of other audiences. The most salient shared feature of these descriptions is that each plays on the space between the person or people watching and what appears on the screen to say something of the manner of their engagement. This interactive space (the interrupted social or domestic space between the viewer's eyes and the screen) can be thought of as a permeable pathway along which the messages of television mix with other messages, other experiences, other diversions, other stimuli, other peripheral visions; all those elements that colour interpretation and affect our willingness or ability to engage with the texts on the screen.

The Indonesian television audience of 1928 has clearly been constructed to bear the features of its time; it is ‘revolutionary’ and ‘nationalist’ but oddly impassive, watching ‘silently’.
1928, the year the Sumpah Pemuda (The Youth Pledge) was declared on October 28 at a lively gathering of nationalist youth organisations, and the year in which W R (Wage Rudolf) Soepratman (the hybridity of his name a tantalising indication of the forces that shaped colonial history and produced the first spark of the Indonesian nation) composed the song, Indonesia Raya. Later adopted as Indonesia's national anthem, in the late 1920s and 1930s the song was a rousing chorus of defiance against a colonial administration that had forbidden its performance: ‘Indonesia Raya, Merdeka, Merdeka, Hiduplah Indonesia Raya’. Participants at the Second Youth Congress of 1928 pledged that they had one homeland, Indonesia; that they were one people, Indonesians; and shared one language, Indonesian. At least this is how the pledge has come to be remembered. Records of the day show that with regard the final oath, the congress actually swore allegiance to, or ‘reverence for’, the Indonesian language, since in 1928, not everyone spoke Malay/Indonesian and the common language to those present was still Dutch (see Day and Foulcher 1998: 7). The passage I began with was also originally in Dutch, although the title of the journal in which it appeared was Malay/Indonesian.

Television in 1928, although demonstrated to be a technical possibility, was still remote as far as its domestic supply and consumption in Indonesia were concerned. At that time even radio broadcasting, which was to become an indispensable medium to nationalist revolutionaries during the struggle for independence (see Wild 1987, 1991), was in its infancy in Indonesia. Short-wave radio, however, had already shown the capacity of the airwaves to carry recognisably human messages in order to reach and unite far flung audiences, thereby destroying distance and introducing concepts of extensionality and simultaneity whereby dispersed audiences could simultaneously engage with the same text or communication. The Dutch Queen, Wilhelmina, addressed her colonial subjects for the first time in the previous year in one of the earliest short-wave radio broadcasts between the Netherlands and the Indies (Wild 1987: 18, Mrazek 1997: 5). The account of one listener, Raden Mas Ir. Sarsito Mangoenkoesoemo, is reminiscent of the description of the television audience with which I opened this section:

Word by word we were able to hear Her Majesty the Queen in the small hours of the night through the sender of the Philips laboratory in Eindhoven. We were perplexed and fell silent at the thought that we had lived through a marvel. Before that small company in the Prangwedanan there had passed an unforgettable moment (Mangoenkoesoemo cited Wild 1987: 18).

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7 On 1 June 1999, W R Soepratman replaced Suharto on the new Rp 50,000 bank note. The lyrics to Indonesia Raya appear in miniature to his right.

8 ‘Precies! Ook ik hoop van harte, dat mijn revolutionaire nationalistiche landgenooten eens zwijgen zullen, en met de modernste hulpmiddelen voor televisie op den uitkijk staan, wanneer de laatste imperialist zijn koloniale mat oprolt’.
The distant, strangely dispassionate dream of nationalist youth watching the Dutch ‘roll up their mats’ on television was never realised, yet the words are evocative of a televised event that aired 70 years later, and of an audience who looked silently on. Television by then was a taken-for-granted phenomenon. There was no longer any sense that the ability to bring to life an electric box with a glass screen and watch distant events was anything perplexing or particularly marvelous. But while the technology had become commonplace, the content of broadcasts on May 21 may have caused a few jaws to drop.

When President Suharto read the speech announcing his resignation that morning, it was relayed live on all domestic television stations. There was nothing particularly unusual about the coverage across all stations; private stations were obliged to relay any presidential speech deemed by the Department of Information to be of national importance. Occasionally, TVRI's live telecasts of parades marking one of the numerous anniversaries on the annual calendar were similarly relayed. These were in addition to the simultaneous relay each evening of TVRI's national evening newscast *Siaran Berita* and world news programme, *Dunia Dalarn Berita*. Private commercial networks were at times understandably irritated by this obligation, because live relays cut into and across programming schedules often during prime time.

It is unlikely any station would have thought twice about the opportunity to relay Suharto's resignation speech. It is difficult to imagine there had ever been a more watched 10 minutes in the history of Indonesian television. And by 1998, it was not just ‘fellow country/new’ who sat glued to their television screens, but women and children in inestimable numbers many of whom, like the radio and pre-television audiences of the late 1920s, must have ‘fallen silent at the thought they had lived through a marvel’. Nor did the 1998 audience solely comprise ‘revolutionary nationalists’ although many were undoubtedly united in their wish to see the established order overturned, a desire framed in terms of its benefit to the nation and its people, so perhaps they were in this sense, both ‘revolutionary’ and ‘nationalist’.

Each of the audience descriptions cited is also linked by another feature: in each, the viewers or listeners have the sense that what they have witnessed will change the world and their comprehension of it. They are ‘world shattering events’ that while marking perhaps the end of a long struggle in the case of the 1928 forecast and therefore presumably accompanied by a sense of relief, they also signal the end of certainty and the yawning of an unknown future. The world has changed forever. What happens next? For a moment there is blankness.

**Live television**

The following description of a fragment of the 1998 Indonesian audience comes from *The Wall Street Journal*. The intensity of media use and production that surrounds media events and the disruption to normal routines that such engagement produces is here shown from the perspective of media professionals. Media professionals and media consumers (the
audiences and readerships), are thereby united through their heightened engagement with events and one another:

Groggy and elated, the reporters and editors at Jakarta's D&R magazine knotted around a television in their long, cluttered conference room to witness the culmination of their lives’ work.

On the screen, Indonesia's autocratic President Suharto was resigning after a calamitous month of mass protests and economic chaos. For the journalists at D&R, many of whom had been sleeping for days on the office floor or at their desks, if at all, it was an almost-surreal moment, redemption and justification of years of journalistic opposition and political ostracism. It was also the beginning of an uneasy limbo (Brauchli 1998).

This television moment had not come out of the blue. It was a final installment of a series of events that had made intense viewing and produced a committed audience according to journalists’ reports in the print media. In the course of protracted and unpredictable ‘events’ such as these (chaos on the streets and a government teetering on the verge of collapse) that change from moment to moment, it is the characteristic of immediacy, and the ‘promise’ of liveness, that renders television and radio so effective and so enthralling; under these circumstances, they literally mediate less between the event and its reception. When Suharto announced his resignation millions could watch instantaneously.

Direct, ‘live’ television that is relatively continuous and unedited can carry the jeopardy of a leap into the void, a medium that hinges on the future, drawing viewers to the edge of their seats to see what is going to happen next precisely because it is unscripted, on the screen as it happens, not as it is written. Before the invention and ready availability of video tape technology much programming was broadcast ‘live’ because there was no alternative. In Australia and Indonesia live television remained a necessary mode of delivery for locally produced programming, particularly for smaller regional broadcasters, through much of the 1960s. In both nations, policy and/or technological constraints bridled commercial or government desires to establish networks of centrally controlled programming and personnel, and television remained for a time significantly local and live despite the presence of telecined imported material.

The liveness of television, apart from this more mundane manifestation, was also exploited for its ability to conquer time and space, thus allowing far flung audiences to witness events and spectacles instantaneously and simultaneously. Liveness, along with screen size and domestic reception, was one of the three aspects that set television apart from the other site of the moving-image, the cinema and this was emphasised in the professional ideologies of television technicians, engineers and critics (Bourdon, 2000: 533). Although live television has ceased to typify daily programming, television's potential for liveness
remains in Bourdon's view the medium's most potent attribute and its underlying 'promise'. For Jane Feuer, television's 'ideology of liveness', moreover, extends not only to direct transmissions but to the simultaneity of viewership whereby broadcasts are experienced as 'live' (cited Doane 1990: 227–228).

‘Liveness’ has also become a relative concept in recorded programming where instantaneity is replaced with appeals to the authenticity that liveness lends. When series episodes and game shows are claimed to be recorded ‘live before a studio audience’, performances acquire greater sincerity and audiences and their responses seem more authentic. But while these shows incorporate the responses of the live audience (though these too are directed by cue lights and people hired to maintain a high level of enthusiasm from the studio audience), the gaffes and blemishes of the performance can be edited out (the errors, happenstance and associated hilarity are now just as likely to crop up in a celebrity hosted assemblage of ‘bloopers’, a celebration of life's intervention in the artifice of television).

Liveness of this type bears the features of finitude rather than the any thing-might-happen, skin-of-the-teeth allure of broadcasts that ‘capture’ an event or performance as it takes place. The notion of ‘capture’ is useful here because it suggests the detainment for examination of something elusive and determinedly in flight. In certain exceptional cases live broadcasting can even give the appearance of acting as a direct conduit rather than a mediator between the breathing of events and the television audience whose breath is bated, everything and everyone breathing as one. Such instances are exceptional too because they are indelible, becoming simultaneously a feature of personal memory and shared history.

This is also noticeably the case with ‘special event’ television: the often live broadcast of national and international sporting events like the Olympics, for example, or the sorts of national celebrations exemplified by those for Indonesia's 50th Anniversary of Independence. Other special event programmes, also generally broadcast live, operate as national ‘vigils’ invoking a sense of shared communion or secular prayer. These can take the form of mourning following the death of a widely respected national (or international) figure, or the broadcast of consciousness- and fund-raising events. The live national broadcast in May 2000 of the Walk for Aboriginal Reconciliation held in Sydney and using to full advantage the iconic form of the Sydney Harbour bridge is a good Australian example of this.

An Indonesian example of a different kind of live television was the 24 November 2000 live broadcast (on all stations) of a two hour variety special that amongst skits and musical performances featured testimonials calling for an end to the violence around the nation. The ‘liveness’ of these programmes is fundamental to their effect because it reduces the perceived gap between lived experience and mediated experience; and because liveness emphasises the exceptional nature of special event broadcasts: they break with regular schedules and their incorporation into the regularity of daily life, while also producing a time-dimensional shift from the pre-recorded to the unscripted ‘as-it-happens’. Although the broadcast of these
events is often, if they are scheduled, set to conclude at a particular time, they are open-ended and vicissitudinous texts because their outcomes are yet to be witnessed by anyone. If a scripted, edited pre-recorded programme, such as an episode of a popular drama, has a finite, predetermined existence in real time and therefore can be thought of as having a state of ‘being’, then live programming can be characterised by its state of ‘becoming’. What happens next from moment to moment is a question not answerable with complete assurance by anyone because liveness, like life, contains an almost limitless field of possibilities and momentary denouements.

The most extremely live broadcasts in terms of unscripted open-endedness, then, are those live broadcasts of dramatic events that constitute ‘history-in-the-making’ where neither the event nor the telecast has a known conclusion. The directness of these transmissions is enhanced by the sense that even after the broadcast has concluded and we are returned ‘back to the studio’ or back to regular schedules, the events, although unseen, are continuing to develop, a picture frequently ‘up-dated’, if the events are perceived to be important enough, with further ‘breaks from regular broadcasts’ and live crosses from the studio back to the scene where situations are ‘unfolding’. When these events are of national importance they too contribute to the national self-imagining because they invoke a feeling of participation in those events regardless of the viewer's actual physical distance from them. It can also be the case, where live broadcasts cover events that are geographically close to the viewer's location, that people switch off the television and travel to actually take part in their unfolding.

Yet liveness or directness remains a relative concept in the mediated environment of television broadcasting. It can be attributed to a range of otherwise divergent programming from the web-cam inspired offerings of reality TV drama, to live telecasts of sporting events and even to the consideration of watching daily schedules as an activity that is live as distinct from watching a video recording. All are live according to sliding scales of unmediated veracity and the real time sense of co-participation in an audience. In Indonesian, live television is siaran langsung, ‘direct transmission’, emphasising the immediacy of broadcasts, their unmediated nature, rendering the existential connotations carried in the English title less instantly apparent (Scannell 2001: 702).

When television is truly live, all viewers share equal position as the first to know. Television is a flexible medium that allows a range of levels of engagement; you can talk while you watch, and read or do housework while you listen, until something comes along that demands your coordinated and undivided attention. When that moment comes there is a feeling that your eyes are not the only eyes focused on the screen and that what you are witnessing is a national (or global) event shared with a national (or global) television audience.
The heightened sense of collective viewing achieved through live broadcasting has been utilised on Indonesian television since its beginnings. There has been, however, a major change in the character of live telecasts since the resignation of Suharto. Under the New Order, live television was most commonly associated with the nation's annual calendar of official events and days of remembrance. These were commonly celebrated with live speeches and parades. Commercial broadcasters regularly protested about the obligation to relay these on the basis that they led to huge losses of potential advertising revenue. The pattern of these annual events represented the historical mapping of the nation and its institutions and an opportunity for the government to reaffirm official sentiments, and to instil an official, national memory of common origins and values. While these commemorations may have had significance for many Indonesians, they can be seen as part of the necessary ‘work’ the government engaged in to promote national unity, official programs, and interpretations of history in order to legitimate its authority. That the promotion of these demanded concerted effort can be seen from the obligation of all stations to simultaneously carry the telecasts removing the possibility of audience members switching over to watch anything else. An excellent example among countless others was the live telecast on the morning of 29 June 1995 of a ceremony to commemorate National Family Day and to award the efforts of Gerakan Bangga Suka Desa, a village development foundation. The event took place in Yogyakarta.

President Suharto's prominence in the live broadcast was to be expected, the proceedings, after all, revolved around his presence there. His movements and reactions were kept centre screen. Following the delivery of his speech outlining the successes of the New Order's village development projects and policies there were entertainments whereupon his duties became less arduous and he became a spectator. Even so, much of the coverage of the performance is viewed from the perspective of his appreciation of it. The performance itself is not the main feature. Rather the television coverage refers constantly back to the president's responses. This is characteristic of the live coverage of official events and speeches under the New Order. Never, for example, did I see Suharto directly address the television cameras and therefore speak to the ‘audience of one’ at home. On the 29 June telecast we see him laughing and chatting amiably with his wife Tien. It is an occasionally intimate portrait. At times the cameras moved in very close, at one point in the first section of the broadcast the audience was allowed an extreme close up of his hands as he applied his slow, deliberate signature to a series of plaques and ‘first-day-covers’ intended to extend the event through time just as the telecast extended it through space. Following an award ceremony in which Suharto moved along a line of men and pinned a medal to each of their suited breasts, the President resumed his seat next to Tien in the front row of three ranks of chairs filled with his retinue; members of his family and government all wearing identical sateen batik shirts. Other pavilions around the square in which the ceremonies took place contained representatives of organisations engaged in family and village development.
Figure 14: Suharto and his double.
The entertainment on the programme was a choreographed costume spectacle that traced Suharto's career from ‘hero of the struggle for independence’ to ‘father of development’ (Bapak Pembangunan). The first dance sequence was a dramatisation of the struggle for Independence and especially the battle for Yogyakarta in which Suharto is shown presenting the city back to the Sultan who arrives looking gaunt in a cane sedan chair to be reunited with his wife. Laughter erupts as the birth of Suharto's first child with Ibu Tien is also announced. The organisers of the National Family Day celebrations would of course be remiss not to stress the importance of Suharto's own family as a microcosm of the national family. Actors playing a young Suharto and Tien are shown together with their baby. It is a light moment that presages a dramatic leap in time to allow any mention of Sukarno's presidency and its traumatic collapse to be excised from the narrative. The young Suharto's destiny is, of course, well known to all watching and we see president Suharto himself, the result of that destiny, in the flesh, watching, pleased. The arrival of the actor in the starring role of ‘New Order Suharto’, his make-up seemingly applied with a trowel, also produces a ripple of amusement amongst the honoured guests. I was laughing too so I wondered if we were all laughing at the same thing. Did ‘Suharto’ look as funny from where they were sitting as he did to me? Suharto himself was again amused. He leaned over and made comment to Tien. Perhaps something in the order of: ‘am I really as fat as that?’ Or, ‘how do you know I'm the real Suharto?’ I feel sure I wasn't the only person watching to speculate on his words and on the thoughts going through his mind when faced with this resemblance of himself.

