

Drunk on the Screen

Balinese conversations about television and advertising

By

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In

Asian Media Productions

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- Healer:** It is as it says in the song I have written down. The *Sapta Timira* signify seven forms of benightedness, of darkness surrounding the heart. For you should know that excess stirs up confusion and bewilderment, and makes life fruitless... There are drunk people: there are people who get besotted with appearance. Beauty (or handsomeness) infatuates them. Appearance, wealth, ability, status, youth, drink, winning (power). Those are the Seven Intoxications. 'Sapta' is 'seven', just so you know.
- 1st person:** Don't joke – and in English too!
- Healer:** That's seven. What's *timira* in English?
- 2nd person:** It's darkness.

From *Guna tanpa guna*, Hindu Religious Rostrum series performed by Sanggar Gintanjali Apgah Denpasar, broadcast December 28, 1994.¹

Consumption, in so far as it is meaningful, is *a systematic act of the manipulation of signs, a total idealist practice...* which has no longer anything to do (beyond a certain point) with the satisfaction of needs, nor with the reality principle... [It is] founded on a *lack* that is irrepressible'.

Baudrillard (1988a:22-25)

That the silent majority (or the masses) is an imaginary referent does not mean they don't exist. It means that *their representation is no longer possible*. The masses are no longer a referent because they no longer belong to the order of representation. They don't express themselves, they are surveyed. They don't reflect upon themselves, they are tested... Now polls, tests, the referendum, media are devices which no longer belong to a dimension of representations, but to one of simulation. They no longer have a referent in view, but a model.

Baudrillard (1983a:20)

When an individual watches a TV ad he or she is watched by a discourse calling itself science but in fact disciplining the consuming subject to the ends of rationality and profit.

Poster (1990:49)

The masses are increasingly the target of television advertising in Asia. Who they are, however, in many countries remains largely unknown. And what the masses think – as opposed to the simulations market research imposes on them – seems mostly a matter of supreme indifference to manufacturers and even advertisers.² In Indonesia, for instance, insofar as the masses are presumed to be economic subjects, at best they have been imagined as passive subjects, who on a good day are capable of applying practical reason to the procuring of selfish ends in pursuit of pleasure. The rest of the time they are bogged down in superstition, communalism and hyperconformity (Heryanto 1999). So there are limits on what needs to be known about them. No sooner is this said than the argument's implausibility is evident. Such economic rationality is not only a set of *a priori*, and so universalist, assumptions (von Mises 1960), but profoundly rhetorical (Brown 1987; Klamer 1987). Such assumptions are comfortable because they provide an uncomplicated and largely unfalsifiable framework for explanation. It also gives the impression of being able to distance, tame and represent the masses (Baudrillard 1983a). Economic events in Pacific Asia in 1997 and 1998 should have shown the palpable inadequacy of such models. So self-justifying and self-enclosed are these models, and so vested the interests of some in defending the *status quo*, however implausible, that I doubt much will change.

This is not to suggest advertisements are not economically important. On the contrary,

If cost is the criterion, ads must be regarded as among the most important elements of the economy. Ads are also in a central structural position in the economy, overlapping the means and relations of production. The major problem of the capitalist economy since the 1920s shifted from production to consumption...When an individual watches a TV ad the health of the economy is at stake.

Poster (1990:47)

In that case are my remarks about advertising agencies in, say, Indonesia not far from the mark? After all, is not a significant proportion of their budgets spent on market research? Why my scepticism?

Audiences and consumers are not however natural objects, but differently constituted, as Foucault put it, in different régimes of truth. Market research researches markets – a contested enough notion in itself. What such research tells us, incidentally, about what humans think depends inevitably on the presuppositions of the analysis itself. The ontology of mind and its relation to choice and action is a thorny philosophical issue. So it is hardly surprising that advertisers' research is prediction-driven and tends to rely on pre-psychoanalytical, mechanical, behavioural and statistical models. The ends of market research would seem to dictate closure.

The standpoint of market research is limited by the instrumental yearnings of the corporations. The goal of increased profits for the corporation actively interferes with the critical analysis of TV ads. The competitive stance of the firm structures the discourse of market research

into the position of the rational subject: the world appears as a mute other that is to be pushed that way or pulled this way. The only question is which configuration of images will do the best job. The position of the firm structures knowledge as a neutral window opening onto a world of discrete interacting objects. The subject remains the desire of the firm and science is its procurer. If the desire of the firm is cancelled, no justification remains for discourse to constitute the world as a mechanics of interacting objects, as a pullulation of causes and effects. Knowledge as a ratio or table of causes/effects is thus connected to the presumption of a rational, autonomous subject, no doubt a male one, a fantasy of desire as profit.

Poster (1990:49)

There are, of course, other ways of imagining humans as subjects – political, religious, historical – just as there are of construing differences according to place, race, class, gender, sexual orientation and so forth. Such constructions remain, however, the preserve of an élite, be it political, economic, media-based or academic. The objects of these accounts – the masses, ordinary people, you and I when we watch television – are mostly presumed to be passive subjects (Hobart 1997a). Such subjects are capable of responding to laws, orders, exhortations, enticements, advertisements, but either they are unable to reflect critically on the conditions under which they live or, if they do, it is a matter of little importance.

In this chapter I wish to consider what a number of Balinese villagers had to say about their engagement with advertising. I shall argue the strong case that, in Bali, people who see themselves as poor (*Sang Tiwas*), insignificant little people (*wong alit*) and part of the masses (*rakyat*) have an understanding of what is going on, what we might call ‘implicit theory’, which differs from, but in ways is at least as important as, that of their lords and masters, academic experts and others. What is more, this understanding suggests different and subtle ways of understanding how advertising works and how people are implicated in contemporary mass media.

My suggestion that Balinese intellectual practices should be treated seriously in their own right and even juxtaposed critically to the monolith of scientific knowledge on occasion elicits howls of indignant outrage.³ So let me outline what I am trying to say and what not. I am not proposing some romantic return to a pure and original native knowledge (see Hobart 1993).⁴ It never existed. We need, though, to distinguish natural scientists’ necessarily extrapolated and textualized accounts of their theoretical worlds from their scientific practice and its consequences (Feyerabend 1975, 1987). Anyway, as Foucault pointed out (1972; and even Habermas largely accepts, 1987) the human sciences face the rather different problem that human beings are at once the subjects and the objects of their own knowledge. The result is a potentially vicious inflationary spiral of ungroundable knowledge, exemplified by the rapid expansion of the human sciences. Without independent conditions of judgement, analysis depends upon the critical evaluation of the presuppositions and implications of the approaches in use. If Quine was forced to admit that there were no epistemological grounds to choose between Homer’s gods and atoms (much though he preferred the latter [Quine 1953:44]), why the thinking subject-matter of the human sciences should

be excluded from having a rôle in explanation is unclear. That is not to imply that they meet on equal terms. Far from it. Natural scientific knowledge especially is hegemonic. My interest is in the practices through which it is articulated – the outrage that questioning evokes being itself arguably a defensive articulation.⁵