The actor ‘Suharto’ remained anxious and stony faced, as if burdened with the gravity of his role and hoping desperately not to look ridiculous. Clearly some effort had been made to make the performer recognisable as Suharto but the result teetered on the parodic. When does such a representation come to be regarded as an impersonation, or worse, a caricature? Impersonations of Suharto (among others) in the monologues of artist-performer Butet Kartaredjasa, who is said to have precisely captured Suharto's voice and speech patterns, had by then gained some notoriety amongst the limited audiences for the Jakarta based theatre troupe, Teater Gandrik (Kompas 23 April 2000). Dressing to resemble an important political figure always carries the carnivalesque potential to make the ‘original’ appear ludicrous. This was clearly not the intention of this performance, but ample possibilities for mischief lurked all the same. The vision switcher cutting between them (though this was not executed in a pointed way) produced an odd effect.

Suharto's resemblance stepped up onto a low riser where in the course of the performance he was presented with three, coloured banners to symbolise the awards the President had received in honour of his services to the family and village development; on the announcement of the third of these, a United Nations ‘population award’, a ‘planned family’, husband, wife and two children, took the stage to the strains of the ‘Family Planning
Song’ looking as if one of the cement *keluarga berencana* (family planning) statues seen in countless villages had been magically brought to life.

A group of school children bumbled onto the scene holding aloft large cards with the letters to a word that never ever fully formed (at least not for the television cameras) to take their place with the ‘freedom fighters’, colourfully dressed ‘peasants’ and planned family still lingering from their roles in the portrayal of earlier episodes in the official history of Suharto's New Order. The space in front of the pavilion where the president and his retinue were seated was becoming impossibly crowded. ‘Suharto’ bustled through the group of school children to ‘hit his mark’ for the finale and finally, after some more jostling, ascended a ladder to board a float in the form of a large, ornate *perahu*. The young ‘Tien’ stood waiting on the deck, and together they were hauled away, waving to the official guests who, good naturedly, waved back.

The final stage of the ceremony centred on a live video link-up between Suharto and village representatives in three provinces; South Kalimantan, West Sumatra, and East Java. The technology itself that made this possible was highlighted as the most important aspect of the spectacle. Suharto sat before a row of television screens, three labelled with the name of the province it was linked to, and a fourth showing the live picture of the president in Yogyakarta. A presenter explained in some detail the communications networks required to enable the *wawancara jarak-jauh* (long-distance interview) to take place. Science and Technology were on display as if the technical wonder of satellite communications stood for interactivity with the processes of governance.

Suharto took up the theme at the beginning of the exercise to note that despite the enormous distances, the wonders of communication technology reduced the visible distance between himself and the three provinces to a mere two metres, the width of the red-carpeted gap that lay between the President and the television screens arrayed before him. And, we might add, between people watching at home and the image of the President. As the long-distance interview proceeded, it allowed people watching their television screens across the nation – and me in Darwin – to see the President also watching television. But unlike the rest of us who watched, the President displayed the remarkable ability to speak to the TV and to have it speak directly back to him. This was not magic of course, it's something we know as teleconferencing, but on television it elaborated liveness as a national collective activity and extended the discourse of satellite communications and live TV as a democratic forum.

How satisfying this demonstration of the conquering of time and space was for the provincial representatives can not be stated with any assurance, but their interface with the President could hardly be termed ‘dialogue’. Suharto dominated proceedings. And the organisation of these events under the New Order were always tightly planned so that the likelihood that the unexpected or unpredictable might occur was never a possibility. Even the good natured shambles of parts of the dance sequence I briefly described above did not amount to a
surrender to the unknown consequences of liveness or directness as it is often theorised (see for example Day an and Katz 1992; Peters 2001). Liveness under the New Order was about perceptual control. Time, space and simultaneity were all mastered by a central authority. As the wawancara jarak-jauh demonstrated, connections of the sort afforded by satellite technology were an object lesson in the ability of the government to reach across distances, to unite the nation by showing that all parts of the nation were equidistant from the seat of power; all distances were reduced to an apparent two metres. The homogenising of national space by the vectors of government was complete in this and amounted to a display of central power rather than a demonstration of national interconnectedness or popular participation.

The liveness of television, considering these two quite divergent uses of it, has no single inherent quality. In the use of it during the New Order period the medium of live (or direct) television was also coupled with the demand that all stations broadcast those transmissions. This further reduced uncertainty because the removal of choice produced a certainty of its own: no matter how many times you flicked through the stations, the picture would always be the same.

As I have noted, even when television is not live or direct in terms of its transmission, there remains the possibility of a simultaneity of audience or readership that can also be imagined as a state of co-temporality and instantaneity linking an unseen collective into a virtually simultaneous activity. Benedict Anderson (1991) has noted that the act of reading a national daily newspaper can similarly carry with it the idea of engaging in an activity that is shared simultaneously (1991: 44). From this we can see that the moment of distribution and currency of a text, and the imagined moment of its consumption can also be productive of a sense of shared involvement in an event, not just the witnessing of the instant of an event and its generation and transmission as a mediated event.

When, early on 13 May 1998, morning television newscasts reported the shooting of students at Trisakti University by security forces, Merah-putih (the Indonesian flag) outside businesses and private residences all over Indonesia were reportedly flown at half mast, indicating that the shooting of students protesting for political reform and an end to KKN (Korupsi, Kolusi dan Nepotisme, Corruption, Collusion and Nepotism) was felt to be a national tragedy and not just by students engaged in the action on the streets or the families of those killed, but by otherwise unconnected people sitting and watching in their homes (Cohen 1998: 18). National mourning is an under-explored contributor to a powerful sense of shared destiny, national purpose, and retributive justice. Evening news reports that night focused almost entirely on the Trisakti tragedy showing emotional scenes at the funerals of some of the victims and the devastation of their parents. That the sympathies of the media were shared by the majority of their audiences/readerships, who in turn sided with the students, seems without question. The students' sense of outrage at the gunning down of fellow demonstrators
produced an emotional tremor with immediate ramifications for the political legitimacy of the regime. The camera lingered in close-up on the abject devastation of the victims' parents, filling the screen with their anguish and tears. In times like this, I propose, when there is a heightened level of tension, engagement and common purpose running through a community, when the heat of an issue is so great that all else is bleached by its glare, the media are better placed to discern what the demands of its audiences are because media workers are more likely to share them. This proposal needs to remain contentious because the terrain between what people want, what media producers and schedulers deduce their demands to be, and what audiences are provided with, should always be in dispute: if only because the mass audience can only ever truly exist as a discursively constructed model; teflon to the presumption of total knowledge. It is nevertheless pertinent to note the signs. Even TVRI, throughout its national news coverage of the incident, ran a continuous scroll across the bottom of the screen which, while referring to the incident as a ‘clash’ (bentrokan) between students and armed forces, a word usually used to indicate an equal measure of antagonism from both sides, expressed its sympathy for the victims and condolences to their families, a gesture quite pointed in the context of the habitually unmoved Siaran Berita, and without precedent, at least in the 1990s.

All media, print and electronic, reported the Trisakti shootings, but the television pictures, particularly on the private commercial channels, were nothing if not graphic. There could be no question as to who was the victim and who the perpetrator when television pictures showed riot police in numbers clubbing and kicking lone protesters who already lay terrified and bleeding. Others levelled their rifles and took aim at students trying to flee. This was a national tragedy and the footage of these scenes allowed little room for doubt. The unpredictable power of actuality footage to portray events in ways that subtly undermined the official line provided by voice-over commentary had also been clearly noted around two years earlier in news coverage of the events of 27 July 1996, the day the PDI's ousted leader, Megawati Soekamoputri, and her supporters were forced from the party's headquarters in Jakarta. *Televisi swasta*'s coverage of this violent clash with Megawati supporters, the rioting in the streets that followed, and their aftermath avoided overtly contradicting the government and the military's official version of events. This, in brief, was that the change in PDI leadership (Soerjadi replacing Megawati Soekamoputri) was an internal party matter and that the rioting was incited by ‘latent communists’, members of the officially unrecognised PRD (People's Democratic Party). Yet the pictures and direct sound of the coverage appeared only to confirm evidence that the ouster (which was not without precedent) was engineered by the government and the violence instigated by the military, and members of the state-supported youth organisation *Pemuda Pancasila* (Pancasila Youth) dressed in red PDI T-shirts. Veven Sp Wardhana's (1997) close study of TV's coverage of the riots noted that footage collected and broadcast by all stations featured clear instances of excessive violence by the armed forces who were seen on numerous separate occasions surrounding and kicking rioters they had already arrested. Even the visuals of TVRI's news report of the incident seemed to
undermine its own construction of events. While the voiceover to the report claimed that rioters attacked a police station, the images showed ‘rioters’ being clubbed and bashed by the riot squad (Wardhana 1997: 39–40). The runaway power of pictures and the inability of television to construct a world view at odds with a commonly accepted understanding of events and their origins was, for Veven Sp Wardhana, clearly shown in July 1996. Sen and Hill (2000) come to a similar conclusion when they note that the commercial stations’ news format in the days following the riots, ‘signalled cracks in the didactic monotone of TVRI, if only through the differences between street pictures and official interpretations’ (130).

**The community of viewers**

After all this we need to remind ourselves, however, that Suharto's resignation and the events leading up to it were not like anything that had ever before been reported on Indonesian national television. Sukarno's forced capitulation to Suharto in 1967 was no doubt televised but the audience at that time was comparatively tiny, hardly a national let alone international television event. It is not surprising, then, that the uses the media were put to in May 1998, were dramatically different to the usual, everyday uses of television that had established themselves in Indonesia. The change in television broadcasts was accompanied by a change in audience behaviour that suggested a closely engaged dialogue between them.

The television audience able to watch this media event was both potentially huge and demographically diverse: people in cities, people in villages, warung operators, becak, bus and taxi drivers, teachers, politicians, business executives, housewives and maids. Broadcast television, as John Hartley (1999) has pointed out, is inherently ‘democratic’ (once access to a TV set has been established across a demographically broad base as it had been by then in Indonesia) because it treats all audience members equally, according everyone the same rights: ‘(television) gathers populations which may otherwise display few connections,’ he writes, ‘(while) promoting among them a sense of common identity as television audiences’ (158). [italics in original]. The application of this view to the Indonesian case may seem paradoxical when the prevalent tendency is to dismiss television under the New Order as primarily bearing the features of ‘propaganda’, of being at the ‘epicentre of national ideological control’ (Sen and Hill 2000: 220) rather than functioning to contribute to a democratic, Habermasian ‘public sphere’. Yet, in keeping with Hartley's understanding of television's nominally democratic characteristic, the expansion of the area covered by television transmissions after the launch of the first series Palapa satellite in 1976 was very deliberately designed to ‘democratis[e] access; that is, to gather a population whose features were not delimited by geographical location, ethnicity, education or socio-economic status. Under television, the diversity of Indonesia's geographically scattered population was contained within the one official discursive construction of the audience. Whether each individual viewer felt a sense of common identity with the rest of the audience, as Hartley suggests, is another matter entirely, the answer to which may depend on what was being watched and under what circumstances.
Television in Indonesia under the New Order was in some respects no different to the medium described by Hartley. Millions had access to the same pictures. Enzensberger (1970) expounds a similar view when he describes the electronic media as ‘egalitarian in structure’, with the potential to ‘do away with all educational privileges’ (20). These were among the very characteristics that had so encouraged the New Order to ensure that villages across the archipelago were supplied with television sets, even, in many cases, before they had been supplied with electricity (generators, banks of car batteries, or solar panels were provided in these instances) or access to formal education. The New Order expanded the television service it presided over through the Department of Information expressly to ‘gather populations and promote among them a sense of common (national) identity’. Yet, the population that was ‘gathered’ according to official government constructions of the audience, was a carefully managed and monitored entity that in the authority's view required constant guidance. The identity promoted was coterminous with the projects of national unity and ‘development’.

When television in Indonesia comprised a single government operated network, the coordination of the task was relatively straightforward. Through a standardised, ‘Fordist’ mode of production, answerable at each stage to a clearly outlined chain of command in the Department of Information (Deppen), television functioned more or less as the government's screen onto which it could project only those images and narratives that supported its efforts or, at the very least were considered not to undermine it. But while the imaginary dutiful audience inscribed in TVRI's content wholly supported the government's efforts, there is every indication that not everyone amongst the millions watching (on TV sets perched on poles in village court yards, or in comfortable suburban living rooms), although belonging to the same audience, were united in their interest or faith in what was being shown. This draws the concepts of subjectivity and choice into notions of the identity of the audience. In single channel environments where there is no choice, where the only decision is whether to watch or not to watch, television is just as likely to induce an alienated sense of non-involvement as it is the sense of common identity through audience membership. Yet the potential for democratic access to the broadcasts remains.

When Indonesia became a multi-channel environment, Deppen's ability to monitor became more complicated, particularly as these new channels were privately funded, commercial ventures whose construction of the audience displayed quite unruly features and sets of perceived demands at a variance with anything described in their handbook. Expansion was rapid. Between 1989 and 1995, we should recall, the number of television networks broadcasting nationally grew from one to six, five of them (when not doing Deppen's bidding by relaying TVRI programming) in competition with one another for ratings and revenue despite the convolutions of cross-ownership between stations and occasional calls to compete ‘cooperatively’. The most significant divergence from the original, official vision for television brought about by the new multi-channel environment, was that the television
audience was acknowledged to have pluralised to become television audiences (although this had not gained formal acknowledgement, televisi swasta being officially regarded as another arm of TVRI). The television audience could no longer be considered a microcosm of the nation, no longer was anyone watching television assumed to be watching the same thing as all other viewers. Viewers' potential opportunities to identify with a wider audience multiplied. Importantly, this was an identification based on choice. As a consequence, commercial operators needed to promote their stations to prospective audience members by first deciding who the audience was and what it wanted to see. An important element of this differentiation, as I noted in section one, lay in the promotion of prime time news programmes.

When the content of broadcasts produces an escalation of interest, an intensity discernible in the reports of other media or in conversations whether overheard or engaged in as a participant, then an awareness of belonging to an audience may become more apparent. The opportunity to participate may even begin to constitute a reason to watch. Commercial television newscasts toward the end of Suharto's rule allowed viewers the opportunity to not only feel themselves to be part of a larger audience witnessing the political debates and demonstrations taking place beyond the screen, but through that membership and the resources it provided, to participate in the exchange of information and the formulation of critical views in the informal political arenas of the home, the street, the waning, and the workplace. The sense of belonging to an audience also produced a sense of proprietorship over these more critical newscasts that government attempts to control them only served to aggravate. One newspaper article reported that a group of viewers formed themselves into an ad hoc organisation, the ‘Solidarity of Television Viewers Supporting Reform’ (Solidaritas Masyarakat Pemirsa Televisi untuk Reformasi), whose members demanded that their right of free access to information be reinstated (Kompas 20 May 1998).

Another article determined that housewives had become an important core group of the audience for news bulletins (Kompas 17 May 1998). That this was the case should have come as no surprise, at the very least because housewives, as a sector defined by occupation and domain, are identified with the day to day activities of the home – home based if not bound.

The government had made concerted efforts at an earlier point in the medium's history, when it had come to be thought of as a tool of national development, to rusticise its content and make viewing a community activity with the supply of sets to villages and the establishment of reading, viewing and listening groups called kelomencapir (see Quinn 1996). However, by the 1990s, private ownership of television sets, following closely the increase and national expansion of private television networks, was apparently routine even amongst members of the rural poor. At least in the relatively affluent regions of the nation.
While we should not forget the huge socio-economic discrepancies existing across the
archipelago, Pam Nilan (2000) writing at the close of the second millennium notes that in
the case of Bali, televisions were considered ‘mandatory purchases’, the level of household
income only determining whether to buy new or second-hand:

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…(121).

Despite this more thorough incorporation of the habit of television watching into private
leisure and domestic life, the public sphere that television news and current affairs
programming purports to serve is, nevertheless, still regularly considered part of a masculine
preserve owing to the assumption that men more than women are oriented toward the
supra-domestic sphere of public action detailed in news bulletins. Television programmes, of
course, can accommodate all spheres in generic forms that collapse the boundaries between
them. One aspect of programming that developed as a response to both the government
regulation that stressed TVRI's monopoly on news, and televisi swasta's competition for
ratings was the creation of information programs that placed a greater emphasis on lurid
crime, health issues, ‘personalities’ and human interest. These are topics less applicable to
a strictly Habermasian definition of the public sphere and more pertinent to a televisual
sphere that merges ‘private’ and ‘public’ sometimes in riotous, genre defying ways. But for
the Kompas reporter who filed a story on the responses of women to the establishment of
the TV Pool, the gendered divisions of programme types remained unproblematic (Kompas
17 May 1998). It is precisely the incongruity of housewives engrossed in television's
reporting of political affairs that provides the hook on which the story hangs. Under normal
circumstances, the women featured in the article – Ny9 Oehani from Pondoklabu, Ny
Aida from Pulomas, and Ny Rini from Bekasi – are reported to have preferred to watch
what women are presumed to prefer: Latin American telenovela and Indonesian sinetron,
programmes in which the female audience is presumed to be inscribed by the genres'
characteristic sentimentality, emotion, and a seriality that allows these forms of ‘soap-opera’
to be accommodated within daily household routines. Their storylines are also predominantly
about family ‘politics’ and often, especially in the case of telenovela, tell the rags-to riches
story of a female protagonist.