As introducing the notion of articulation (see Laclau and Mouffe 1985, Laclau 1990; Hall 1996; Slack 1996) suggests, I wish to shift discussion away from what Bakhtin called the ‘theoretism’ of much human scientific thought to reconsider our uses of theory as a set of intellectual practices which produce and reproduce knowledge itself (see Hobart 1996). Reviewed in these terms, the intellectual practices of academics, market researchers and the people being studied necessarily overlap, engage with and affect one another.⁶ Knowing as a situated act is a relatively minor theme in western philosophy, which has remained in thrall to visual or spatial metaphors of knowledge (Rorty 1980; Salmond 1982). Indian philosophers, however, have taken the issue seriously. As Matilal noted, in Nyaya philosophy, knowing is a process which:

Is set in motion by doubt and ends in a decision ... The end-product takes the form of a mental episode called *prama*, ‘knowledge’ (a knowledge-episode). It is such a cognitive episode (*jñana*) as hits the mark! ... Indian philosophers viewed a world or constructed a world of a series of cognitive events rather than collected a mass of true propositions.

Matilal (1986:100, 105-6)

As Balinese have been for close on a millenium part of this philosophical discourse, it would seem *force majeure* or plain ethnocentric to declare them unqualified in principle from commenting on their own thought. That this involves a counter-articulation to the prevailing hegemony should not worry critical thinkers, though it may well upset pillars of the *ancien régime*.

Background

Because I shall let a number of Balinese speak reflectively about themselves at some length, in order to appreciate what they were saying, I need to sketch in some theoretical and ethnographic background.

Of the approaches to consumption and consumerism, despite his tendency to over-generalize his arguments, I find the work of Baudrillard the most stimulating and perceptive. Perhaps it is significant that his key work, *La Société de Consommation* took twenty-eight years to be translated (1998).⁷ On advertising, I am still feeling my way. On television and mass media, working in a Balinese village, where issues of audiences looms large, my starting position is with the work of critical media scholars like Ien Ang (1991, 1996) and David Morley (1992). The conclusion to their arguments is the importance of ethnography. I would argue further, though, that it also involves the inclusion of the objects of inquiry as agents, whose reflection on their lives is the condition of changing them, not just as patient subjects of others’ knowledge. If the slogan ‘media practices’ is not to be vapid, a new kind of critical ethnography is

required which includes people's appreciation of the circumstances of their own practices.⁸ Much has been written on the human subject in media, especially film, studies. I am disturbed by the ethnocentric nature of much of this theorizing, Lacanian or otherwise; as I am by the continued exclusion from those analyses of those whose thought and lives we take it upon ourselves to study. I hope that what follows will make it clear that they are abundantly qualified to participate. Following John Hartley (1992), I take it that good practice in media studies is of necessity interventionist. Impressive as it may sound, scientific neutrality here is a disingenuous posture that has unacceptable implications.⁹

The conversations on which this paper is based took place in August 1997 in the highland Balinese village where I have worked since 1970. They were part of a long series of discussions during my annual visits, since I became interested in 1990 in the mass media in Indonesia. This interest was sparked by Balinese themselves, who pointed out to me that the spread of television was having an enormous impact on their lives, more significant than tourism or the government's development policies. By the late 1980s, public life around coffee and food shops in the village square, to which people had previously repaired after work in the rice fields and in the evening, had largely ceased. People, including teenagers, mostly preferred to stay at home and watch TV. This affected my research, because villagers rarely ambled round any more for a drink and a chat as they had in the past. When I caught up with them, usually watching television, they would often muse about its impact, because television was a topic of increasing concern, the implications of advertising being high on the list (Hobart 1999, 2000).

Almost every household in the village where I work (which is neither particularly affluent nor poor by Balinese standards) now has at least one radio and a television set. Poorer families own black-and-white sets which receive only the state television channel (TVRI), but more people now own colour sets which can also receive five terrestrial commercial channels, as well as over twelve satellite stations (although only one family has yet bought a dish in the settlement itself). Such sets cost over half a million Rupiah in 1997 before the monetary crisis (US \$200 or more, and the dishes \$500). Quite how the less well-off pay for these is a question which exercises local Balinese themselves. Much work, whether carving, sanding and painting statues, or making offerings and cooking, is compatible with watching, or at least listening to, television which, in most households, is on from morning to late at night.

The conversations, from which extracts follow, are part of my work in progress on television as a social practice in Bali. The mass media are part of a congeries of practices, many if not most of which happen when the television set is not even on, be it cooking in time to watch a TV programme, saving to buy a video recorder or buying a product as seen on TV. I live with an extended family and spend much time watching television with them, and watching and listening to them while they do so. The relevant members of the family are as follows. The head, Ktut Sutatemaja, aged about 60 at the time of writing, is my main research assistant. He was a long-distance truck driver, actor and later became village head responsible for customary and religious matters. His wife, Mèn Sinduk, in her early 50s, runs a general shop. Her daughter, Ni Sinduk, in her late 20s, at her mother's urging married Ktut Sutatemaja's eldest son (by a different marriage, but they are notionally brother and sister). She

recently completed a degree at the Academy of Performing Arts in the provincial capital and is an accomplished actress-dancer. Her husband, Wayan Suardana, is a secondary school teacher and does most of the work on a project to record Balinese television programmes, which I started in 1990.¹⁰ Mèn Sinduk's recently widowed mother, who spent every day as a petty trader in the market, had also moved in.

In a pavilion, conveniently near the kitchen for the women, is the television set. It is turned on during the day if someone has leisure time, and almost every evening from about 7 p.m. is the focus of family life until they go to bed one by one. Until July 1997, they had made do with a black and white set, which could only receive state television (TVRI). Few people, however, watch this channel. If they cannot afford colour sets, which receive five commercial channels with a far more varied and glossy fare, they often go round to the neighbours who have. When I presented the family with the old 21 inch Sony set used by the Television Project, its effect on family life was immediate. The adolescent boy in the family now stays in most evenings; television is on much of the day; members of the family do work when possible while watching; and the women in particular watch much more than they did. The advertisements are a favourite, not least as a topic of conversation. No family I have seen watches television in silence: it is an interactive occasion.