But during the first weeks of May 1998, television had become the medium through which
women in the home could stay informed about the rapidly unfolding leadership crisis,
the student protests, and the strategic positioning of pro-reform figures. Describing this as
a transition from the ‘thirst for entertainment’ to the ‘thirst for infotainment’, the article

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9 Nyonya, translatable as Mrs.
seems set to subtly discount the social and political significance of television's expanded and unified audience for political news and debate. It does this by regarding the women's obsession for news as another form of diversion rather than engagement with public issues. The term *infotainment* is key here: while it could in fact be considered a useful description of the sort of barrier melt-down occasioned by what television is good at, the creative blending of categories and audiences once thought distinct, it is also coined critically to describe a diluted and therefore insipid or ‘dumbed-down’ hybrid, in which the informational content is simply rendered more digestible. This is sometimes characterised as the shift from *hard news* to *soft news*. In the discourse of gendered spheres, infotainment can be thought of as information that has become *feminised* through contact with entertainment. Yet television's capacity to relay events taking place on the streets and in parliament, and to broadcast studio debates between government ministers and commentators directly to the home, is pronounced a prominent feature of the genre, one which contributes to informed discussion about current events at social get-togethers of female viewers.

Take, for example, women as the (audience) segment most representative of this change. Previously the arrival of private television and its afternoon programmes had brought the women of the *arisani* closer together through the continuing sagas of telenovela. Nowadays, it's easy to be taken aback by those same women discussing the deaths of the Trisakti students, State Minister Hartono and Information Minister Alwi DahaHlan disagreeing about ‘reform after 2003’, and Dr Sri Mulyani Indrawati crying at Parliament because of the seriousness of the crisis affecting Indonesia. Everything they discuss they've seen on the television news (Kompas 17 May 1998).

There is something in this overview of the television news of the day that is suggestive of the ‘continuing sagas of telenovela’ these women have been lured away from. The popular attraction for news of the student demonstrations and calls for reform, moreover, was claimed to have had the effect of drawing the family closer together around the nightly news and current affairs shows and changing domestic habits in the process: ‘the television, with all the news of the reform movement broadcast on the private stations, has replaced the dinner table as the place where the family congregates’, one interviewee commenting that her husband had been getting home from work earlier than usual to join her and their

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10 A co-operative of neighbourhood women who organise savings lotteries, perform charitable works, and meet socially on a regular basis.

children in front of the television (Kompas 17 May 1998). This was an observation that emphasised the domesticity of the medium and its impact on the family. It also alludes to the ‘television family’ as a deliberative unit in the larger, national audience. But most importantly it is illustrative of the greater unity of the audience in these circumstances: men, women, and children were all drawn into a single, national audience around engagement with the same unfolding narrative. Each station or programme on the topic may have differed slightly in terms of their analysis, and each viewer or group of viewers gathered around each television set may have wound its way through the various offerings according to different preferences and patterns, until the last installment – Suharto's resignation – which was identical on every station.

And yet rather than focus on the apparent distinction between the attraction of news and that of soap-opera, perhaps it is more fruitful to look at their similarities and the ways that each informs the other. Both are about other people in unusual situations; both make demands on, and contribute to resources for problem solving and decision making whether in personal, domestic, or public affairs. This amounts to the possibility that soap opera and other fictional drama are useful, indeed necessary, to the provision of the deliberative skills required for the exercise of citizenship. Carpini and Williams recognise three distinguishable but interrelated levels in an overall definition of politics: the ‘institutions and processes of politics’ by which they mean such things as parliament, elections and political leadership; ‘the substance of polities’, that is, the discussion of issues on the political policy agenda; and thirdly, ‘the foundations of politics, … the processes and concepts upon which the very idea of politics and government is based – authority, power, equality, freedom, justice, community, etc’ (1994: 75). It is this third level they claim is most often overlooked in assessments of the media's political function, and one which demands a reassessment of what constitutes ‘politically relevant television’ (75). It is the ‘commonsensical’ and therefore unexamined distinction between fictional and non-fictional programming and the hierarchy that has developed between public affairs television and entertainment, that has prevented a deeper understanding of the political values contained in television drama and other ‘entertainment’ genres.

A good appellation to reflect this decoupling of particular texts and their modes of address (which carry embedded within them expected modes of reception) from perceptions of their relative importance to the political sphere, and therefore tease out the extent of television's contribution to the resources of citizenship, is John Hartley's 'democratainment', the term he uses to describe ‘the means by which popular participation in public issues is conducted in the mediasphere’ (1999: 209). The word is suggestive of a mode of address that communicates through the intimacy and domesticity of the medium while conveying a sense of participation in, and membership of a wider public. For Hartley (1999), to

\[12\] ‘… televisi dengan berita-berita reformasi yang disiarkan stasiun swasta … berhasil menggantikan peranan raja makan sebagai tempat keluarga berkumpul.’
understand the way television functions in any given society (and to consider any question of its ‘influence’) we need to regard it first and foremost as a form of education. It is a ‘trans-modern’, ‘cross-demographic’ communicator; ‘teaching different segments of the population how others look, live, speak, behave, relate, dispute, dance, sing, vote, decide, tolerate, complain’ (155). Hartley's more expansive embrace of the medium is surprisingly fruitful when applied to my own experience of Indonesian television, especially because it contradicts many persistent ‘Lerneresque’ assumptions about the ideal function of television in what were once called developing nations.

Indonesian commercial television is a ‘population gathering’, undifferentiating medium that simultaneously constructs shared identities while acknowledging the existence of difference and choice. In Hartley's view, the democratising character of television is not confined to its potential to contribute to the public sphere as represented by the sorts of news and current affairs programming we have discussed in this section so far. Nor, we can assume, are the rural development discussion fora and educational programmes prioritised by the New Order in the 1980s representative of Hartley's understanding of television's educational and democratising character. As he notes, television systems across the world are becoming increasingly depoliticised in accordance with the demands of both governments and media proprietors, if by political we are referring to the media's role in providing resources that enable its audiences to exercise judgement on issues immediately affecting government and the political system under which it operates (1999: 155). Certainly it has not just been the Indonesian government that has attempted to diminish political debate through the media. Yet emerging from a weakening of television's engagement with the political sphere in the formal sense have been ‘personal’ and ‘cultural’ media usages that promote ‘new forms of citizenship’, television (and its audiences) ‘thereby becoming political in unexpected ways’ (155). The establishment of televisi swasta in Indonesia can in this way be seen to have greatly expanded the opportunities for the political engagement of television audiences in ways that went far beyond stations’ forays into news and current affairs. One pertinent instance of this can be found in Sen and Hill's (2000) observation that Indonesian fans of the cheaply imported American action-adventure series MacGyver, one of the nation's highest rating programmes when broadcast on station RCTI in the early 1990s, identified its hero's defence of human rights as the major, over-riding reason for their devotion to the show, an observation with clear political consequences for a regime long attacked for refusing to observe human rights (9–10).

As I have begun to note, there are initial difficulties with the outright application of Hartley's assessment of the everyday ‘uses of television’, and the types of citizenship it helps to establish, to Indonesian circumstances in the last days of the New Order. This is chiefly because the routine of the everyday was itself thrown into disarray in the last days and weeks of Suharto's presidency. Cultural studies' ability to look closely at the taken for granted patterns of everyday life is necessarily dependent on communities in which there
is a level of certainty; everyday life is that which repeats itself to become part of a daily, unexamined pattern. For this to occur it has to happen every or almost every day. A level of security and stability is required for these everyday patterns to establish themselves. Such certainties cannot always be relied upon. Michel de Certeau, for example, begins his influential essay ‘Walking in the city’ from *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) with a description of the view from the 110th floor of the World Trade Centre. The spectacular destruction of the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001 is perhaps the most media saturated case of the loss of certainty in recent times but it should serve as a reminder that in many other places across the globe (in Afghanistan for example), taking for granted that what happened today will happen tomorrow or next week is a luxury few can afford. Life for many is day-to-day not everyday.

But for most people, such tumults, if they occur at all, are exceptions, anomalies in the patterns of everyday life and the media's place within it. While the media are always prepared to respond to these major events and the demands of more intense media usage they produce, at other times the relationship between the media and its audiences is vastly different, dependent on quieter, more predictable daily and weekly schedules and patterns of living. Once major ‘events’ have met their horizons, media use reverts to the more ‘personal’ and ‘cultural’ forms that had previously existed. The bulk of programming may once again become devoid of politics writ large and contribute instead to the more ‘unlikely’ forms of ‘the political’ and types of citizenship John Hartley writes about.

But under the New Order, attempts to manage television's construction of the audience did not stop at regulating the more formally political content of news and current affairs shows. Nor was censorship – in its many guises – only directed at content, but in the ways that that content was received and the daily viewing practices that accompanied it. As my earlier discussion of the dubbing issue suggests, and as many previous accounts of the New Order have attempted to make clear, the regime can be characterised as having been especially interested in cultural politics and the maintenance of Indonesian national cultural identity (see for example Foulcher 1990). Subsequent governments have inherited this legacy.

The global audience

The revolution will not be televised,

The revolution will not go better with Coke,

The revolution will not fight germs that may cause bad breathe

The revolution will not be a repeat, brother,

‘Cause the revolution,
Will be live.

*(The revolution will not be televised* song lyrics by Gil Scott-Heron)

Since the proto-hip-hop group *The Last Poets* first composed this song, the promise of satellite news networks has been that the revolution *will* be televised. Furthermore, its promoters and entrepreneurs claim, the global presence of satellite television will actually assist in bringing about many of those revolutions by penetrating barriers to the free flow of information that ‘totalitarian’ and ‘authoritarian’ regimes attempt to impose. As Rupert Murdoch announced in a 1993 speech outlining News Corp's global strategy shortly after his take over of STAR TV (Satellite Television Asian Region):

Advances in the technology of telecommunications have proved an unambiguous threat to totalitarian regimes everywhere. Fax machines enable dissidents to bypass state controlled print media; direct dial telephony makes it difficult for a state to control interpersonal voice communications. And satellite broadcasting makes it possible for information-hungry residents of many closed societies to by-pass state controlled television channels (Murdoch cited Weber 1995: 50–51).

Just how satellite broadcasts are supposed to threaten totalitarian regimes is in part reckoned to be a feature of the technology itself. It epitomises democracy, freedom and transparency by virtue of being unfettered and beyond regulation, promoting pluralism and freedom of choice by negating the possibility of monolithic control. Murdoch, in another part of the same speech promotes the liberating potential of television broadcasts with a similar claim to that made by Sukarno in his speech to Hollywood, one which also has echoes in that made by JR/Larry Hagman about the unplanned for revolutionary outcome of Ceaucescu's decision to broadcast *Dallas* in Romania and the dire consequences that followed for the dictator himself. Thanks to the borderless flow of global television, he says:

> the extraordinary living standards produced by free-enterprise capitalism cannot be kept secret from a world that sees how Lucy lived, and how Bill Cosby's Dr. Huxtable prospers in a supposedly fractured society (Murdoch cited Weber 1995: 48).

In short, Murdoch was proposing that broadcasts of television series like *I Love Lucy* and *The Cosby Show* in authoritarian nations in Asia had the potential to produce, in Daniel Lerner's phraseology, ‘rising frustrations’ that could lead to social upheaval and popular demands to establish free-enterprise capitalism in those nations. In the case of satellite news networks like CNN the emphasis is not on the broadcast of fictional narratives exhibiting social equality or prosperous lifestyles but on its ability to capture global media events including, hopefully, some of the social revolutions satellite television entrepreneurs
themselves claim to have had a hand in. It can be claimed that CNN has the potential to break down the media control of closed nations in any, or a combination, of four ways: it can provide opposition movements within closed nation-states access to a global audience that they have otherwise been denied; connected to this is its ability to act as a witness to events that may otherwise be covered up; it can act as a ‘global feedback loop’ (see Wark 1994) whereby CNN's coverage of events within a nation are relayed back into that nation overriding any domestic bans on reporting the event and thereby having the potential to contribute to the unfolding of those same events; and it can, in much the same way as the claim made for the broadcast of imported fictional drama, inform people within nations whose own media is restricted, of political movements and actions in other parts of the world. According to Budi Susanto, CNN may have even taught Indonesian rioters how to make and throw Molotov cocktails (Susanto cited Cohen 1998). CNN in this light is both educational and inspirational. Some of the concerns expressed when CNN was first given permission to open a Jakarta office related to the accusation that the presence of CNN might actually provoke unrest in Indonesia because people saw the station as a way of gaining global coverage for their protests.

But beyond this there are other issues about the presence of these networks and in particular their ability to portray events around the world in a way that is as unfettered as the claims made for the technology that transmits them. More to the point, can CNN tell its stories in a way that is meaningful to people at the location of events CNN sets out to cover? In a sense, global news networks, while proclaiming an agenda of releasing the world from totalitarianism and tyranny by disregarding national borders and media regulations, carry about with them their own discursive borders, their own factory pre-set event horizons, narrative templates, and conventions of containment. Global television news networks are in a sense no less engaged with constructing the news according to their own particular world-views and agendas than were the cameras of the TV Pool established by the government during the week prior to Suharto's resignation.

As well as imported drama on the schedules of domestic stations, which as we have seen was subject to regular criticism at least from official circles, transnational and global television networks utilising the same satellite technologies, and in some cases the same satellite as Indonesia's domestic services were also a part of the nation's composite mediasphere. In addition to CNN were MTV and ATVI (Australian TV International), a shortlived channel jointly established by the ABC and DFAT (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade). These were among the stations I could receive in Darwin along with Indonesian, Malaysian, Indian, Chinese and Filipino channels (the lineup changed over the period I was watching. Following the demise of ATVI, for example, Australia's Channel 7 appeared in its place).
In the last five days of Suharto’s presidency, and with the establishment of the TV Pool, television news and current affairs programmes lost the credibility they had so recently begun to acquire. Film-maker and outspoken media critic Garin Nugroho called upon televisi swasta to muster the courage to reject the government’s imposition of the TV Pool or risk losing their audience (Republika 18 May 1998). As I have noted, whether or not stations accepted this challenge, government censorship was by now an inadequate form of information control. The move simply forced people to take advantage of any other available alternatives. ‘Regretfully we have decided to go back to seeking out the real news from the BBC, Radio Australia, the Voice of America or Radio Hilversum. We have no interest in TV pool news’, wrote one ‘ex-member of the televisi swasta news audience’ in the letters-to-the-editor columns of Indonesia’s largest national daily (Kompas 19 May 1998). Naturally, short-wave radio stations were not the only sources of alternative news, though perhaps the most widely accessible. Other ‘ex-members of the private television audience’ turned to satellite television and the internet, the relative availability of which served to stress how interconnected circuits of information had become. Indonesians with access to manoeuvrable satellite dishes were able to tune into CNN to find out what was happening nationally or even elsewhere in the same city.

The circumvention of the government’s imposition of restrictions on the television news of domestic commercial stations was partly achieved, then, by seeking out or establishing alternative sources of information. That people possess the will to do this advances the view that access to information on national affairs (or, in other circumstances, global affairs); that is, information on events taking place in spheres encompassing formations that extend beyond the concerns of immediate experience (those of the quotidian and the local) is felt by many as a need. Global and national events can certainly be claimed to exert a direct influence on personal, private and localised spaces but the need to stay informed also suggests senses of engagement with and belonging to wider, more abstract, virtualised, or ‘imagined’ communities; the public, the audience, the nation, and even, with the case of CNN’s projected audience, the global community.

On May 21, protesting students holding vigil outside Jakarta’s parliament building crowded around television sets showing domestic stations to silently watch as President Suharto delivered his resignation speech to the nation. This was the outcome demonstrators, activists and other outspoken critics of the New Order had struggled for and which their banners demanded. The mood that followed the speech by the thereafter former President was, to judge from the satellite television pictures, a delirium bordering on catatonia. Dazed protesters waded through the strewn detritus of what had for weeks been an encampment of thousands of students, some frolicked in the fountains and reflection pools, others prostrated themselves in prayer and thanked God. Elsewhere, in public and domestic spaces throughout Jakarta and across the nation, people watched this brief, surprisingly low-key moment of ‘history-in-the-making’. Shocked, surprised and with a sense of disbelief, I watched as well
(and watched the students watch), in Darwin, never far from the satellite TV screen in those days of internet rumour and the associated expectation that something had to give, but without a clear idea of what or when, or whether Indonesian television news crews would be there when it did.

I needn't have worried, because CNN was in Jakarta too, at the ready to beam that place and time to points around the globe where anyone watching could silently (or with noisy elation) witness how Suharto finally ‘rolled up his mat’. After having flicked through the Indonesian stations, and passed on the news to anyone on campus I thought would want to know, I switched over to CNN to follow the analysis of its commentators. It was in the narratives they constructed that limits to the network's own interpretive range became apparent. The disinformation and opacity of authoritarian governments that satellite TV proprietors claimed to have overcome could be said to have been displaced by another, not distinguished by being more open or more true, but simply more in keeping with the metanarrative of international satellite television's role in the affirmation of popular democracy. ‘Disinformation’ as McKenzie Wark (1994) describes the term, is precisely what CNN is engaged in. Not in its usual sense of being ‘an unnecessary and immoral impurity that has to be eliminated from the telling of the truth’, but:

the process by which more or less random events are articulated together and given form within the overarching narrative structures which organize media flows. Disinformation gives form to the event and thereby does a disservice to its more nebulous, elusive qualities but is in a certain sense and at a certain level essential (153)

Disinformation as defined here is ‘essential’ because it is only through the narrativisation of events – a process that calls for their insertion into already existing narrative structures – that sense can be made of them.

I was reminded while watching CNN's footage of students watching Suharto's resignation speech on a TV outside parliament that the camera filming each shot was the camera I couldn't see, because within each shot were a number of other cameras filming the students watching and getting ready to record their reactions. The operator of one of these cameras was using his free arm to ‘wind-up’ the protesters, urging them to jump higher and shout louder, be less stunned and more gleeful, not to ponder what might come next but to simply show elation at Suharto's departure.

Suharto's resignation was the major story of the day although footage of the students gathered around parliament was apparently limited, forcing the producers to endlessly repeat the short segments they had access to. The repetition of video sequences in news stories is a common practice that can easily pass us by as the seamless interface between the images and the voice-over leads us ever on. File footage and ‘atmos’ audio tracks are also
routinely added to ease transitions between shots and fill any gaps that might otherwise interrupt the seamless flow. Following the words of a reporter ‘on the ground’ that closely matched the sequence of video images, a digest of the edited highlights and lowlights of Suharto's presidency was telecast with a voiceover scripted who knows when: rushed together moments before, or prepared days, weeks, months, even years in advance and filed in readiness in the reasonable expectation that this event would come one day. Analysis with hindsight is clearly not CNN's forte. Its reputation rests with the network's ability to beam live footage of events that are in the process of unfolding; that is, its primary strength is the production of media events. Nevertheless, it is worth examining CNN's attempt to construct a story out of the footage and commentary it had managed to accumulate in order to understand the particular bias of a ‘global network’ based in Atlanta. The news can be seen in this instance to not just seek conflict but with hindsight to manufacture resolutions on its own terms. Unlike history, global media events have a clear beginning and end, and that end, is made to fit as closely as possible the metanarrative of CNN's own proclaimed agenda: that is, the search for global solutions, global citizenship, freedom, popular sovereignty, democracy and the rejection of those who are antipathetic to it. I should say that I don't find anything particularly sinister about this. Not particularly, because all news is constructed reality. To suggest that it is not, or that some is more real than others, would be to avow the existence of a single regime of truth that all news is capable of reproducing. The reality that is constructed, moreover, is that which most accords with what is perceived to be the preferred reality of the audience.

The segment performed the function of a narrative (en)closure that contained the development of Suharto's political career and the significance of its sudden conclusion; a putting of things in perspective now that the story had a denouement. The commentary went as follows:

NARRATOR: Amid the chaos and confusion that has reigned in Indonesia in recent days, the world has again seen a people bent on removing a long serving authoritarian leader. But it was not always that way for Indonesia. Even his critics conclude that Suharto has been a man of contradictions, a man who cannot be characterised as simply good or bad. He came into power in a flow of blood and yet he united his nation as never before. He ruled with an iron grip and yet he brought economic development to his country. Suharto swept to power in 1965, a little known general who rose from the turmoil that would be remembered as ‘the year of living dangerously’ when it is believed hundreds of thousands of Indonesians perished. To this day the truth of what happened then is unknown. When Suharto came to power he quashed all opposition and kept opposition parties tightly controlled until the most recent grounds well of disapproval.
JEFFREY WINTERS, NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY: Many people describe him as a Javanese king. He feels it is his right and his prerogative to rule and the people around him treat him in a courtly way.

NARRATOR: Suharto took over the task of developing a vast nation of more than 14,000 islands and 550 languages but at what price? Suharto's rule has been condemned for terrible human rights abuses and pervasive corruption. Critics accuse him of lining his pockets as well as those of his family and friends with the riches of Indonesia's natural resources. It is thought today that he and his family are worth tens of billions of dollars. There is also the belief that he considered himself something of a God with a divine right to rule his people. The Indonesian people often called him 'Bapak', father, although some say he lost touch with the common man years ago.

JEFFREY WINTERS: He is someone who is very remote from the people. He has very little direct contact with the people and he's never held something which is like the equivalent of the U.S. president's press conference where he takes questions from the press in an unprepared way. I mean, he is very remote and above the fray.

NARRATOR: Instead of 'father', his critics had a different nickname: 'the puppet master'. It was a reference to the popular Indonesian art of shadow puppets controlled by a hidden figure behind a screen. Suharto always stayed somewhat hidden in the shadows letting those in front of the screen carry out his plans. But now the puppet master's play has come to an end and Suharto has left the stage.

Apart perhaps from the 'generous' assessment of Suharto's duality, 'neither good nor bad' but both or neither, an assessment that concedes an albeit modest level of complexity to the story, this commentary is a good example of Wark's 'disinformation' in that the information fits neatly within pre-established confines. Some of that 'disinformation' draws heavily on Indonesian studies more culturalist assessments of Suharto's methods of rule to confine the narrative to a cultural 'other' in a mysterious, shadowy East: 'like a Javanese king' or 'a puppet master...hidden in the shadows'. Another draws from narrative fiction and cinema: 'the year of living dangerously' although originally Sukarno's reference to the policy of 'confrontation' with the newly established Malaysia has become, thanks to Christopher Koch's novel *The Year of Living Dangerously* and Peter Weir's film adaptation of the same name, journalistic shorthand for the 1965 coup/counter coup and the purges that followed. Whatever the source, the point is that the producers of news stories such as this one are forced to engage with viewers at a level that is already established and accepted. What is omitted is as important as what is included and since not every aspect and complexity can
be woven into the story the editorial position depends to some degree on what the network perceives to be the demands and knowledge of its audience.

Because CNN is based in Atlanta in the United States, the business concern of an American, and conducts its news predominantly in American-accented English we can also assume that these stories have embedded within them the narrative perspective of America and the West. Not global then but a vision of the world through fieldglasses of American manufacture. Suharto's lack of accountability, for instance, is explained through reference to the U.S. President's press conferences and the accountability these are presumed to guarantee. Thus even if we take Ted Turner's claims to CNN's role in the struggle for world peace at face value, it is unmistakably a pax Americana. These concerns clearly have a long history dating back to the earliest anti-colonial movements, reaching their zenith in the media imperialism, and NWICO debates of the 1970s. We can refer back to section one and compare, for example, the formula for ‘world peace’ expounded by Sukarno to journalists at a press conference during his 1956 U.S. tour: ‘World peace will be much closer when every pressman understands the meaning and implications of colonialism and imperialism’ (Department of Foreign Affairs 1961: 69). Both acknowledge that the media play an important role in disseminating information and that the exchange of information between nations is necessary for the realisation of world peace. Yet the barriers to world peace that each wishes to remove are distinctly different. The concept of world peace is Utopian, not for the simple reason that it is a vision of a better world, but in the sense that it is the product of a necessarily limited conception of ‘the world’: a Utopia bears the specific features of the society that produces it.

The utopianism of international broadcasting is not confined to CNN and the U.S in the late 20th century. In television's pre-history, Marconi expressed a similar hope, believing that pictures transmitted on ‘hertzian waves’ would be a ‘tremendous gift to pacifism, foretelling the speedy end of the militarist epoch’ (cited in Trotsky 1993 [1926]: 246). This seemed based on the idea that media and communications, in bringing the people of the world closer together would also encourage international understanding. Similar claims were made of the radio and the railways (Foucault 1991 [1984]: 243). Murdoch and Turner's statements are therefore simply more recent additions to a Utopian discourse that has accompanied developments in the technology of communications for at least the last century-and-a-half.

What value CNN's pontifications on the political career of the nation's second President since independence are to Indonesians who understand English is an open question. It is scarcely any wonder that viewers tuned to CNN only to supplement local news coverage or as a last resort when their own domestic networks had been forced to withdraw from involvement in the process of political debate. Yet the ability of transnational news networks like CNN to relay events in Indonesia to the rest of the world can be counted as a quite different aspect of the globalisation of information; not showing contained, domestic audiences what
their own governments will not allow them to see, but allowing the scattered, unaffiliated
global audience to see how relations between governments and the people they regulate, are
negotiated in other parts of the world.

The broad strokes of global events are commodified in the sense that they are made to fit as
much as possible into a programmatic discourse of rational explanation that runs according
to certain rules and accepted ‘truth claims’. Accordingly, the globalised newsworld of CNN's
construction, in terms of its analysis, has only vague yet instantly recognisable features. A
key aspect of CNN's wrap-up of Suharto's political career was the assertion of what Simon
Philpott (2000) has described as a ‘deterministic relationship’ between Indonesian culture and
the style and form of its politics, a general assumption, he notes, that ‘tends to cease at the
boundaries of ‘the West’’ (79). Thus, to glibly refer to Suharto as a puppet master in the
shadow puppet theatre is made to make ‘natural’ sense in the context of Indonesian politics.

Meanwhile, on Indonesia's private, commercial stations, each of which had relayed the
former President's speech, normal programming was resumed. Did students on the steps of
parliament keep watching? Possibly. But it is more likely that the mood in their immediate
surroundings had thoroughly overtaken television's relevance at that moment and they
became instead not part of the audience for an important, live telecast but the focus of
television cameras filming their reactions for the international and domestic news of the day.
In a perfect world, there is no violence or intolerance, no shortage of goodwill or commitment to ease the burden of those less fortunate. People pull together and strive to understand the needs and differences of others. In this way they are united by bonds of mutual respect and common purpose. Accordingly, in the best of all possible worlds, the
events at Trisakti would not have turned out the way they did. In a head-on confrontation between a wave of student demonstrators surging down a city street and a cordon of Brimob in full riot gear, the riot police would have stepped aside and smilingly waved the students on on their 5 kilometre march to parliament. There would have been no baton charge, no tear gas and no bullets, rubber or otherwise. On the way to parliament the students would take a detour to the countryside to labour with poor farmers in the rice fields. Later, after marching to the coast wearing spotlessly identical ‘REFORMASI’ headbands and rhythmically punching the air, the gleeful horde would help fishermen pull in their nets before returning to the city to work shoulder-to-shoulder with members of the armed forces mending and repainting buildings damaged in riots. That there were riots at all would be seen merely as a hiccup to be quickly overcome. And all the while the students would sing:

Kala sang surya menebar sinarnya When the sun shines down its rays
Membelai indahnya alam Indonesia Caressing the natural beauty of Indonesia
Ia mengagumi anugerah illahi It is amazed by God's bounty
Kekayaan alam bumi Indonesia And the riches of the Indonesian soil

Namun balik segala keindahan Yet behind this beauty
Berjuta rakyat menderita kemiskinan Thousands of people suffering from poverty
Kita hams tabah terhadap cobaan We must resolve to try
Selamatkan jiwa rakyat Indonesia To rescue the spirit of the Indonesian people

Marilah kita bersatu Come on we are one
Singsingkan lengan baju Let's roll up our sleeves
Bersatu bahu membahu Stand together shoulder to shoulder
Sejahtera Indonesiaku For Indonesian prosperity

As the end of 1998 drew nearer, student protesters once again began to appear on television screens. But on this occasion under different circumstances and in a different guise. The bizarre scenario outlined above is taken from a public service advertisement presented by the insurance company PT Asuransi Bintang which first screened sometime in October. It was especially visible in the week leading to 28 October, the 70th Anniversary of the Sumpah Pemuda, the Youth Pledge that vowed to struggle for the establishment of One Nation, One People, and One Language. The advertisement can be seen as an attempt to use television to counter the ample evidence that neither the nation nor the television audience was united.

Following the resignation of Suharto, Indonesia began to appear as if it was literally disintegrating. No matter how autocratic former President Suharto's system of rule had been and how brutal those of the armed forces under him, his regime began to be seen as necessary. This seemed to me to be the plot. It would appear as if his departure had opened a wound which only he could suture, and that democratic reform would never move fast enough to resist his return. As with all great monsters, the threat of resurrection was
imminent. There were rumours that Suharto and those close to him (the remnants of the regime that demonstrators and the Indonesian press referred to as the *status quo*) were hovering in the wings ready to reclaim power with the assistance of pro-New Order military factions on the premise that reform had failed to deliver.

Commercial stations and many of their major sponsors were operating in a mode of damage-control to overcome the effects of the economic crisis that had severely reduced their revenue; and a social crisis that exacerbated efforts to regain investor confidence the loss of which had had a direct effect on television and the domestic market's falling revenues. It was a bitter cycle that threatened to spiral toward total collapse. Public awareness campaigns were launched in an attempt to rekindle national confidence at a time when the future of the nation itself looked to be in jeopardy.

On the Sunday prior to the Wednesday of the *Sumpah Pemuda's* official anniversary, ‘student protesters’ and the ‘armed forces’ moved still more surreally into the TV studio for an all singing variety spectacular, *Indonesia Bersatu*, also sponsored by PT Asuransi Bintang. It was simultaneously broadcast on all commercial stations. Once again as was the case with the advertisement the theme was national unity, emphasising the need to pull together to repair the damage done. And once again it was the strained relationship between the armed forces and pro-reform students that was seen to require the most concerted effort. Almost all members of the T&T Orchestra which provided the musical backing to the dozen or so featured acts wore REFORM ASI headbands. Those who did not were dressed in army and police uniforms. Playing side by side in the orchestra brought a new meaning to the words ‘working in concert’, especially as throughout the telecast, other performers – ‘soldiers’ and ‘students’ – swept, laid paving stones and painted the rudimentary set built to resemble a riot damaged street; twisted concrete reinforcing rod poked menacingly from plywood, cardboard and plaster-wash columns. Unwisely perhaps, from time to time a camera-on-a-crane swept over the top of these structures exposing, if there was any prior doubt, the lack of substance behind their faux-ruin facades. In stark contrast to the *plesetan* camera crews that roamed amongst the May demonstrations, here in October, *only* the cameras were real. The rest was cardboard, paint and theatricality.
Figure 16: Asuransi Bintang variety spectacular.
The young conductor, composer, arranger and jingle writer Tya Subiakto meanwhile conducted before a gleaming, ivory-lacquered grand piano, swaying and flapping like a fevered apparition in her trademark garb of billowing white taffeta. At each ad break at least one of the commercials picked up the theme of national unity and kept its flame alive in the midst of other, more pecuniary messages. In addition to the Bintang Insurance advertisement, another presented by Bank Danamon entitled ‘Prima Indonesiaku’, showed representatives from all Indonesian provinces dressed in their ‘traditional costumes’. Like the Bintang Insurance offering, it was to the accompaniment of a song, the words appearing in subtitles at the bottom of the screen as if inviting the viewers at home to join in. A lone costumed actor, an ‘Irian Jayan’ in feathers, fur and face paint, sang a line, someone from another province sang the next and so on until the final chorus when everyone came together, holding hands in a giant human chain and singing the chorus in unison:

Meski laut memisah pulau
Jangan gelombang membelah buritan
Meski mau memisah raga
Panjang terpecah persatuan

Karena beda kita padukan
Karena bhinneka kita satukan
Hadir semahgat di hati rakyat
Wujudkan tekad Sumpah Pemuda

Sejak awalnya kita memang sama
Sejak dahulu kita memang satu
Bersama meraih cita-cita
Bangsa besar di khatulistiwa
Bangsa besar prima Indonesia

It is not surprising that the anniversary of the Sumpah Pemuda should provide such a cogent point of reference. It was, and remains, the defining moment of Indonesian nationalism, the point at which – in 1928 – people were called upon to cease thinking of themselves as Javanese or Balinese, Minang or Batak to instead focus on the commonality of their history and their destiny as Indonesians. That the pledge was made by youth, and specifically young tertiary students, has also retained significance; student youth have functioned as guardians of the national spirit through successive generations ever since. It was youth who mobilised in protest against Sukarno, and youth who were there outside Parliament when Suharto resigned in May. And it was youth who continued to protest at the slow progress of reform, parliament and the judiciary dragging their feet when it came to routing out New Order figures remaining in positions of power. The mock camera crews were still on the street,
too, goading television journalists into giving student demands more airtime. But on variety
television and advertisements these antagonisms had quickly and simply evaporated.
Figure 17: Extra Joss Man
The Utopian representations that public service campaigns and Indonesia Bersatu projected seemed geared to counter the social decay that had begun to appear in many parts of the Republic; it was a nation riven with sectarian violence, secessionist movements and accusations of loosening morality and civil responsibility; one relinquished of the original spirit with which the ideals of independence and nationhood had been first proclaimed, largely perhaps because the quest for national unity under the New Order had been pursued at all costs, without popular consultation and in whose defence countless atrocities had been committed. A number of these, in some cases many years after the event, had begun to be investigated and the myths surrounding them debunked. Televised attempts to convince the audience of the need to work towards a common future proceeded from the determination that if a narrative of a better world is constructed, the audience might be taught to see a way of achieving it, as if television and insurance companies had access to an alchemical formula dispensed through video that turns shit to gold.