In the conversations about advertising excerpted below, the household head was always present; and his daughter-in-law usually was, because she was quite interested in talking about television and the other topics we tended to discuss. Other family members dropped in and out. Two other key figures were also often present. One was an old actor in his early 90s, 'Gung 'Kak, a minor scion of the local court, and a great deal clearer in mind despite his age than I often am. The other, Déwa Pekak, was a wealthy high caste farmer and lover of shadow theatre and conversation. I have worked with both on and off for many years. The elderly actor in particular is an old friend of the ex-headman and they frequently have conversations when I am not there about much the same issues which we discuss. I recorded four discussions about advertising in all in the summer of 1997.¹¹ Each was fascinating; but I deal largely with the first as it was that which took the most reflective turn. Feminists might well argue that this was because of the dominance of elderly males. If you look at the transcripts carefully, this underestimates the role of the young woman.¹² I would suggest the quality of the argument has more to do with the fact that three of the main people were, or had been, actors. And actors, rather than, say, priests, are still the traditional intellectuals in Bali.

As far as I can judge, the conversations on which the research is based are extensions of discussion that takes place on various occasions, rather than radically different kinds of activity. There are, however, important differences. These discussions have an interrogative twist: I ask questions in a way Balinese would often not. By virtue of my being an academic, my presence there as part of research, often with a cassette recorder, provided a direction at moments to conversations that they would probably not have otherwise. I say 'at moments' because, despite leaving a tape recorder running, the speakers often gave every appearance of ignoring me. (This is less obvious in the extracts chosen here, because I have selected moments when they were addressing my questions to them). It is a matter of degree. On their own account, when you spend so much time chatting in a group, issues of status diminish, although

they do not disappear. I would suggest that they are unlikely to disappear for the family, who earn a significant proportion of their total income from the Television Project, even if that is largely unconnected with my day-to-day research. Finally, by showing interest and asking questions about television, the people I work with, at least intermittently, think about television in different ways in their lives.

The idea though that there is some pure, authentic ‘response’ to television advertisements, some state of being which transcends practices of viewing is a utopian fantasy.¹³ On the other hand, the idea that there is a ‘dirty’ response in terms of how many units are sold per broadcast is equally fanciful. For practical, as well as theoretical reasons, you can never know why. No matter how ardently advertisers or media studies specialists might wish it, there can be no generalized account of Balinese, Indonesian – or anyone else’s – response to television or to advertisements (see Ang 1991). It is to precisely these issues that I now turn.

Caveat Spectator

Over the years several themes often came up in conversation. Villagers were acutely sensitive to the differences of power between ordinary viewers and metropolitan élites. The latter are widely presumed to organize deals among themselves. So even the scheduling is a form of advertising for those with connections or cash. How programmes promoted lifestyles, and advertisements sold goods to people who often did not really want to buy them, was a constant theme. Explanations ranged from situated worlds (if you stand near a waterspout you get splashed) to theories of imitation (cf. Smith 1995).¹⁴ A favourite was telling stories against yourself about how you had been fooled into buying some product you saw advertised on television.¹⁵ That in itself is an interesting comment on how poorer Balinese saw themselves implicated in advertising practices.

Earlier on the evening of the first conversation, we were watching television when there was an advertisement was for a refrigerator, which I found rather unoriginal and ignored until my host became excited and remarked how clever the presenter was. Later I asked about it.

- Self:** You were just talking about the fridge advertisement. Can you explain it again? I’m not sure I really understand.
- Ex-head:** It’s about what’s said in the fridge Ad, the one who speaks – what’s his name? The one in the *SiDoel* films who plays Kong Aji. (*SiDoel Anak* is a series which has the highest audience ratings in Indonesia. It is one of the few about ordinary people’s lives.) Now he’s talking about the fridge. ‘Hah! Now this is good. It holds a lot and is economical on electricity’. Now, after that it goes: ‘New, durable!’
- Self:** Hmm.
- Ex-head:** Now the presenter is clever.
- Old Actor:** Hah!
- Actress:** Emerald, Emerald. That’s the brand name.

- Ex-head:** What?
Actress: Emerald.
Ex-head: Well, Emerald or whatever. That's understood. As long as goods are new, of course they're good. But, after a few months, a few years, what then?
Old Actor: There's a time limit, of course.
Ex-head: The presenter is consummate; what he says is ingenious. It's so he can't be attacked by those who buy it. If, after three months, it breaks down, can the purchaser hold him responsible for saying it's durable? That's smart, that is.
Old Actor: That's someone who's good at being ambiguous.
Ex-head: Using 'Hey! New durable!' It's funny; it's articulate.
Old Actor: A clever person, who also has a silver tongue.

While much of what the participants said I had heard in some form in other conversations, it was not chance, I think, that this one was only picked up by viewers who had themselves been actors. It is the art of being careful, or deliberately ambiguous, in your choice of words to convey one impression, but say something different, which is appreciated by the more discerning, more mature listeners. Such mature speech, *raos wayah*, is much used in public fora and, of course, in theatre. There was appreciative recognition of a Javanese, fellow professional. The presenter had managed to square his obligations to the advertising agency which hired him and to the more discerning among the viewers to whom he was supposed to sell the fridges. If people chose not to think about what they heard, that was their problem.

Selling Words, Not Images

As the discussion continued about how words were used to persuade, I interjected that surely it was the images – the endless procession of desirable looking commodities – which is what made advertisements really enticing.

- Self:** It isn't just in words that television advertisements promote their goods. There are images. There are pictures.
Ex-head: It's showing what the items are like, to inform people who don't know about them.
Old Actor: About the products.
Ex-head: In (advertising) literature, for example, you have to specify what it is that you are talking about. That is so that people know about the goods in question, that according to the ad they are good.
Self: If so, the purpose of advertisements is so you will know about the product in question?
Ex-head: You are only able to know about it. It's just an image. You do not yet know it, what it is really made of, what its real worth is. You just know about the image...

This line of argument surprised me initially, I think because I had slipped into what is at least my idea of British media priorities, namely images over text. It might seem that the downplaying of images was because, as stage actors, they depended on the word. However, during the opening scene of a popular drama performance by perhaps Bali's best-known troupe in March-April 1991, one performer had slapped down his long-time partner for stating as a fact what he had seen on television. He was reminded sharply that it was just an image, *lawat*, the same term the ex-headman used. Nor is it the case that Balinese, or at least the actors, eschew images for words, which would be rather odd in a society famed for its visual sensitivity and panache. This time, though, the commentators were saying what is widely held to be so. In Bali 'wysiwyg' is 'wysiwyg': what you see is what you see, not what you get. There is a more serious point here. Images are suggestive, but you tend to need words to tell you the significance of what you have seen.

Selling Words, Not Goods

The conversation continued with me still confusing image and reality, and being corrected again. (Ethnography is largely a battle by the people you work with to overcome the analyst's ethnocentric and professional prejudices. If you are lucky, they win – sometimes).

- Self:** Now, if I understand advertisements on television, they show a comfortable existence – the good life – so people will want a lifestyle like that?
- Ex-head:** They don't show the good life. What they show - better what they put forward – is an existence they say is good. But that is not yet for sure.
- Old Actor:** What's good.
- Ex-head:** Yes. Is it actually good – is it really like it is presented – or not?
- Old Actor:** That's so.
- Ex-head:** Now, I'm speaking from what I've heard, I don't know it personally. I've just heard word. Don't believe what you see, because you've never tried it. But, as to the products, the advertisements will make all sorts of claims about them. The sort of person who buys is the sort of person who has no need to make their money work any more, isn't that so 'Gung 'Kak? 'Hey! Let's just buy one. The ad said they were marvellous'. Huh. That sort of person.
- Old Actor:** They've never bought one before.
- Ex-head:** In other words, buy something to try it out.
- Old Actor:** As I said. Never bought one, let's have a trial...
- Ex-head:** Now, if I think about it, if a patent medicine-seller turns up: 'This medicine, that medicine. (*In other words, whatever its name is, it cures lots of diseases*). Rub your eyes, they disappear.¹⁶ However, in fact what you're selling is the words. You aren't really selling the goods if you are a patent medicine-seller. People say they sell speech.

- Old Actor:** It's generally known that. Of course what medicine-sellers trade in is sounds.
- Self:** Is there a point to what they say?
- Ex-head:** Just a lot of hot air. There's nothing of substance.
- Old Actor:** Nothing at all.

The commentators make the point that beautiful images and elegant lifestyles do not speak for themselves. They require mediation. (Note that mediation here is not instantiation, as if often assumed in Cartesian and idealist models). The remark about 'the sort of person who has no need to make their money work any more' is interesting. The ex-headman is neither an economist nor a businessman. In fact he has six years of elementary school education. It is more a comment on contemporary Balinese society, where rocketing land prices accompanied and enabled a spectacular boom in consumption unrelated, as many Indonesians are finding out at the time of writing, to the conditions for balanced economic growth. While a conspicuous set of people, right out to the remoter villages, was selling land and other assets to be able to buy the widely-available consumer items, a much smaller group was gravely concerned about the consequences.¹⁷

As usual in conversations in many places, it is what is not said that is as important as what is. Here the unstated theme is: what sort of state have you to be in to try something out for the hell of it? And what sort of person must you be to indulge in such wasteful consumption when others around you are near starvation? Hence the repeated reference to 'the sort of person (who)'. As the context makes clear, they are the sort of people who either cannot, or no longer, bother to distinguish the image from the reality, or who are so besotted they need to buy something simply because it is there. In short, they are benighted, intoxicated. There is a close parallel between Balinese and English, *peteng* being 'night', so that *kapetengan* is literally 'benighted'. In contemporary Balinese usage, seven kinds of intoxication are recognized (see below), only one of which refers to strong drink, drugs and so on. It is a far broader, and more interesting, category.

The whole analysis rests not upon ever more dazzling exegeses about the ultimate nature of the image, of the media, of the umpteenth late capitalism, but upon a recognition of human proclivities, as known by people in the village. By contrast to the largely mechanical models of the subject in market research, Balinese discourse treats the subject explicitly as a site of transformative processes, *triguna* (see below). Is there much difference in falling for the wonderful claims made for patent medicines and for television advertisements? Then comes the twist. Images are imaginary. What you are actually buying is not what the salesman's patter was about, but the words themselves in all their insubstantiality and seductiveness. Having ploughed through tedious tomes on theories of consumption, am I alone in finding a deftness, an analytical sharpness, a sense of history and irony in the Balinese conversations which the former mostly lack?

Something more general is at issue here. My companions were engaged in a disquisition on seduction. As Baudrillard has argued at length, seduction both undermines and refuses the inscription and hypostatization of the discourse of production, which indefatigably strives, and fails, to negate the workings of seduction. The paradoxes, fantasies and elusiveness of desire, what motivates particular humans on

particular occasions, make a different sense within the twists and turns of dialogic interaction than when laid out on the slab of hypothetico-deductive thought.¹⁸ It is in this sense that Balinese thinking requires attention, not in the forlorn hope that they will write the ultimate treatise on human nature which, as Collingwood (1945) noted of Hume's attempt (1739), is an impossibility because the notion is indissolubly linked with reflective human interaction and so is dialogic.

The End of Advertisements

The next step raises a practical point, which turns out to be a rather subtle issue in pragmatism.

- Ex-head:** No one ever advertises things which are really first class.
Old Actor: Ah! It's true, they don't. But why not? Some ads have great lines, but it's far from certain the product is any good.
Actress: It's like Dad says, if the product is really good, then you don't need to advertise it, like Sony products. There are never any ads on television for them.
Old Actor: Of course, everyone knows that.
Actress: Everyone knows if goods are really good.
Ex-head: There is no way of knowing if the product is any good from advertisements. The cost of hiring people to make ads is extremely expensive, 'Gung 'Kak.
Old Actor: Hiring them?
Actress: It's very costly. They say you have to pay them for every time it's broadcast.
Ex-head: How much for so many people? You get very rich through doing ads; you earn an enormous amount. So you have to stick your neck out and pay god knows how much to run an advertisement. Instead, why not give out samples for everyone to try? If the product were really good, they'd hand them out on request. That would really help.
Old Actor: In other words, people would promote them by passing on the word.

This is by no means the end. If it is insubstantiality and seductiveness, exemplified in the word and the image, which you are buying, then the divorce of the sign from the object is not only complete, but the sign becomes its own reality. Without post-structuralist academic credentials, the commentators have reached a related position to Baudrillard's famous rescension of Foucault's *The Order of Things*.

This would be the successive phases of the image:

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

Whereas Baudrillard retired into unsituated abstraction with his image of the image, the commentators are capable of coping with a heterogeneous reality.¹⁹ Not all representations are simulacra: that would be too easy. The problem is that the different phases of the image co-exist. The good products sell partly because they are not simulacra. The seduction of the image is its own limiting condition. There is also the seduction of the real, which succeeds because it proves to be on the whole what critical investigation said it was, in this instance Sony television sets. To achieve his effect, Baudrillard has to ignore his own analysis of seduction by creating a new grand narrative of the image and seduction. For Balinese, if something works, people tell one another.²⁰

Baudrillard argued, rather cogently, that in the world of mass media there are two orders: ‘an operational system which is statistical, information-based and simulational’ and a ‘system of representation’ based upon a ‘philosophy of the subject: will, representation, choice, liberty, deliberation, knowledge and desire’ (1988a:209, 214). Instead, however, of pitching one against the other to produce at best an interminable stand-off, at worst a vicious vortex, in their conversation the Balinese, recognizing these possibilities, pointed to a route out of the academicism. The recognition of reality, statistical or subjective, depends as C.S. Peirce (1984) and the commentators noted, upon a community. In the latter case you talk over with others what it was that actually worked.