(In addition to those advertisements more readily defined as public service or awareness campaigns, presented by companies rather than for them, were others that proposed a hybrid of the two. An advertisement for the jamu energy tonic, Extra Joss, showed two gangs of high school boys about to clash on the street until into the breach leaps Extra Joss Man, a virile, muscular guy with a hard hat and a lot of energy, much of it (gauging from other advertisements he appears in that feature heavy-duty erections of steel girders and gushing geysers of crude) sexual. Quickly convincing the boys to drink sachets of Extra Joss, the melee is diffused while across the screen in a cursive hand the coda flashes: ‘Jangan kuras tenaga sia-sia: Utamakan persatuan bangsa’ – ‘Don't waste your energy fighting: Put national unity first’.

It is pertinent that I have begun this discussion with an advertisement that screened around the anniversary of the Sumpah Pemuda at a time when Indonesian national unity was at its lowest ebb because it is from the youth pledge of 1928 that the original Utopian vision of a modern, independent Indonesian national unity stems. And it is unity and tolerance of diversity, albeit with hierarchical characteristics, that is emphasised in Indonesian public service advertisements and those hybrids that loiter at their margins. The persistence of hierarchy and the disunity that socio-economic divisions and unequal power relations suggest, appear to sit comfortably in the visions for a just society displayed in television commercials. One of the most striking features of the majority of the ads I will look at in the next section is the representation of harmony in what have in historical reality proven to be discordant social divisions, particularly that between the urban wealthy and the rural poor. These representations are not confined to ad breaks, but it is in the presentations from corporate sponsors described here that they have reached their zenith: in the midst of other advertising genres, public service advertisements and corporate awareness campaigns ring out like secular hymns, opening windows to a better world for all to share.
But we should recall once again that the audiences watching these campaigns and variety specials were capable of an infinite range of responses, and the saccharine of their representations was just as likely to make some members particularly nauseous. This is especially true for those for whom the shooting and clubbing of student demonstrators in May remained a vivid and bitter memory. Like the simulated camera crews that called attention to an absence of real TV camera crews and therefore to a lack of representation of protesters' demands on Indonesian television screens, the Bintang Insurance advertisement and *Indonesia Bersatu* in their squeaky-clean Utopian constructions made conspicuous other absences, other things missing from the screen: among them, that no-one had yet been brought to justice for the Trisakti killings, and that the potential for other such incidents remained a distinct possibility. No accord or reconciliation between the armed forces and the demonstrators had been reached. Also rendered invisible were the Indonesian-Chinese victims of rape and violence that accompanied the mass rampage through Jakarta's streets following Trisakti. Their absence, given the invisibility of Indonesian-Chinese from all television discourse, is perhaps too obvious to mention, yet, as Susan Martin (1993) has commented with reference to the exclusion of Aboriginal people from Australian television, ‘to ignore (their absence) is to connive in the naturalisation of such exclusion’ (511).

It is on the public record that at least one member of the audience was particularly sickened by the representations contained in the *Bintang Insurance* commercial. Robi from Pondok Labu in South Jakarta, wrote a letter to the editor of *Kompas* to express his displeasure. The full text of which reads:

**TV Commercial Sickening**

I have seen the public awareness campaign showing on our television screens released by an insurance company and its associates showing, among other things, a group of students dressed in alma mater jackets without campus badges and all sporting white headbands on which is written ‘Reformasi’ A number of Brimob troops are standing fully equipped in riot gear. The students are all singing about ‘unity’ in a theatrical manner as they approach the ‘milk coffee’ cordon which welcome them smiling in a similarly theatrical fashion.

The scene that follows, moreover, makes me nauseous. As members of the Trisakti alumni we feel that the time is not right and it's not proper to broadcast images for a unity campaign like this because of the feelings of trauma, hatred and other emotions that can't be expressed while they are so fresh in our minds. These images don't give rise to feelings of harmony, on the contrary they remind us that the motives and people who carried out the beating and shooting of our colleagues and young students, have yet to be revealed (transparently).
This is also true of other cases of the security apparatuses repressive actions against fellow students on other Indonesian campuses. With respect to the principal of the presumption of innocence, we do not wish to accuse every member of ABRI of being a perpetrator in these actions but if only because persistent problems between security forces and students (the true reformists) remains to be solved, it would be best to just stop showing this presentation.

Don't forget the screams of the students who were beaten up and the tears of the families of the students who were shot dead, especially those actors and actresses playing the parts of students, don't do this just because you want to make some money. Where did you leave your consciences (ad makers, conceivers, producers and the stations that broadcast it)?

Robi (Kompas 18 Nov 1998) [see appendix for original Indonesian text]

Coming full circle from student action on the street and at parliament where the lack of adequate television coverage was (and was continuing to be) commented upon with cardboard TV cameras: to the lights, camera, action and extended broadcast of the Bintang Asuransi variety spectacular in which it's the street that's cardboard, we can sense that attempts to tightly control television space through extremes of intentionality persisted beyond the first flush of reform and openness in other media. That Robi from Pondok Labu lodged a protest about these feel-good representations and the serious issues they swept under the carpet (and that Kompas chose to publish his letter) suggests there may have been others like him. But in all likelihood there were just as many who found nothing to be concerned about in television's appropriation of those events. Other advertisements since May similarly used images and references to the demonstrations and riots to promote goods and services. Insurance companies advertised car insurance policies that contained amongst their clauses one that specifically covered cars against damage in riots. One of these opened with images taken from news footage of cars upturned and set ablaze in shopping precincts. In another, a computer animation of a bouncy cartoon car groans and grimaces as the city scape around it smoulders. As memory of the riots and student demonstrations faded further into distant memory they became still more like cyphers, signifiers released and floating from the body of the signified and its referent in the world.

Two radio advertisements described by media commentator and columnist Veven SP Wardhana (2000a) two years after Trisakti, are further illustrations of this. The first constructs the scene of a young couple caught in a traffic jam caused by what they first assume to be a demonstration but which turns out to be a crowd of people rushing to a ‘super sale’ at a nearby shopping centre (which, through willful ‘over interpretation’ we can read as being not unlike those shopping centres smashed and set on fire by rioters two years before from which televisions were taken and, later, the charred remains of looters caught in the blaze). The second features the police interrogation of three abducted student activists.
one of whom expresses relief that he has worn his head protection; a brand of shampoo that prevents itchy scalp. The audience's apparent acceptance of both ads without public protest, Wardhana claims, is evidence of the ‘desacrilisation’ and ‘desensitisation’ that occurs when the media engages in these sorts of appropriations.

But back in 1998, even while the *Asuransi Bintang* special was painting a picture of the way the world could be – peaceful, harmonious and well-insured, student demonstrations and confrontations with police were far from studio bound. How television should deal with the persistence of social tensions and the threat of their escalation was the cause of much trepidation. Despite the new tolerance of openness in the media announced just days after Suharto's resignation by the new Information Minister Yunus Yosfiah (whose alleged connection with the terminal silencing of the ‘Balibo Five’ in 1975 raised questions in the foreign press about his commitment to journalistic freedom), some editors and journalists were uncertain about how to approach the vexed question of press responsibility (Brown 1999: 8). This amounted to uncertainty about whether reporting incidents of violence between ethnic and religious groups, or between protesters and state security forces actually led to a proliferation of similar incidents across the archipelago. What were the responsible limits to media freedom?

In November, on the occasion of a special sitting of parliament, student demonstrators again amassed to protest the persistence of New Order elements in the assembly. And once again violence erupted between protesters and security forces; hundreds were injured and seven people killed in what became known as the ‘Semanggi tragedy’. Chris Brown (1999), a postgraduate student from the University of Washington, was present at Semanggi to witness what he regarded as a melodramatic performance by student protesters, faking it for the cameras as if mass demonstrations cannot comprise exhilarating, adrenalin-fuelled performance without detracting from the validity of their opposition (9). He also noted the presence of the mock camera crews amongst them. Brown is, like me, unsure about the precise intention of the people wielding these mock-ups but posits two possible interpretations: either they were there to comment on the frequent failure of news about student demonstrations to make it onto nightly television news bulletins, ‘or perhaps the satire … pointed more cynically to the empty formality of protest’ (9).

For me, the essential function of the cardboard and plastic cameras and their stripped-back, elemental appearance, a function that embraces Brown's suppositions, is the creation of a critical ‘camera awareness’: why they are present, why they are not present, what they are recording, what they are not recording, are all aspects of the power of the camera that from the point of view of television audiences is otherwise rendered invisible. Making things be seen is a guarantee of a camera's own invisibility because the television audience is literally looking through them. Contrary to this, as I noted earlier in this section, the mock cameras were made to be seen.
Domestic television crews were also present at Semanggi and in this instance their footage was broadcast allowing millions of others not present to witness the stand off between students and the security forces. SCTV's telecast was the most graphic. In an unprecedented move the station made the decision to broadcast a live uninterrupted telecast of the demonstration from early in the morning of Saturday 14 November until 1.30 am the following morning. It was, as famed broadcaster and political commentator Wimar Witloer commented, ‘a highlight of the television generation’ (Media Indonesia 17 January 1999).
Epilogue

Freedom of Choice

Indonesia's 1999 national election was the first freely contested multi-party election held since 1955, and only the second in the nation's history in which the exercise of individual free choice was actively encouraged. Habibie and his reformasi (reformation) cabinet had promised from the outset a new era of political reform, media openness and tolerance of dissenting voices. The 1999 election, therefore, demanded a complete reorientation of the idea of ‘democracy’ away from the authoritarian and paternalistic agendas inherent in the compounds of both Sukarno's Demokrasi Terpimpin (Guided Democracy) and the New Order's Demokrasi Pancasila (Pancasila Democracy), towards one that derived legitimacy from the free and popular election of political representatives. The media became instrumental in the delivery of public information, the initiation of discursive analysis of that information and, consequently, the liberation of publicly voiced opinion from the prescriptions of the past.

Commercial television's role in this was important for two reasons. On the one hand it provided a forum for discussion between politicians, ‘experts’ and commentators, thereby familiarising a large cross-section of the audience with the debates, issues and personalities involved in the election. The openness of these discussions was a striking example of the changes that were taking place in the media, political system and in society generally. But this was underscored by another new characteristic in the language of reform, that is the entry of marketing techniques into the promotion of political parties and political ideas. The flood of advertisements for political parties and political education campaigns that appeared on commercial television in 1999 was the product of a new emphasis on marketing and market research in Indonesian political campaigns.

Following Suharto's resignation and the swearing in of Habibie as the nation's third President, official restrictions on the media were lifted, including the imposition of the TV Pool. Yunus Yosfiah was appointed Information Minister in President Habibie's reformasi cabinet.

The transition to a more open media was not without occasional hitches, however. The day after SCTV's live broadcast of the Semanggi tragedy, members of station management were called to a meeting with Habibie who requested that the station keep its reporting ‘balanced’ (Tempo 30 November 1998). Soon after, however, television stations tentatively tested the atmosphere of political and social reform with a range of talk-shows that discussed themes unthinkable just six months earlier. Talk-shows swelled in number in the second half of 1998 but became increasingly popular as the election drew nearer (Kompas 6 April 1999; Kompas 16 April 1999). One of these, Detak-Detik Kampanye, produced and sponsored by the Indonesian Electoral Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum, or KPU) and broadcast on
all stations, provided an opportunity for leaders of parties to discuss their policies more fully and to respond to the queries of members of the public through a live phone-in. The highest rating talk-show, TPI's *Dialog Partai-Partai*, featured the leaders of two parties each ‘episode’ who fielded questions from both a studio audience and telephone talk-back (*Kompas* 6 April 1999). Their popularity was an indication of the audience's thirst for information especially as presented in this new and novel form.
Figure 18: Televised talk.
That the face of broadcasts had changed was owed in equal measure both to the spirit of *reformasi*, and Indonesia's economic collapse, a factor that pushed commercial television to the brink of bankruptcy. The dramatic decrease in advertising and the revenue that derived from it forced stations to reduce broadcast hours, retrench large numbers of their workforce, and increase the percentage of repeat programming in daily broadcasts (*Kompas* 15 February 1999). New release programs, both imported and domestically produced, were reportedly shelved until faith in the market had sufficiently recovered to adequately justify their greater expense. Clearly, the larger audiences these shows could attract were of no benefit to stations unless accompanied by proportionately high advertising revenue. The talk-shows mentioned above were a response to political reform but also to the economic downturn: they were cheap to produce, there was a lot to talk about and their popularity attracted advertisers.

Local television production houses responded creatively to the enforced limitations of the economic climate both thematically and in terms of financial arrangements. Rano Karno, the director, producer and star of the long running and popular show *Si Doel Anak Sekolah* had begun making plans to film in Switzerland, but returned instead to Jakarta where he built many episodes around the effect of the monetary crisis on Betawi kampung life (Chudori 1998). An action-fantasy-comedy aimed at children entitled *Saras 008* revolves around a masked superhero who does battle with villains Mister Blek and the evil geneticist, Ratu Sinisi, from planet ‘Krismon’ (a commonly used acronym of *krisis moneter*, the monetary crisis). Funding for the show, made by Indosiar's in-house production company, came from an increasingly common method of securing sponsorship for new productions in the aftermath of the crisis. The ‘008’ of the title, in addition to its James Bond 007 allusion, is actually the prefix of the long-distance telephone service of Satelindo, the telecommunications company that sponsors the programme. Satelindo's attempts to win a share of the long distance telecommunications market dominated by Indosat's 001 service has also spawned the variety show *Impresario 008* (RCTI) and, in response, the popular-science quiz show *Indosat Galileo* (SCTV) (see *SWA* 15(15) July 1999).

One of the most conspicuous features of television broadcasts during the first half of 1999 was the advent of political advertising. This took two main forms. For the first time, political parties adopted the techniques of advertising and marketing to convey their messages to the public. This was the result of competition between parties in the coming election and, in the view of prominent Golkar member, Marzuki Darusman, reflected a new professionalism at the level of party politics. Referring to the party's advertisements and the market research that feeds into their production, he said that it was no longer acceptable to go to the polls armed only with a broad ideology. Parties nowadays, he said, needed to understand the political market and to make appeals on the basis of that knowledge (*Cakram* February 1999). In a competitive political climate, parties had to promote a favourable image of themselves, one in which prospective voters could recognise their own aspirations. The invocation of ‘the market’, moreover, and the credentials of ‘professionalism’ are used here
to suggest the exertion of greater efforts (through market research) than in the past to better understand voters needs.
Figure 19: Promoting a healthy democracy.
Party political advertisements, however, were vastly outnumbered by advertisements produced by government and non-government organisations that urged the critical reading of political party promotions and the thoughtful and independent exercise of free choice in the coming election. Most of all, however, these voter education campaigns needed to assure voters that the 1999 election was to be fundamentally different from those held under the New Order: it was to be freely and openly contested; there was to be no compulsion or obligation to vote for any particular party; voting was to be secret; and everyone's vote would count equally toward the election of the nation's new parliamentary representatives. There was a high level of scepticism to overcome but television's broadcast of these messages, which ranged in delivery from earnest to playful, exuded an atmosphere of excitement and optimism.