Beauty in a Bottle

There are no advertisements which the Balinese I know are more rueful about being taken in by than those to do with personal appearance. Shampoo advertisements were the favourite. Only after buying one or two brands, they said, did it become obvious that the models who posed for the ads were chosen for their beautiful hair to begin with! The actress, a beautiful woman – but one whose skin was a very slight shade darker than that considered attractive – turned to her use of skin whiteners which were much promoted during 1997.

Actress: I tried it because the woman in the advertisement was beautiful.
Ex-head: The one who was using it?
Actress: The one they used in the ad. They showed her first and the effect of whitener. To begin with she’s presented as dark, after using whitener, she gets whiter, whiter, whiter until she’s white. After seeing it, why not try it out once? I wanted it there and then.
Self: Did it work?
Actress: No! My skin was just the same. It didn’t get any whiter.
Self: After that did you try any more?
Actress: No. The bottle’s still half full. I never used it up.
Self: Did you try another brand?
Actress: Oh, no!

The theme, familiar to Balinese and one to which I shall return in the conclusion, is the central role of people's vanity, which drives them to spend money even if they know it is going to be wasted. As the actress remarked: when she saw the advertisement, she wanted the whitening agent instantly. You rarely buy a line a second time if the first was a failure and recommendation by friends displaces the lure of the advertisement.

Do Advertisements Force Viewers to Buy?

As the evening wore on and what people had to say was emerging more fully, my questioning moved from jogging the conversation along to being more openly interrogative. A common concern in daily life is whether a person was forced into an action, a possibility which is strongly disapproved of on the whole. So I asked what seemed to me the obvious question.

- Self:** Now it's like this. If products are being hyped the whole time, are people in some way forced?
- Ex-head:** That's being forced.
- Old Actor:** That isn't being forced. You can't call that forced.
- Ex-head:** Yes?
- Old Actor:** As a person I am not forced by that. It's perfectly all right if you have some way of showing that it's useful, so that people are pleased.
- Ex-head:** That's a form of forcing people, what you've just said.
- Actress:** Now if they just show advertisements again and again, but if I've bought whatever and it was no good, I'm not going to buy it again. But I can enjoy watching the advertisement by itself.
- Old Actor:** That isn't good. (*This sentence could mean several things. It is impossible to tell for sure which.*)
- Ex-head:** Whatever way you look at it, that means being forced. (*He switches to Indonesian. From the style it would seem a publicly rehearsed case against advertisements.*) 'Being coerced by advertisements'. (*Reverts to Balinese.*) You aren't being forced to buy! It's not that. You're not forced in that sort of way. It's when you don't, you don't trust something, but you find yourself using the words, talking about it, that's what we're calling force.
- Actress:** Now listen. It's not just about people buying. It's about not believing what you watch. Now you've never bought whatever it is, then you think: 'Well let's give it a try'.
- Ex-head:** That's it.
- Actress:** Because they keep repeating the ads.
- Ex-head:** That's what we mean by being forced. It isn't just one person. (*He switches again for the next sentence to Indonesian.*) Many people are coerced by advertisements.
- Old Actor:** Now, suppose it is just the three, or four, of us, for example. Now, there are advertisements as I see it, Tuan (*that is, me*). Now I'm not denying that there are all sorts of advertisements, whether they are

worth anything or not. People are only reasonable in – what’s it called? – demonstrating what their products can do, using words. ‘This is what my product is good for’. Now that’s very useful. But whether that product is any use to you, I have no idea. I am not denying people promote products that way. But, now, if it were me for example who was going to buy it, I would be very careful indeed before doing so.

Actress: You’d be careful buying whatever it is, but you’d just enjoy looking at the ad. Like ‘New. Durable!’ you can enjoy listening to it. But you don’t feel like buying the product.

As happened often, there was an interesting disagreement. The ex-headman instantly adopted the idea of forcing and a position common in media studies’ work on media imperialism. What matters is the structure within which the viewer is constrained. By contrast, the actress, while recognizing the impact of repetitive exposure to an advertisement, brought her own experience to bear. No amount of repetition will make you buy something that does not work. She also neatly split appreciating the product from appreciating the image, the beauty, the cleverness of the advertisement.

The old actor instead took a nuanced position, often assumed by wiser theatre actors. Responsibility for action, here purchasing a product because it is heavily promoted, lies in the end not with the advertiser or producer, but with the viewer. Companies quite reasonably wish to inform the public of their products. Indeed it is useful. That you should then go and buy the product is something quite different. That depends on the personal exercise of critical judgement. However much they might wish otherwise, advertisers can only partly – and partially – structure the conditions under which you have preferences or make choices: they cannot decide for you. Philosophically the coercion argument is incoherent on the matter of responsibility and so agency. Interestingly, the old actor parallels Ernesto Laclau (1990) who noted that, if decisions are structurally determined, the possibility of the human subject at all is eliminated.

If you think that I am over-interpreting what Balinese have said and am attributing a degree of reflection to their thought which is not warranted, I would beg to differ. That we may not be so reflective is no excuse for projecting, ethnocentrically, our habits – indeed prejudices – onto others. The old actor and ex-headman are both traditional intellectuals and quite aware of the complexity of the issues they were addressing. ‘All men’, as Gramsci (1971:9) famously remarked, ‘are intellectuals...but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals’. It may require the participation of a trained academic like myself to put the arguments into a format acceptable to the dictates of style of late twentieth century academia. Much of the theory is obviously implicit, but then much theory is in academic argument (Collingwood 1940; Quine 1953). We only reveal the tip of a treacherous iceberg. All that says is that ethnography is the product of a complex agent, comprising the ethnographer and her interlocutors. As Collingwood (1940:34) noted, much that passes for research is based on the idea that knowledge is:

The simple 'intuition' of 'apprehension' of things confronting us which absolutely and in themselves just are what we 'intuite' or 'apprehend' them as being. This theory of knowledge is called 'realism'; and 'realism' is based upon the grandest foundation a philosophy can have, namely human stupidity.

Seduction

As the evening grew late and conversation seemed to be drawing to a close, I asked a leading question. It was bringing Baudrillard to Bali.²¹

- Self:** If I look around for an analogy to the way advertisements coerce, is it like seduction? If a man softens up a woman?
- Ex-head:** Now that's refined coercion. Seduction. It fits, it's seduction.
- Self:** What do you think, 'Gung 'Kak?
- Old Actor:** Now if you say that, if it's like someone trying to seduce someone else, as Ktut said. I feel it's right.
- Actress:** That kind of forcing isn't brutal. It's subtle force, isn't it?
- Ex-head:** A refined way.
- Old Actor:** Now in a refined way, for example. If everyday people say it too often, of course you get a feeling that you want to give it a go. In fact, of course you have to have money.