Further contributing to the mix were some examples of advertising for consumer products that referred reflexively to the election campaign and to political advertising itself. The implication of private-consumerist with public-political spheres was made even more perceptible by the fact that memilih, to choose, in the context of an election means ‘to vote’. While political parties adopting the methods of advertising were sometimes accused of marketing themselves like consumer goods, some consumer products had apparently set out on a campaign to win votes. Komix cough syrup, for instance, had this message: ‘Kampanye Batuk? Pilih Komix Aja!’ (Cough Campaign? Vote Komix!), while Bodrex pain killers suggested that headaches caused by too much campaigning could be cured by selecting/voting for Bodrex.

These additions to the spectrum of programming highlight the heterogeneous character and versatility of commercial television, a medium capable of accommodating a diversity of texts from multiple perspectives that demand shifting modes of reception from its audiences. That private, commercial television broadcast advertisements for political parties and voter education campaigns promoting the redefinition of democracy in terms of individual free choice is interesting on a number of levels. From a financial and business perspective, public service and political advertisements in the lead up to the election went some way towards improving the decline in commercial television revenue figures. For the month of May for example, political and public service advertisements constituted between 20% and 50% of stations’ total advertising earnings (Media Indonesia 9 June 1999). The space left by the noticeable decline in advertising for consumer goods then, was filled by a relatively large increase in advertising for political and social awareness. This placed the discourses of consumer advertising side by side with advertisements for political parties, and voter education. Television in the lead up to the election took on the appearance of an electronic bulletin board. The election was the common denominator of most of its messages and it flowed from advertisement to newscast to talk-show to sinetron regardless of genre or narrative convention.
Advertisements for Political Parties

The international anti-censorship organisation, Article 19, in its report *Guidelines for Election Broadcasting in Transitional Democracies* notes that television advertisements for individual political parties during election campaigns are forbidden in many nations throughout the world (Article 19 1994: 17–19). The reasons given are varied, but the report suggests that as long as access to the medium is equal among parties, and that broadcasters themselves remain neutral by not favouring any parties over others, television advertising can be a highly effective way of publicising the range of party options.

The content of political advertisements, however, has raised other concerns. Typically, political advertising is deplored on the basis of a deep-seated mistrust of the *image*, the power of which is thought to overwhelm the true *substance* of messages. In response to opponents of the proposal to ban political advertising in Australia in 1991 who argued that it constituted a threat to freedom of speech, journalist, broadcaster and former ad man Phillip Adams, raised this spectre of the ‘image’:

> We are not dealing with something which is free; it is inordinately expensive. Very often we are not dealing with speech; we are dealing with images which transcend or subvert the normal processes of intellectual or logical communication (Senate Select Committee on Political Broadcasts and Political Disclosures [SSCPBPD] 1991:24).

Critics of political advertising often fail to acknowledge the similarities between advertising and the strategies of political communication and speech making, a form that routinely utilises appeals to such rhetorical notions as patriotism, national identity and family values, and draws from a battery of symbols and imagery calculated to elicit an emotional response rather than a conscious, intellectual appraisal.

Both political campaigns and advertising campaigns are also directed towards the same hopeful outcome; that is, to influence the decision making processes of individuals in the audience. ‘The market place’, as Kathy Myers (1986) reminds us in her exploration of the power of advertising, *Understains*, is ‘an arena for making decisions’ (145). It is to the market place, whether virtual or in the realm of the everyday, that advertising attempts to lure us. And it is to the ‘market place of ideas’, and eventually the polling booth, that political campaigns and the promotions they employ wish to direct undecided, enfranchised citizens. It is importantly the state of indecision and the incompleteness of indecision that advertising, both political and consumerist, addresses. Given the similarities between the demands of political parties and the producers of consumer goods, that is to establish a positive image of their products and their ideas in the minds of as many undecided voters/consumers as possible, it is perhaps obvious rather than worrying that politicians seek to utilise all available media to communicate their messages.
The decision to allow parties to advertise in Indonesia was a product of negotiation between the business interests of television, and concerns to ensure the neutrality of broadcasts. As a consequence, a series of restrictions were put in place to minimise the advantages of parties with greater access to funds and allow smaller parties to compete on a more even footing. Advertising spots for each party were originally limited to a maximum of four per day, although this was later increased to ten, and were to be between 15 and 60 seconds in duration. Parties were also not permitted to block book time or to be the major sponsor of television programmes. Some restrictions on the content of advertisements also applied. They were not to promote inter-party conflict or to threaten national integration (*Kompas* 8 March 1999). Nor were they to be presented in any way that could encourage them to be interpreted as news or public service announcements. In every other regard, as far as television executives were concerned, ads for political parties were to be treated in the same way as other advertisements; bookings were on a first come first serve basis and subject to the same rates of Rp 200,000 to Rp 14 million for a 30 second spot depending on the station and time of day (*Kompas* 12 Feb 1999; 8 Mar 1999).

The promise of TV executives that political advertisements were to be treated in the same way as advertisements for consumer goods was once again an implied guarantee of the objectivity and professionalism of station operators. Parties would receive the service they paid for and nothing else. News coverage of the campaign, it was promised, would also be neutral. All television stations, including TVRI, had worked to rid themselves of any obvious signs of political links with the former government and commercial channels were concerned to avoid the public perception that their independence was in any way compromised by the broadcast of advertising material for particular parties (*Kompas* 12 Feb 1999; *Kompas* 8 Mar 1999).

Some advertising agencies expressed ethical concerns with accepting briefs from more than one political party, just as it is considered unethical to work on the promotions for two different brands of the same consumer product. Matari Advertising, however, acted as consultant and produced campaign materials for the PKP (*Partai Keadilan dan Persatuan*) as well as the PKB (*Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa*). Paul Karmadi, Matari's Vice-Chairman, denying the potential for conflict of interest between the two portfolios, explained that while the PKB had a broad following at grass roots level, the PKP (headed by ex Vice-President Try Sutrisno) set out to attract voters from the urban elite and middle-class, consequently they were not, he argued, in competition for the same market sector (*Kompas* 4 May 1999).

It is clear from the advertisements for PKP and PKB that there were also vast differences between the campaign budgets of both parties and that Matari's resources were focussed more fully on publicising the latter. Ken Sudarto, President of Matari, has stated that many parties approached Matari but that in the end they, ‘had to be sympathetic and in accord with the vision and program of the party whose campaign we handled (*Cakram* March 2000). As
a consequence, Matari became totally involved in the campaign, mobilising almost all of its divisions. This dedication was seen as evidence of the agency's professionalism.

PKB, the party led by Abdurrahman Wahid and Matori Abdul Djalil and supported by the Nahdatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest Muslim organisation, was the first party to establish an agreement with a marketing agency (in November 1998). Matari quickly went to work on the development of an image, a slogan a hymn and an anthem. In recognition of the time constraints on creating a solid image for the newly formed party but also aware of its support network in the NU, the agency decided on a 'straight-forward hard-sell' strategy using the party's very prominent leaders as the main spokespeople and selling point. *Membela Yang Benar* (Defending the Truth) was chosen as the party's official campaign slogan (*Matari Online*, homepage). The first series of advertisements entitled ‘*Soya mendengar Indonesia bernyanya*’ (I Can Hear Indonesia Singing) went to air in November 1998 even before legislation regarding political advertising had been formally introduced. In response to the suggestion that the PKB had unfairly taken a head start in the campaign race, Matari claimed that the advertisement was not part of its election campaign but rather was meant to promote the party's fund-raising efforts (*Forum Keadilan* 22 Feb 1999).

The PKB television advertisement screened in the last days of the campaign period opens with edited footage of mass rallies also organised and filmed by Matari. The party's marching song thumps along on the soundtrack:

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Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa                National Resurgence Party
Bersatu tekad dan daya                 Together we are determined and strong
Kita maju tak gentar                   We advance without wavering
Membela yang benar                     Defending the truth
Menjunjung tinggi harkat manusia      Rising high human dignity
Mewujud keadilan untuk negara jaya    Bringing about justice for the glorious nation
Kita membahu-bahu bersatu padu        Shoulder to shoulder together as one
Tegak terus sepanjang masa            Standing firm for the rest of time
Mari kita bangkit tegar               Come let's rise with solid resolve
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In combination with the scenes from rallies, the waves of people frequently moving in unison and the marching rhythm of the soundtrack, the words to the song take on a martial quality with their emphasis on unity, strength, courage and the sense that in the defence of truth there is a battle to be fought. Clearly the PKB's campaign still relied heavily on at least the image of mass participation in party rallies, despite some commentators’ suggestions that the increased use of the media in political campaigning should ideally reduce the reliance on public rallies (see Badil 1999b). Indeed, it appears that the bulk of the PKB's campaign promotions were designed to appeal primarily to its established support base of *Nahdatul Ulama* members whose loyalty alone was expected to be sufficient for the party to poll well in the election.
Although other parties attempted alternative advertising strategies to get particular messages across, such as the use of mini-narratives and *vox populi* style testimonies from party supporters in the streets, the general emphasis in party advertisements, particularly from the smaller parties, was on the direct promotion of party symbols. This is reminiscent of Herb Feith's description of an aspect of campaigning for the 1955 election when, ‘in the later stages of the campaign most of the parties organized training and instruction in the mechanics of voting and how one located their symbol on the ballot-paper’ (Feith 1971: 21). This is understandable given that most of the 48 parties were newly established and other than those with highly recognisable figures in their leadership had no profile or reputation to draw from and limited time in which to develop campaigns based on anything more than simple brand recognition techniques. As a result, for the majority, real party differentiation through television advertisements was vague at best.

Golkar's advertisements\(^1\) made use of different production values and narrative styles from ad to ad. We can assume that his was in order to appeal to different ‘market’ sectors. One example, using very straightforward techniques and low production values, appeared to be directed at voters at the lower end of the socio-economic scale. It shows an older man arriving at the village polling station on his motorbike. A younger woman standing in the queue greets him, addressing him with the Javanese title, *Cak*. The man exhorts her to vote for *Golkar Baru* (New Golkar). Things are different now, he says. She replies with a smile that everyone knows that already. This advertisement and another from the Golkar campaign that states outright that there is ‘no other choice’ (*tiada pilihan lain*) but Golkar, appears to mock the party's efforts to distance itself from the past under the New Order when, for many, there really was ‘no other choice’. This sense of continuity with the past is reaffirmed by the established constructions of respect and loyalty that Golkar is shown to represent. One need only reverse the roles of the older man and the younger woman and note how differently the advertisement would read to see the sorts of everyday relations of respect the advertisement is employing.

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\(^1\) I have so far been unable to discover which agency (or agencies) produced Golkar's advertisements.
Another quite different advertisement from Golkar's campaign utilises high production values and is less direct in its appeals eliciting an emotional response rather than a direct call to vote in the context of recognisable scene and relationships.
It opens on a nightmarish landscape lashed by a tempest. A woman, drenched by torrential rain struggles to stand and hold aloft a sodden and sullied piece of cloth that we soon recognise to be the Indonesian flag. The camera tracks to the right and we see standing next to her a man who is also holding the flag. As the camera continues to track, it becomes apparent that the flag is actually in the form of an endless banner that winds back to the horizon raised along the way by countless people from all over Indonesia, the region of their origins indicated by the clothes they wear. The music and chorus swells, the sun comes out, and Indonesia, in the hands of Golkar Baru, we are led to understand, will remain glorious and united. It is perhaps tendentious to make the claim that advertisements such as these are produced to primarily appeal to an urban middle class. Yet its resemblance to examples of nationalistic, corporate advertisements, especially those that appeared around the time of Indonesia's Independence Day celebrations in the years prior to the monetary crisis, and the sentimental nationalism that fuels its appeal, is striking.

The television campaign advertisements of PDI-P (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia – Perjuangan), the party led by Megawati Soekarnoputri, were unlike those of other parties in that they made statements about specific issues. This gave them the look of a party in opposition rather than one attempting to establish a name and number for itself, the position many parties were forced to occupy. It suggested that the PDI-P was ready to tackle the litany of problems facing the nation. One example from their campaign opened with the word ‘FAKTA’ (fact) in bold black letters on a red background, before moving on to a series of black and white film portraits of babies, smiling and gurgling to the accompaniment of a tinkling music box that gradually winds down and slurs to a halt. When it stops, the screen jumps once again to words written in bold black on red. The booming female voiceover used in all of the PDI-P advertisements reads them as they appear:

‘HUTANG 1000 TRILYUN MEMBELIT ANAK CUC1 KITA!’

MEREKA HARUS DIPERJUANGKAN!”

The Rp 1000 trillion debt has ramifications for our grandchildren!

We have to struggle for them!

Clearly, the implication is that the PDI-P have the will and the wherewithal to do something about the nation's debt. Others state that the PDI-P will conquer ‘injustice’, ‘ignorance’ and ‘poverty’. Yet another begins with a shattered map of Indonesia reconstituting itself.

While these statements are suggestive of the party's strong social and political convictions, the other aspect of the PDI-P campaign that sets it apart from the others is its strong reliance on the image of the party's leader. Thus another advertisement further emphasises the inseparability of Megawati and the PDI-P. In this context she becomes less a representative
of a political party than a powerful symbol of opposition and struggle. The PDI-P’s ‘rights’ to this symbol needed to be fiercely protected. Using the same didactic techniques described above, the advertisement warns:

Warning! There are many who exploit the name of Megawati Soekarnoputri to attract the sympathies of the masses. Only PDI-Perjuangan truly supports and struggles together with Megawati Soekarnoputri in the 1999 election. Don't miscast your vote.2

We will never know the degree to which these television advertisements had an impact on the final results of the election. The popularity of Megawati as an opposition figure well before the resignation of Suharto made the PDI-P a strong contender in the election. It was billed as being in opposition to the old forces of the New Order, with or without an effective media campaign. Even the director of the advertising agency responsible for PDI-P's campaign, AdWork Euro RSCG, stated that the reason he accepted the party as a client was that he was certain they would poll well in the election (Kompas, 4 May 1999).

It is perhaps more interesting to speculate on the ways in which parties will build on the experience of 1999 to utilise television advertising techniques in future campaigns. The dominating presence of advertisements for Golkar, PDI-P, PKB and to a lesser extent, PAN (Partai Amanat Nasional) and PPP (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan), moreover, should continue to raise ethical concerns about smaller parties’ access to television advertising as a means of communicating their messages. While the major parties continued to launch new campaign advertisements right up to the election date, the much smaller PDR (Partai Daulat Rakyat), for example, which had already spent as much as Rp 700 million on television advertising, was forced to concentrate on other media (Gatra 29 May 1999).

In 1999, parties with established followings received the highest number of votes. It is likely they all would have achieved this with or without television advertising. As is the case of new consumer products entering the market, however, new emerging political parties may actually benefit more from large scale advertising campaigns across all media than those already in possession of a large market share. However, the prohibitively high price of television advertising under current arrangements prevent that from happening, allowing established parties to maintain their dominant positions in the spectrum of choice.

Political education campaigns

While advertisements for political parties set out to induce voters to make a particular decision, that is vote for a particular party, voter education campaigns were established to

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define the nature of that choice. In a sense, these campaigns had the explicit agenda of undermining promotions for political parties because they appealed to voters to critically assess their options and not vote on the basis of the sorts of symbols and slogans that characterised party advertisements. The primary challenge identified by voter education campaigns, however, to the objective of educating voters in the concept of free choice was not political advertising but the continuation of attitudes and scepticism stemming from the New Order's Pancasila Democracy. While these efforts were a radical departure from the previous administration's ‘floating mass’ concept, the supposition that ‘the public’ required re-education in the form of mass, centrally organised, information campaigns is also suggestive of the persistence of elite attitudes to political communication that begin with the assumption that the ‘masses are (still) ignorant’ (orang masih bodoh).