Whether it emerges in the transcript or not, my suggestion was immediately appealing. Young men's attempts to seduce women, *and vice versa*, are a favourite theme. It also provided a way out of the dilemma about agency. The person being seduced has to comply, and contributes actively in her or his own seduction (see Hobart 1990). Advertisements cannot seduce you unless you collaborate.

No Cash, No Desire

The reference to seduction reanimated the whole discussion. My host's son had turned up and his wife started to tell the story of how he went out one day without telling anyone and bought a gas hob, because a poor relative had bought one, whereas he was a high school teacher (and moreover had a very good income from the Television Project). His father remarked wryly that his son was caught in the new trap, *Géngsi* (the need for prestige, being one up on the neighbours). 'What was he feeling?', the father asked. His daughter-in-law, the actress, replied:

- Actress:** He just wanted to buy it.
- Ex-head:** Hah! He just wanted it! Now after being desperate to buy it, what if you don't have the money? How do you feel then?
- Actress:** If you don't have the money, then that's it. If you don't have the money, you aren't really going to feel strongly about getting a gas

hob. It's because he's got a good job, he had the money to use to buy it. If he hadn't, he wouldn't have. We'd have used the usual (*paraffin*) stove. There would be no point in wishing for it. Of course he didn't feel so strongly about it. The point of the gas hob is that because he had the money, he wanted to buy it.

At the end of the previous extract, the old actor had remarked that advertisements made you want to try out something, but only if you had the money. The actress developed the point. If you cannot get hold of the money, you do not want something. Desire is not a primordial condition of human beings (Deleuze & Guattari 1983). It is the product of the relationship between an image, an object, an occasion, an inclination, the means and a decision, the willing of an act. You might fantasize about something, but there is no point. So you do not wish for, or want, it.

Drunk on the screen

According to Thatcherism 'greed is good'. Capitalism is naturalized by declaring economic activity to be based on rational choice, rational choice on egoism and egoism on greed. That the connections do not work well (for example, Hindess 1988:29-41; and as the Soeharto régime belatedly found out at the nation's expense) does not prevent them, like advertisements, from being recycled endlessly. The old actor's point was that that is no reason to accept the argument.

I take it that explanations of complex processes like contemporary capitalism, advertising and mass media are underdetermined. That is, there are several explanations which fit the facts, albeit in rather different ways (Quine 1960). Additional criteria are required to decide between explanations (Hesse 1978). Politicians and economists may be interested in those explanations which make their policies or theories look attractive. As an anthropologist I am interested in explanations which avoid ethnocentricity and are commensurable with people's understanding of the conditions of their lives. I am therefore more interested in accounts that permit people critically to reflect on themselves as agents, not just the practices which may tend discursively to produce the passive subjects or objects of others' actions, such as advertising.

Balinese bring a considerable arsenal of religious and philosophical ideas to bear on the explanation of human action. I shall mention only two, which bear directly on advertising. My sources are from television. Hinduism is a state-recognized religion in Indonesia and most Hindu broadcasts are produced by Balinese. Understanding the earth-shaking economic and social changes taking place, hardly surprisingly, is a preoccupation. As with the old actor's analysis, the trend is to locate the areas of antagonism within the person or between people, rather than displace them onto external structures, that objective reality loved of scientism.

One of the best known classical frames of reference is the *sadripu*, the six inner enemies, which each human has as part of their being. These are *kama*, desire, the pleasure of the senses; *kroda*, anger, passion; *loba*, greed, covetousness; *moha*, infatuation, darkness of mind, ignorance; *mada*, intoxication, whether by passion, drink,

fury or whatever and *matsarya*, envy or jealousy (Zoetmulder 1982; *Sadripu* Téater Nusa Denpasar, broadcast February 24, 1993). Here at last, surely we have greed (and desire, for that matter), and a framework which bears at least a passing resemblance to the seven deadly sins.

Although the *sadripu* are widely known, they are too general to be applied usefully to the critical analysis of human action on specific occasions. They are overshadowed, in religious broadcasting in the nineties at least, by a different explanatory grid: the *Sapta Timira*, the seven forms of benightedness, or intoxication. It is these to which Balinese broadcasters appeal in addressing the problems of the contemporary world.²²

Let me quote from the programme entitled *Mada*, intoxication (the fifth of the *sadripu* listed above):

Surupa is a person being intoxicated with beauty, or with handsomeness. *Dana* is being overwhelmed by money. *Guna* is when someone is inebriated with their own abilities. Cleverness, of course, also intoxicates. *Kulina* is obsession with status and title. After that *Yowana* is being infatuated with youth. *Sura* is being intoxicated on strong liquor, like Pan Suba (a figure in the story) who gets drunk to the point of being *Sura*. Finally there is *Kasuran*, that's getting carried away by victory. So, for example, winning at gambling is also a cause of intoxication.

Why so many Balinese feel so ambivalent about the island's most famous tourist resort, Kuta Beach, starts to make sense. It is the place which best instantiates all seven *Timira* at once on a daily basis.

From the excerpts above, it should be clear that, as Balinese talk about them, advertising has on the whole far more to do specifically with forms of intoxicating than with the other inner enemies. In different ways, different genres of broadcasting address different kinds of intoxication. The most widely spoken about when discussing advertisements is *surupa* – the intoxication is double. It is not just your own appearance, which impels purchases of shampoo, skin whitener, clothes and so on. More broadly it is intoxication with the attractiveness of the actors in the advertisements.²³ Obsession with youth is another, if less remarked upon, feature of advertisements, as *kasuran* is in quiz shows and televised sports.

I do not wish to force the issue, but Balinese have a wide vocabulary to talk about their engagement with television. This relates to quite distinctive complexes of ideas about the nature of the human subject (cf. Wikan 1990). Indian Samkhya had developed an intricate account of the subject and its dispositions as part of a world of transformative material processes, the *triguna* (Larson 1987). Quite how generally Balinese versions of the *triguna* were used in, say, the precolonial period, by whom and on what occasion, I am not in a position to say. It seems to be the dominant frame of reference in Hindu religious broadcasts and is often referred to in theatre. The theory is not just dialogic, but treats humans as continually making and being remade by the world about them. It is an account of the subject which fits post-structuralist approaches far better than the atomist theories prevalent for example in psychology.

Advertisements make people drunk. That is why they feel they must buy things suddenly. The image of intoxication is significant. It presupposes choice and its forfeiture, excess and loss. There is a recognition of the threat to one's self-command (not self-control, with its mechanistic image of the subject) and the impossibility, in a world of transformative process, of total command over oneself anyway. This account of intoxication also presupposes the dangers of a false appreciation of oneself and its relation to the world, and a disjuncture between a desired or imagined object and reality. It is a relational term, but one that involves rupture and so signals the end of dialogue, now replaced by narcissistic monologue (the favoured form of theoretism) or vacuity. The primary relation is now to the subject's own longings. But this in turn presupposes a double other. The first is the imaginary being who really appreciates your beauty, wealth, prowess or whatever. (In Bali even drunks used to get drunk together in *tuak*-drinking groups.) The second is those others, Peirce's community, who both appreciate its allure – *kapetengan* is an inevitable part of being a sentient human – and misery; and form the conditions of the possibility of recognition of intoxication.

Drunkenness in Bali can also be contagious. Balinese are bitterly aware of their proclivity to *nuut lubukan*, to walk in the footsteps of those who have gone before, never veering from what others have done before. No one even knows the number of 'artshops', homestays and paraphernalia thrown up in an epidemic of *Dana* across what was once, by their own admission, a rather lovely landscape. There were never remotely the customers to justify the riot of intoxication, which was itself cut short by the riots across Indonesia as an economy itself built upon intoxication imploded. Much of the development turned out to be a simulation.

Put this way it sounds as if intoxication in whatever form is out-and-out bad. That, however, would be to impose a quite different, and puritan, metaphysics upon what Balinese are arguing about.²⁴ The point was made nicely by the rich farmer, who turned to me one day during a conversation and remarked that he was mad. To my astonishment, the others all chimed in laughing and announced that they were mad too! The farmer put me out of my misery by expatiating. He was mad about *bricolage*. He was mad about repairing things and messing with odds and ends. The old actor was mad about theatre: it did not matter how old he was, how bad the weather or how far away the show, he would be there. Everyone is mad about something: something intoxicates them. Meditative abstinence is for saints. And there have never been many of those around, not least because so fierce a negation of ordinary mortal frailties sets up the likelihood of a correspondingly ferocious reaction into excess. To be mad or drunk may be bad, but it is human. Anyway those who proclaim their restraint or advocate it to others all too often, sadly, turn out later to have indulged in excess themselves. Advertisements simply tap into human frailties.

To return to advertising, it is not simply that watching the television screen makes you intoxicated by what you see. A striking feature of advertisements is the ecstasy which is supposed to overcome actors when presented with a cold-relief pill, on pouring chilli sauce all over your food or given the chance to wear a proprietary sanitary pad. What is distinctive of advertisements as a television genre, perhaps not just in Indonesia, is that it is not just the viewers, but the actors too who are drunk on the screen. That it no longer matters that it is a simulation is part of the point of advertisements.

Television advertisements are part of a new emerging régime of pleasure. Ideas of pleasure, gratification, happiness, and the conditions for their achievement, are highly discursively specific (Foucault 1986a, 1986b). The pleasure theory of human drives nicely fits capitalist ideology, because it is linked to an Enlightenment theory of the psyche as an internal market to start off with, a model now being displaced by consumption as ecstasy (Ferguson 1990; or as Balinese prefer, inebriation). The disciplining discourse which television advertisements aim to impose is connected with the imperative of seeking pleasure almost as a moral and civic duty to further Indonesian economic development. As Baudrillard remarked caustically:

The best evidence that pleasure is not the basis of consumption is that nowadays pleasure is constrained and institutionalized, not as a right or enjoyment, but as the citizen's *duty* ... The consumer, the modern citizen, cannot evade the constraint of happiness and pleasure which in the new ethics is equivalent to the traditional constraint of labor and production.

Baudrillard (1988b:46, 48)

And as he has been at pains to make clear, what is consumed are signs of difference, driven by a desire for social meaning. Were it not so, consumers would have long ago been sated. This is why advertisements are as much about consummation as consumption.

What my Balinese companions had to say about televised advertising involves presuppositions broadly similar to those in Baudrillard's analysis. They continually stressed the overwhelming importance of the image and the need to think critically about its relation to the object, which is never fully revealed. They were also quite clear that their moments of enjoyment came about from appreciating the images for themselves, an aesthetic consummation. As they were fairly poor people who could not buy most of what they saw, to what extent was this vicarious pleasure or even, as mall walking is supposed to be, an act of resistance? No doubt it is that in part, although quite how you tell I do not know. From what they said, however, it has another aspect. Where the school-teacher was evidently caught up in the civics of consumption, the others were articulating the counter-case for a quite different account of the subject. It is a subject placed in a complex dialogue of seduction, excess, intoxication and often, by virtue of the human condition, inevitably disappointment. If nothing else, I hope that the analysis of these conversations has made the point that, if we imagine our discursive ideas about consumption, pleasure and the human subject are universal, we are likely to miss much that is of interest and importance. There is more in heaven and earth than is dreamed of in writing about advertisements and television.

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Notes

¹ The programme was in Balinese. Words in bold however were in English in the original; italicized words are Old Javanese.

² I have yet to carry out research on the practices of Asian advertising campaigns (such as those described by McCreery and Mazzarella in the previous two chapters. However, extrapolating from work done elsewhere, I would advance a double ‘null hypothesis’. First, the relationship between advertising and sales is sufficiently complex and indeterminate that even the crude formula ‘provided it sells the product’ cannot be the yardstick for evaluating the efficacy of advertising campaigns (Schudson 1984). Second, sales may well be as much about ‘keeping the score’ between rival metropolitan advertising companies, whose prime constituency is the world of national and transnational media, as it is about the interests of the commercial companies for whom they work.

³ Juxtaposing and allowing the intellectual practices of the objects of study to comment and reflect on the thinking and practices of their knowing subjects upsets many scholars. The objections take two forms. The first is that I do not need continually to invoke philosophers in order to legitimate what Balinese have to say. Encouraging a normally forbidden, recursive reflection on our own thought is not however primarily about justifying Balinese thinking. It is to question the hegemony of our own thinking and decentre it. It is also to enable the antagonisms (in Laclau’s sense) of different congeries of intellectual practices to engage to whatever outcome. The second objection is the inverse of the first. It is that academic thinking is *a priori* so superior to any native thought that the exercise is inevitably fruitless, inappropriate, indeed polluting. Danny Miller’s response to this chapter was that 1) Balinese had nothing to say that was profound and 2) that viewers in other parts of the world can come up with parallel ideas. I leave it to readers to judge the first comment for themselves. The second merely reiterates what I am arguing, namely that academic objectifications of people as viewers, masses etc. involves serious misrecognition – indeed denial – of what they are doing.

For some reason, this juxtaposing seems particularly to upset north Americans. I do not know if this is because they still see themselves as the dominant world power and their knowledge as correspondingly hegemonic and sacred, whereas we Europeans have come sadly to learn that the world all too often exceeds, and fails to conform to, our theories. My own theoretical position here links work in history and philosophy with that of Foucault, Baudrillard and the post-Gramscian critiques of Laclau and the cultural studies’ debates in Britain.