In order to stress the differences between the elections held under the New Order and that held during the liberal democratic period in the 1950s, Adhie M Massardi (1999) pointed to contrasts between the lyrics of two official election campaign marching songs, the first written by the patriotic songwriter and composer Ismail Marzuki to promote Indonesia's 1955 National Election; the second by Mochtar Embut and broadcast on radio and television to publicise the six election campaigns held under the New Order between 1971 and 1997. The form of the election marching song seems in itself a curious oxymoron, combining the image of a uniform mass, synchronised to the beat, with the notion of diversity and individual free-choice, a fitting enough genre perhaps for the promotion of elections under the New Order when choice was actively limited. But it is little wonder that alternative interpretations and parodies of Mochtar Embut's march were heard occasionally throughout the 1999 campaign period. In one such instance, the return from an ad break to the after-school, youth interest, music clip show, found a co-host engaged in a screaming, a cappella, heavy-metal rendition.
Figure 21: Pemilu Jujur advertisement

The style and rhetorical content of the songs are, nevertheless, a record of the two previous regime's attitudes towards the election and the depth of public participation required for its success. For Massardi, Ismail Marzuki's song contains the spirit of the nation's first election, an essence he finds especially encapsulated in the line 'menentukan dasar tujuan bersama, membina negara nasional yang mulia' (1999: 4):
Pemilihan umum ke sana beramai
To the general election lively we all go
Marilah marilah saudara saudara
Let's go brothers and sisters
Marilah bersama memberi suara
Let's go together to cast our votes
Suara saudara sungguh kuasa
Your vote really is powerful
Menentukan dasar tujuan bersama
Determine the basis of our future direction together
Membina negara nasional yang mulia
Build the foundations of an honourable nation-state

Pemilihan umum ke sana beramai
To the general election lively we all go
Marilah marilah saudara saudara
Let's go brothers and sisters
Memilih bersama para wakil kita
Together choose our representatives
Menurut pilihan bebas rahasia
According to our secret free choice
Itu hak semua warga negara
It's the right of all the nation's people
Nyasun kehidupan adil dan sejahtera
To construct a life that's just and prosperous

Pemilihan umum ke sana beramai
To the general election lively we all go
Marilah marilah saudara saudara
Let's go brothers and sisters
Serentak memberi suara merdeka!
Together as one give voice to independence!
Merdeka dan jujur tiada paksanya
Independence and honesty without compulsion
Laki dan wanita bersama membina
Men and women together let's build
Bangsa dan negara jaya dan sentausa
A nation and state that's glorious and tranquil

The song's spirit of inclusiveness and enthusiasm for people's participation in the democratic process places it in stark contrast to the marching song written to promote and legitimise *Pesta Demokrasi* (Festivals of Democracy) during the New Order, the six elections that intercede between those of 1955 and 1999. 

Pemilihan Umum telah memanggil kita
The General Election has called us
Seluruh rakyat menyambut gembira
Everyone responds happily
Hak demokrasi Pancasila
The right of Pancasila democracy
Hikmah Indonesia merdeka
The wisdom of Indonesian independence

Pilihlah wakilmu yang dapat dipercaya
Choose the representatives that can be trusted
Pengemban Ampera yang setia
The faithful guardians of Ampera
Di bawah Undang-Undang Dasar 45
Under the 1945 constitution
Kita menuju ke pemilihan umum
We head for the General Election

Rather than rejoice in the power of democratic process, the lyrics invoke a sense of duty to institutionally ordained procedure in accordance with the Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, the foundations of New Order legitimacy. From the first line to the last, the election is represented as a directive and not as a manifestation of democracy. As Massardi suggests, there was nothing for people to be happy about during elections under the system of *Demokrasi Pancasila*, that's why they had to call them *Pesta Demokrasi* (1999: 4).
The primary task of government and non-government political education campaigns in 1999 was to rearticulate the meaning of ‘democracy’ by reclaiming it from Demokrasi Pancasila and attributing to it the sense of representative democracy in which voters select the nation's political representatives in an act of free choice. In order to achieve this, many advertisements emphasised ‘before and after’ scenarios of the sort identified in the contrast between marching songs discussed above. Voter education advertisements used audio-visual tropes and metonyms of the type commonly used in consumer advertising to express the transformation that was taking place. The past was represented as monochrome, or silent, whereas the present, and by extension, the future that the present would decide, was colourful and enlivened by the sound of voices. In all cases a sharp distinction was drawn between elections under the New Order and the 1999 election.

An advertisement produced by the Indonesian Electoral Committee (Panitia Pemilihan Indonesia, or PPI) very effectively describes the past state of practical disenfranchisement as voicelessness. People have always had opinions the ad suggests, but up to now, no-one heard them and no-one cared: an interviewer, microphone in hand, is shown stopping people in the street or interrupting people at work. People across a broad spectrum of Indonesian society, rural and urban, from office-worker to student to waning operator to labourer to teacher are approached. The interviewer asks each of them their opinion (Bagaimana menurut Ibu/Bapakl) but all responses, although given in a visibly thoughtful and animated fashion, are obliterated by the sound of a howling wind. As the sound of this wind dies down, to be replaced by an infinitely less desolate musical background, a voice-over gives explanation and indicates the change that has taken place:

For many years it was as if your voice had been silenced. But in this year's election your voice will be heard loud and clear. Your voice will truly decide the fate of the nation.3

In keeping with the key theme of voicelessness, I have translated the word suara here to simply mean ‘voice’ but it has the connotation of ‘expressing an opinion’, and can also mean ‘vote’. The idea, then, of silencing a voice in the context of an election carries with it the literal meaning of denying the significance of one's vote. The words ‘suara anda akan benar-benar menentukan nasib bangsa’ (your voice/opinion/vote will truly decide the fate of the nation) became the PPI's slogan for their voter education campaign, one that emphatically distinguished between the character of the June 1999 election and that of those administered by the New Order. The figure of the interviewer is also important here. While interviewers with microphones are a common sight on television s/he is usually seen asking the opinions of newsmakers, people of prominence, politicians. In this case, however, the opinions of ordinary people on the street are what matter, not those of their representatives.

3 ‘Bertahun-tahun suara anda bagai terbungkam. Tapi di pemilu tahun ini suara anda akan nyaring terdengar. Suara anda akan benar-benar menentukan nasib bangsa.’
An advertisement for Anker Beer took another though not entirely dissimilar view of the differences between previous elections and that of 1999, replacing the metaphor of voicelessness with the image of a faulty beer tap and the thirst that arose from it. It was also a fine demonstration of the use of plesetan, the same sort enabled by the mixed meanings of suara and memilih. ‘1992’ then ‘1997’, years of the two previous general elections, are superimposed over the black and white image of a draught beer tap. As each year appears, the handle is jerked frantically but only a dry gasp emerges. Then it is 1999 and the world is in colour. This time when the handle is pulled, beer shoots out, filling the glass to overflowing with glistening foam and amber. The word LUBER is shouted and stamped across the screen followed by a salutation to the victory of freedom of choice (Salam Kemenangan untuk Kebebasan Memilih). Luber is the punchline to what is essentially an extended visual pun. The word means ‘overflow’ and clearly refers to what is happening to the beer spilling from the glass, but it is also a well-known acronym for the words, langsung, umum, bebas dan rahasia (direct, public, free and secret), the characteristics of democratic elections denied under the New Order.

Some voter education clips were directed particularly at women who constituted nearly 60% of all eligible voters. The writer Ayu Utami despaired that the total lack of political party advertising focusing on the female vote was made even more obvious by the plethora of advertising for consumer goods targeting women. Women had been accepted as consumers of goods but not of political ideas, and this, she said, was an indication that parties did not regard women as independent thinkers whose vote could be won (1999: 14). The main focus of voter education clips directed at women derived from the perception that the votes of married women have in the past been strongly influenced by their husbands and that this needed to be redressed. One of these, again produced by the Indonesian Electoral Committee, shows three women at the hairdressers having their hair done by a stereotypically camp male hairdresser. One of the women happily comments that her completed hair style is just the way her husband likes it, to which the others in turn respond: ‘Are you afraid of making your own choice?’ ‘Will you vote the way your husband likes too?’ As mentioned earlier, the freedom to vote for whoever one chooses, by extension, implied other choices and other personal freedoms: for the women in the salon, the freedom to choose ones own hairstyle; for the hairdresser, who makes his customers laugh when he says with a grin that people have to be brave enough to make their own choices, perhaps a suggestion of freedom to choose ones own sexual preference.

**Si Doel Anak Sekolahan**

Domestic corporations also contributed sponsorship to campaigns for political education. One of the most prominent of these was a series of advertisements co-sponsored by the cigarette company, Sampoerna in collaboration with the Committee for Voter Empowerment (Komite Pemberdayaan Pemilih, or KPP), that featured the characters and settings from the popular television series, *Si Doel Anak Sekolahan* (Doel the School Boy), a situation
comedy-drama set in a poor Betawi (indigenous Jakartan) kampung. Although funding for the KPP's campaign came from a variety of sources including the United Nations Development Program, which donated approximately Rp750 million, United States Agency for International Development, the Asia Foundation and the governments of Norway, Japan, Philippines, Thailand and Canada (Republika 2 May 1999), it is only Sampoerna's name, along with that of the KPP, that appears at the tail end of the Si Doel advertisements.

Si Doel has become an institution on Indonesian television⁴. In addition to being one of Indonesia's longest running and highest rating television programmes, it has frequently been used as a vehicle for public awareness messages in the past. Actor Rano Karno, who plays the title character of Si Doel, has, in particular, taken part in a number of government sponsored public service campaigns, including as the representative for the Aku Anak Sekolah (I am a School Child) campaign which promotes the importance of education in an attempt to reverse the fall in school retention rates that had occurred during the economic crisis. In conjunction with this, he has been appointed as Indonesia's UNICEF representative.

Rano Karno attributes the success of Si Doel and, as a consequence, the prevalence of characters from the show in public service and consumer promotions to its perennial theme of dialogue between the traditional and the modern, and between regional and national culture (Komite Pemberdayaan Pemilih, homepage).

In this way, the family and friends of Si Doel perform a social function as a site of mediation. A measure of the show's success has been the ability of its cast members to merge with their on-screen personae in such a way as to enable them to move between texts effortlessly and speak to viewers from a variety of narrative positions. The proliferation of advertising campaigns using members of the Si Doel cast led one agency worker to proclaim the arrival of a ‘Si Doel era in advertising … from advertisements for motor bikes, electronic goods and cough medicine to government information campaigns about immunisation, all of them use characters from the Si Doel family’ (Kompas 1 Mar 1997).

The Sampoema/KPP campaign employed all of these attributes. The series of advertisements tackled four main themes: tolerance; freedom of choice; anti-violence; and the need to accept defeat or victory gracefully following the election. All prioritise the health of the community over the rights of the individual and the family is cast as a microcosm of the nation in which the dynamics of democracy resolve themselves peacefully (Komite Pemberdayaan Pemilih, homepage)

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⁴ The story of Si Doel has been an enduring popular cultural icon since the novel on which it is based, Si Doel Anak Betawi, by Aman Dt. Madjoindo was published in the 1940s (the precise year is uncertain). It was used widely as a school text in the 1960s and formed the basis of two films directed by Sjumandjaja in the 70s: Si Doel Anak Betawi (1972), starring the child actor Rano Karno, and Si Doel Anak Modern (1976). For a comparative analysis of all its incarnations see Budianta (1999: 27–53).
Each advertisement presented a problem concerning an aspect of conduct in the forthcoming election and, within the framework of a 30 second-scenario, negotiated a solution. Usually this was represented in the form of conflict between the comic figures of Mandra, Karyo and Basuki that is defused by Si Doel/Rano Karno's voice of calm and reason. The final installment sees Mandra and Karyo listening to the results of the election. When it becomes apparent that the party Mandra voted for has lost, he throws a tantrum, smashes the radio and begins to sob and wail uncontrollably. On hearing the commotion, Doel goes to investigate. After seeing what has happened, he walks up to the camera and says: ‘Sebenarnya tidak ada yang menang atau kalah. Yang ada kemenangan kita semua. Kemenangan Indonesia’ (There are actually no winners or losers. Victory belongs to all of us. It is Indonesia's victory). The underlying message of all the Si Doel advertisements was that the success of the election relied entirely on how peacefully and honestly it was conducted, not on the final tally, and this was the responsibility of all Indonesians. In the words of another campaign conducted jointly by KIPP (Komite Independen Pemantau Pemilu, the Indonesian Rector's Forum) and UNFREL (the University Network for Free Elections): ‘Pemilu jujur di tangan kita’ (An honest election is in our hands).

**Working group Visi Anak Bangsa**

The political education campaign of the working group *Visi Anak Bangsa* (VAB) arguably proved the most popular of the public service campaigns. The organisation, established by Garin Nugroho, Debra Yatim, Yanti B Sugardi and Agus Pambagyo, drew its funding from around thirty different sources including the United Nations Development Program and the United States Agency for International Development. According to Garin Nugroho, there were four main themes covered by the campaign advertisements: decentralisation; anti-money politics; the need to redress the top-down nature of political communication; and developing democracy in the regions (*Forum Keadilan* 5 April 1999). Importantly, the broad focus was on outlining the wide variety of issues that could be taken into account when deciding which party to vote for. The television advertisements were one part of an integrated campaign that included advertising in other media as well as a series of seminar and discussion groups that were held in each province.

The group was apparently under no illusions that their messages would immediately raise the political consciousness of the audience. It was hoped, however, that they would increase awareness of civil rights during the election and that their messages would be retained up to the next election in five years time and thus contribute to the ongoing process of developing a stronger, more independent civil society (*Tempo* 22 Mar 1999). Certainly it appears, judging by the positive coverage the campaign received in the print media, that this aim may be realised.

Several factors set these thirty to ninety second narratives apart from other public service commercials. They outnumbered the products of other campaigns (there were over fifteen...
clips in all), they covered the greatest variety of styles, they received the highest level of distribution across all television stations (each ‘clip’ was broadcast 600–1000 times over the four week campaign period), and they were the product of a nationwide travelling campaign of forums, seminars and a series of polls, the results of which fed into their research. The research component of the group's activities was an extremely important aspect of their work practice and one that was in keeping with the concern to avoid ‘top-down’ assessments of the people's needs, fears and opinions.

Perhaps most importantly, in the midst of often didactic exhortations, they provided space for contemplation. One of the messages of the campaign was the simple advice that ‘voting is a right, not an obligation’ (memilih adalah hak bukan kewajiban). As broadcaster, activist and co-founder, Debra Yatim explained, Visi Anak Bangsa's liberated view of the election meant that if people really wanted to they should be allowed to lodge an informal protest vote (golput) without fear of any repercussions (Republika 6 March 1999). All eligible were urged to register, however. As one commercial put it, ‘Nyoblos tak nyoblos asal tak bolos’ (vote or don't, so long as you turn up).

The director of these ‘film clips’, filmmaker and media critic Garin Nugroho, became the subject of numerous articles and interviews in the print media all trying to unravel the secrets of their success. It is difficult to pinpoint, but by nature of their often captivating aesthetics alone they were unlike anything else on television during the campaign. They judiciously avoided stereotypes of scene or character or regional culture and produced instead a sense of Indonesia's boundless humanity, each individual possessing particular concerns and layers of identity. VAB's extensive research programme that set out to uncover the concerns of people all over the archipelago and their hopes for the election must be at least in part responsible for the rejection of the concept of the ‘masses’ as an organising principle of the campaign. Between March and May 1999, the group organised discussion groups in 28 cities across Indonesia. These were broadcast live by local radio stations and to further emphasise the democratic intentions of the working group, radio listeners were invited to phone in their contributions to the debates.
As a consequence, the advertisements that resulted from VAB's research are populated by individuals whose daily lives and localities are celebrated for their diversity. This is the impression that flows in particular from a sub-genre within the campaign's total output, in which groups of people standing around, sitting around, at work or in between chores, chat ask questions and muse on their options. Nugroho has stated that much of the dialogue was

Figure 22: Visi Anak Bangsa public service advertisement

(g) We sing a song of many colours with hearts filled with love.

(h) Democracy gives freedom of choice.
taken verbatim from the group's workshops around Indonesia. In this way, the advertisements continually draw attention to the intersection of politics with everyday lives in Indonesia (Suara Merdeka 8 April 1999). They revel in the vernacular and the idiomatic while eschewing the cliches of regional identity that have characterised official representations of Indonesian diversity.

Above all, the VAB campaign was appreciated for its good humour, and this too was in keeping with the group's view that election advertisements should not be instructional but should function in much the same way as ‘invitations to a party’. As mentioned the variety of approaches across the fifteen examples produced in all is kaleidoscopic. Sometimes the mini-scenarios of the type described above were broadcast separately, at other times in blocks of three or four, connected with abstract linking devices, such as the sound and image of a large, ticking clock. The layout of a comic strip was another frequently employed device, the camera drifting from frame-to-frame revealing often exaggerated scenes, the dialogue supplemented with words and exclamations in speech bubbles. Interspersed throughout VAB's advertisements are slogans such as: ‘Pemilu langkah awal memperbaiki bangsa’ (The general election is first step in repairing the nation), ‘Pemilu jujur, langkah menuju pemimpin yang adil’ (An honest general election is a step towards a just leader), ‘Pemilu sebentar lagi saatnya menentukan arah bangsa’ (The approaching general election is the time to decide the nation's direction). As author and journalist Leila Chudori (1999) commented, VAB's advertisements did not sermonise, rather they entertained and in this way their messages stuck (83).

This, perhaps, this was the secret to their success. It is also a strategy of consumer advertising. While Visi Anak Bangsa's advertisements were often the most sophisticated of all the campaigns in terms of their use of humour and experimental narrative techniques to simultaneously entertain and instill a message, ironically the product it promoted was free choice. Get yourself to the market/polling station, they said, then make up your own mind.

The ‘era of television’

Commercial television in the lead up to the 1999 general election contributed greatly to the atmosphere of openness and democratic change. It was in a position to play an integral role in the promotion of reform and the broadcast of information about the coming election precisely because it had itself acquired the features of the new openness. Commercial television in 1998–1999 stood at the confluence of social and political reform and was shaped by those forces. It was also, however, a product of the economic crisis and the collapse of the former Suharto regime whose patronage it had enjoyed. All of these factors were instrumental in allowing television to participate in the process of change. In turn, television broadcasts helped mold the social atmosphere and political character of the times: ‘Politics has entered a new era’, announced Garin Nugroho, ‘the era of television’ (Kompas, 19 May 1999:6). The appearance of numerous talk shows discussing matters relating to
the processes of social and political reform was one feature of this ‘new era’ but so too was the broadcast of Indonesia’s first political party advertisements, a manifestation of the competition and range of choice that characterised the June 1999 election.

The broadcast of political advertisements signaled a new dynamic in Indonesian elections. Unlike those held under the New Order administration, voters were encouraged to consider their options and to exercise free choice. Advertisements are, after all, dependent on the existence of choice, created to promote one option above others. On commercial television, the display of promotions for political parties alongside those for soap and shampoo suggested a fundamental similarity between them: both seek a decision in their favour. But the political education campaign advertisements and those for consumer goods that made conscious reference to the election also exemplify the ability of advertising narratives to enter into the realm of ideas and the exploration of social and political issues, a potential that problematises critiques of advertising based solely on assumptions of advertisements’ instrumentality as promotions for consumer goods and services. Or for organisations such as political parties for that matter.

The most striking aspect of political party advertisements during the 1999 general election campaign was their continuing reliance on the image and idea of the masses, the prominent feature of political and electoral processes under both Sukarno and Suharto. Although prescribed a different function under the Old Order, the New Order, and Reformasi, it remains prescriptive. The persistence of the idea of ‘the masses’ in political thinking and rhetoric, furthermore, invokes the corresponding idea of a political elite to speak for them and an inherent resistance to dialogue.

There were also concerns to properly promote the election as one based on free choice and to encourage voters to take the fullest advantage of that choice. Several campaigns from government bodies and private organisations set out to at least begin the task of voter education. These focused on such issues as promoting a peaceful, non-violent campaign; the freedom of women to make their own choices in the election; tolerance of the decisions of others; the decentralisation of political power; and greater communication between political leaders and the people whose interests they are supposed to represent.

There is no evidence to suggest that the campaigns of those larger political parties that could afford to advertise heavily on television had any discernible effect on the outcome of the election. The positions of these parties were established to a large degree before the election campaign had begun. There is, however, a much stronger case for the suggestion that the messages contained in some of the voter education campaigns discussed here, in particular those of Visi Anak Bangsa, had an effect that is lasting and which will continue to strengthen and give confidence to Indonesia’s civil society. The creation of these campaigns is in itself, evidence of the richness it already enjoys.
Conclusion

Conclusion: windows on the world

At the start of this thesis I confessed to being ‘caught in a double bind’. Here at the end I realise how much I underestimated the nature and number of strands entangling me. I cannot claim to have unraveled them but in the process of writing they have become more readily identifiable. Specifically, the underlying question the thesis poses is: does access to the technological means to watch the television of other nations equate with membership of the audience for those broadcasts? In seeking to answer this question I set out to resist essentialising several theoretical figures and methodologies that have been used by past studies of television to frame their hypotheses. Television and the nation. The universal and the culturally specific. The text, the audience, the ethnographer. The subject and the researcher. None of these need to be regarded as pure, isolable entities because each are imbricated and constitutive of the other.

It could be said that collapsing the boundaries between them has produced its own weaknesses. On the down side, it has left me without a solid foundation on which to say anything incontrovertible about television. Especially, because their collapse also denudes recourse to academic authority. And, although I have described some of the features of national broadcast television in 1990s Indonesia, I have not sought to define the characteristics that set it apart from the TV of other nations. From the outset then the thesis possessed the potential to be simultaneously a success and a failure. Such is the ambivalent nature of the ether, the medium on which research for the thesis is ostensibly based, and the inherent limits of any ethnography conducted at a distance from the human activities associated with the thing it seeks to investigate. Further, because research for the thesis has relied to a significant degree on my experience of watching Indonesian TV, this ‘ethnography of the ether’ also necessarily raises issues about the researcher's own subjective position in such a project.

Importantly, it has been my intention to establish these as problems, issues to be considered and mused upon rather than solved. For this reason the thesis has not proceeded along a linear route, building evidence upon evidence to reach a solid conclusion. Rather I have attempted to allow allusions to thread their way between the two main sections and their numerous sub-sections to construct the thesis is less concrete ways and thus allow connections to be drawn between television programmes and television theory; between Indonesian nation and Indonesian television; between realities and their televisual representation; between subject and object. In my own mind this replicated both the nature of television schedules themselves and the way they have been theorised: fragmented but at the same time, in the ‘flowing’ together of those fragments, rich in allusive connections that paint a much bigger and less manageable picture than the sum of their parts. Here at the end of the process I feel I lacked the necessary confidence to successfully elaborate this
parallel between the structure of the thesis and the nature of its topic. There have not been nearly enough cliff-hangers, pratfalls or ad breaks.

The question I began with is this: is it possible to develop a coherent picture of another nation by watching its broadcast television from a great cultural and physical distance? This was soon after joined by another of more universal application: what is television! Television as Stephen Heath has claimed, is ‘a somewhat difficult object, unstable, all over the place, tending derisively to escape anything we can say about it (Heath 1990: 267). Looking through an electronic window at Indonesia at the turn of the millennium, it was the framing device of the window itself that immediately began to cause problems because television, at once everywhere and nowhere, makes indistinguishable even the outlines of its own frame. And, with regard its national character, the near kaleidoscopic diversity of its broadcasts embraces features that frequently appear global in style and type even when not actually comprising imported content.

The suggestion contained in the title of this thesis, ‘Watching Indonesia: an ethnography of the ether’, and what may be thought of as its unusual modus operandi rests on the idea that the study of a foreign nation, that is, one which I have never counted myself a member of, nor been fully immersed in, can be conducted from outside that nation, by watching its television via satellite. The idea of total immersion in another community in order to conduct fieldwork and gather empirical evidence has long been an integral part of ethnographic practice and Indonesian studies. This study, however is based on ‘virtual immersion’ – I watched Indonesian television on a daily basis, and immersed myself in the flow of its transmissions but not while based in Indonesia. In addition to proposing that my viewing was a form of voyeurism or surveillance, the thesis also raises questions about the limits of audienceship, the sense of belonging to, and participating in an audience, and the possibility of comprehension from afar. From where I sat in Darwin, the signifiers that moved as pixels on the screen were a long way from their referents and the connections between them were not always clear.

This is partly because broadcast television, as distinct from narrowcasting and more self-avowedly trans-national satellite services, is engaged with establishing a specific character, usually a national character, that makes it appear representative of its imagined audience, and draws its relevance from the specificities of the cultural contexts in which viewing is thought to be taking place. It was not therefore simply a matter of looking through this window (the ‘fly of my tent’) and recording my observations. Television ‘personalities’ and programmes speak to their viewers as familiars. They invite people to join them in an inclusive manner (it would be pointless to demand attention). But as I discovered, the inclusiveness of national broadcast television, even when transmitted via satellite, has its limits. These perhaps determine the extent to which television can be regarded as a universal phenomenon and the point at which it becomes culturally specific; to paraphrase Ellis, the
point at which television lies beyond the full comprehension of anyone outside its deictic terms of reference.

In the course of this thesis I have not explicitly attempted to identify just where these relative trajectories become distinguishable from one another. Not doing so creates a problem of interpretation because it forces an acceptance of subjective introspection in the process. This in turn complicates any ambit claims to objectivity and academic authority of the sort that regularly surface in studies of television whether focussed on its texts or its audiences. I have, however, attempted to construct the thesis in such a way as to evoke an implicit understanding of the many often contradictory textures and modes of address that constitute broadcasts.

Citing Feitvet (2001: 174), I state in the introduction, that the difference between the universal and the culturally specific, and that between textual analysis and audience based research can both be summarised in the observation that each is respectively ‘object-’ and ‘subject-’ centred. If we accept this broad distinction we can include a third arbitrary duality, that of ‘objectivity’ and ‘subjectivity’. In the course of my ‘ethnography’ I have not sought actual proximity to the television audience in Indonesia. Rather, I have claimed membership of the Indonesian television audience. In doing so I have further complicated the notion of academic objectivity by proposing that audience members (such as myself) can themselves conduct ethnographies rather than remain solely the subject of them. The contentiousness of the method, the impurities of the medium and the contestable bases of either nations or audiences make this an exercise that discourages certainty. That the ‘experiment’ was conducted on the subject of Indonesian television in the 1990s redoubled the risk of the enterprise since this also raises the spectre of the unknowable, cultural ‘other’. On what basis can I presume to say anything about the television audience much less the Indonesian television audience?

At best it can be stated that the range of expression and variety of representations presented on broadcasts allow television to be thought of as a site of negotiation between multiple, often putatively contradictory discourses. All of these emphasise television's disruption of any clear demarcation between the local and the national, the national and the global, public and private spheres, or culture and politics. In each case television simultaneously affirms and negates the existence of these categories. In the first instance is television's role in the construction of national distinctiveness, a discourse that on the face of it seems contradicted by the global distribution of television programmes, styles and genres. A significant proportion of nationally broadcast television schedules typically comprises content that has been produced outside the nation. Less obvious, behind the scenes, are further trans-national interconnections at the levels of the administration, technological infrastructure, shared work practices and the financial affairs of stations. And finally and most frequently overlooked, is the near universal practice of watching television itself, a practice that is...
apparently shared by countless millions throughout the world, regardless of national borders. The familiarity of the practice of watching television as a universal (or at least international) way of passing the time, seeking information, engaging with dramas and scenarios outside immediate experience, encourages the idea that it is a global phenomenon not divisible by nations. Because television is an audio-visual medium, beyond spoken language there is a level at which television as a combination of institution, texts and practices is a universal Esperanto that is immediately recognised and – in its broad strokes if not always in the details – universally comprehended.

Taking advantage of broadcasts via satellite to supply my primary source materials is also a way of implicating the study with ideas of the globalisation and mediation of culture. Satellite television ignores national boundaries allowing it to be received trans-nationally whether or not this was the intention of broadcasters. Using these transmissions to ‘watch’ a particular nation exploits the very technologies that are often felt to have contributed to a global cultural homogenisation. My claims to ethnography in the thesis have been only partly tongue in cheek because they raise the possibility of a virtual (pseudo)ethnography of the media that allows the exploitation of satellite technology in a way that expands on the prevailing view that such modes of transmission function to dominate, homogenise, or alternatively, liberate national mediascapes and their audiences. These are among the negative responses of regional governments to transnational broadcasts which are thought to threaten their own formulation of national culture.

Yet, as I have tried to show, television carried on satellite transmissions can also be used to engage with aspects of more localised representations. The broadcasts of other nations are fast becoming available to a global audience via satellite and the internet. While ‘global networks’ like CNN and MTV may still be criticised or regarded with suspicion for their impact on local cultural diversities, local and national media are now also becoming part of the global mediascape. Broadband and webcasting are soon likely to accelerate this potential, causing the local to become global just as the global is experienced locally.

Whether it is likely that individuals would choose to watch the broadcasts of other nations in a routine way as they become more widely accessible, for entertainment and education and thus become part of their regular audience cannot be determined though the likelihood should not be dismissed out of hand. On a another level this is happening already amongst expatriate communities and those sharing ethnic cultural affinities that cross national borders. The existence of diasporic audiences for national broadcasts raises other questions about the geographic location of feelings of national cultural belonging. For curious viewers or those with an interest in research, however, their availability expands the range of opportunities for creative intellectual engagement with the public and private lives of other nations beyond immediate experiential horizons…without leaving home. This has long been a major claim of television's own self-promotion: it brings the world into your living room.
The thesis has also been concerned with examples from the history of audio-visual mediations between Indonesian audiences and the rest of the world. Specifically, in the history of the idea that such mediations can influence the way people see themselves and their cultural, political and personal situations. These are what Sukarno with reference to Hollywood movies described as ‘windows on the world’, windows that showed things that would otherwise not be seen. But as Sukarno's address to the Hollywood moguls and Larry Hagman's somewhat carnivalesque description of Ceausecu's grisly deposition also suggest, the different contexts of reception can produce wildly differing interpretations of the same texts because they position viewers in quite different relationships with those texts. A refrigerator in an interior in a Hollywood movie, Sukarno proposed, could, in mid 1950s Indonesia, spark a revolution, just as the ostentation of the Ewing's lifestyle in *Dallas*, could inspire the people of Romania to topple their tyrannical ruler. With these examples in mind we can propose that the true political potential of television lies not so much in its role in the politics of representation but in the politics of their interpretation.

The New Order government made frequent attempts to control runaway interpretations of televisual texts. In the case of the ban on dubbing, for example, the government attempted to hinder the easy reception of values in imported programming officially perceived to be foreign and inappropriate. The imposition of the TV Pool sought to control the public's interpretation of current events by exercising a form of editorial control over the content of newscasts thereby giving primacy to an officially authored version of events. The messages of television, however, even (perhaps especially) when invested with the authority's authorial tone are notoriously unpredictable at the point of reception. The mock camera crews that roamed the demonstrations in Suharto's last days underscored that all public information is interpreted through negotiation with other texts and contexts and other sources of information and knowledge. Following the resignation of Suharto and the advent of *Reformasi* the floodgates were opened for a far more inclusive view of Indonesian society and television's reflection of it. Public service advertisements in the lead up to Indonesia's first open, multiparty general election since 1955 were especially committed to the view that the audience for television and the range of viewing contexts also manifested a diversity of aspirations for the nation's future.

So how do I go about justifying my own selection and interpretation of fragments from 1,000s of hours of viewing and reading about Indonesian television I cannot claim that the aspects of television that made it through to the final thesis have been chosen as representative of the entirety. Nor, as I have already stressed, do I seek to imbue my interpretations with any objective authority although in accordance with academic convention I have cited the work of others to lend support to my analysis. I do, however, ask that my observations be trusted and accepted as a valid record of viewership. While the range of possible interpretations of any given televisual text must be considered to be infinite given the diversity of individual and cultural contexts that frame the act of watching I have
sought to cross-reference my own and render them at the very least, plausibly shared by others within that infinite range.

Relatively few have the technical means at their disposal to simply switch from Indonesian stations, to international broadcasters, to Australian domestic stations as I did. However, that the capacity exists to move freely between local, global, and other-national channels and, with the spread of cable and web TV, that opportunities are set to increase, allows us to think of the media, like the biosphere, as a global system composed of myriad, locally and historically specific, but mutually interdependent components. While the media produced by individual nations; by much smaller cultural units of regional communities; and larger supra-regional affiliations can be examined in isolation, there remains a bigger picture of reciprocal, more expansive networks of global connectedness. I hope this thesis has been a contribution to the task of recognising that studying the television of other nations has the potential to cast light on the links between the mediaspheres of different nations and the phenomenon of television itself.
Appendix A.

Iklan TV menyakitkan


Adegan berikutnya bahkan membuat muak. Sebagai alumnus Trisakti kami merasa belum saatnya dan tidak tepat menayangkan gambaran seperti itu untuk kampanye persatuan karena rasa traumatis, kebencian dan berbagaimacam perasaan lain yang tidak dapat diungkapkan hingga kini masih segar di benak kami. Gambaran tersebut bukannya menumbuhkan rasa persatuan tapi justru sebaliknya menggugah kembali perasaan-perasaan, mengingat hingga detik ini motif dan pelaku pemukulan hingga penembakan atas rekan dan adik mahasiswa belum ditemukan (tanpa rekayasa).

Juga kasus tindakan represif aparat terhadap rekan mahasiswa kampus lain se-Indonesia. Dengan menjunjung asas praduga tak bersalah, kami bukannya ingin menuduh salah satu kesatuan ABRI sebagai pelaku tapi semata-mata karena belum tuntasnya permasalahan antara aparat dengan mahasiswa (para reformis sejati) maka sebaiknya dihentikan saja penayangan tersebut.

Ingat jeritan mahasiswa yang digebuki hingga tangis keluarga mahasiswa yang ditembak mati, khususnya untuk para aktor dan aktris pemeran mahasiswa/I jangan cuma karena rupiah kalian mau tampil. Di mana letak hati nurani kalian (pembuat iklan, konseptor iklan, para pemeran dan stasiun TV yang menayangkan)?

Robi

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