⁴ Nor am I reiterating the romantic media studies’ thesis of the active viewing subject, who determines her conditions of engagement with the media. As the Balinese commentators made clear, that argument confuses activity and agency. What this does suggest though is that, at least for Indonesia, arguments like Stuart Hall’s about the

degree to which mass media are hegemonic are overstated and the familiar product of armchair theorizing.

⁵ This argument obviously echoes critiques of the hegemony of Euro-American science by scholars like Haraway (e.g. 1991) and Latour (e.g. 1993). The difference is that, of necessity, they remain part of, and must work within, the ensemble of intellectual practices they are criticizing. The issues of incommensurability and radical translation, let alone potentially quite different kinds of intellectual practice are marginal to their main concerns.

⁶ So juxtaposing such practices is merely undoing the original hypostatization by which knowledge was made to emerge as a transcendental system in the first place. As the Frankfurt Critical School made clear, knowledge is always directed to a purpose, even if this purpose is non-technical, but interpretive or emancipatory (Habermas 1978; Apel 1979).

⁷ Glossing the title as *The Consumer Society* significantly puts the stress, as anglo-saxons prefer, on the individual rather than upon the practice on consumption – thereby also missing the *double entendre* on consummation so central to Baudrillard's analysis.

⁸ Elsewhere I have considered the problematic relationship of anthropology to cultural and media studies (see especially Hobart 1997b). A crucial issue is the relevance and kind of ethnography. The present piece is arguing for a shift in degree, if not in the kind, of ethnography to incorporate and acknowledge the constitutive dialogue which underlies the final inscribed accounts.

⁹ For this reason I exclude passages from the conversations which would provide advertising companies in Indonesia with what viewers consider effective ways of overcoming their critical judgement. Here I echo my Balinese colleagues: advertising should inform about the existence and merits of goods and services, but not attempt to preempt preference or choice.

¹⁰ For a brief account of the television project, see Hobart (1999).

¹¹ The first, which is the one discussed mainly here, was with the elderly men and the actress on August 8. The second, on August 17 (National Day), was when I returned to the theme after watching television with my host, his son and daughter-in-law and the old actor. Four days later the whole family and some friends were raptly watching a film. So I recorded the advertisements on a VCR and played them back afterwards, while recording their comments on a cassette tape. The next day I found the three women in the family (great-grandmother, grandmother and daughter) working together and asked them about advertisements while they worked and chatted.

¹² A problem is that village women are busy, they have little time to break and often prefer to talk while they work. On many topics, they were the best commentators. On

television they tended to be less so, perhaps because they only really started watching after the colour set changed household dynamics.

¹³ The point has been made forcefully by Johannes Fabian (1990), who has argued ethnography to be one performance among the many which are going on at the same time. His argument however still implies inherent dissimulation. For this reason, I prefer Judith Butler's account of performance as simply what there is (Butler 1990, 1994).

¹⁴ Significantly, accounts of identification which have been so central to much film and cultural studies did not feature. I spent much time last summer discussing identification with actors as well as audiences. It is remarkably hard going actually to formulate questions about identity in Balinese. And when you do, you easily land up going round in circles. When they finally understood what I was driving at, everyone I spoke to gave identification short shrift.

¹⁵ Seduction by advertisements (a theme I develop below), as with other embarrassing moments, is conventionally supposed to happen to someone else, never to you. That Balinese were enthusiastic to admit to getting carried away has, as I argue towards the end of the chapter, with ideas about seduction and intoxication.

¹⁶ This sort of sales talk is the butt of popular jokes. There is apparently a well-known sales pitch which is meant to imply that whatever the illness, it will disappear in the wink of an eye. As the patter has come to be condensed, what it literally says is: 'Rub your eyes and your eyes will disappear!' Conveniently nothing is actually claimed for the medicine.

¹⁷ The collapse of the rupiah, the implosion of the Indonesian economy after May 1998 and the decline of the tourist trade have tended to prove my host right in his decision to forego lavish spending and buy rice land when everyone else was in an orgy of selling theirs. Once, of course, rich consumers had made their money work or they would not be as rich as they are.

¹⁸ On the applicability of dialogic analyses to the study of Bali, see Hobart (2000). The choice is between what you can make of the sort of thing the commentators were discussing above as against the finding, say, that 92 per cent of young people between sixteen and twenty years of age from a particular Asian country said that they did not respect politicians. (This, as near as I can remember it from a lecture during the original conference in Hong Kong, is the percentage who asserted this wholly unremarkable pseudo-fact during interviews made under unknown, but doubtless 'carefully controlled, objective' circumstances.)

¹⁹ It does not follow, as some participants at the original *ConsumAsiaN* workshop on 'Asian Advertising and Media' took it, that the commentators were arguing that the product is seen as no more than an image. That is a classical problem of European representationism. Quite the contrary, the problem to Balinese is that people easily

conflate image and object and confuse the complex relationship between them. Unless you happen to bump into something, most of what you encounter happens to be images. The formal philosophical issues have been laid at some length in Nyaya-Vaisesika (see Potter 1977; for the problems of its applicability to Bali, see Hobart 1985).

²⁰ Incidentally, if I – by way of the commentators – appear to be taking issue with Baudrillard in particular, it is largely because he actually said something interesting and worth engaging with.

²¹ He is in vogue in the Faculty of Arts at the provincial state university. I must confess I am partly, but by no means wholly, responsible for this through my work on media studies in Indonesia. The excitement he generates there is interesting.

²² Inevitably perhaps accounts vary, primarily over whether bravery or concern with winning should be separated from *kasaktian*, unusual efficacy (conventionally glossed as ‘mystical power’). Other programmes in the Hindu Religious Rostrum series of broadcasts make it clear that *timira*, *kapetengan*, or *kagelapan* all signify intoxication, *kamabukan*, for example *Karma wesana* broadcast November 3, 1993; *Peteng pitu* broadcast September 21, 1994: ‘The seven forms of benightedness or *sapta timira* are seven kinds of darkness or seven kinds of drunkenness’ (*Peteng pitu atau sapta timira adalah tujuh macam kegelapan atau tujuh jenis kemabukan*).

²³ Balinese are often quite open about their sexual attraction to television actors .

²⁴ This is not to say that some people do not subscribe to anti-recidivism, even encratism, for example the producers of some Hindu religious broadcasts. To what extent this is a reaction among public presenters of all the major religions in Indonesia against the conspicuous excess of the last years, and to what extent a more specifically Hindu-Buddhist response to the preachings of the more puritanical schools of Islam, is an interesting question.