



## Optical Allusions: Looking at Looking, in Balinese and Dutch Encounters

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**Abstract:** This article revisits vision's relation to power and knowledge through a symmetrical discussion of Balinese and Dutch ideologies and practices of seeing. Juxtaposing Balinese and Dutch allusions to matters optical in anecdotes about meetings between envoys of the Netherlands Indies state and members of pre-colonial Bali's ruling classes invites a consideration of the role optical technologies play in assembling (partially connected) worlds. Highlighting the mediators that visual practices require, it argues that familiar claims about vision rest on hegemonic ontologies. Looking back at colonial encounters from Bali shows that what eyes see and do goes beyond observation.

In *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, Ruth Benedict lays out a prescription for a cultural anthropology concerned with difference:

The lenses through which any nation looks at life are not the ones another nation uses. It is hard to be conscious of the eyes through which one looks. Any country takes them for granted, and the tricks of focusing and of perspective which give to any people its national view of life seem to that people the god-given arrangement of the landscape. In any matter of spectacles, we do not expect the man who wears them to know the formula for the lenses, and neither can we expect nations to analyze their own outlook upon the world. When we want to know about spectacles,

we train an oculist and expect him to be able to write out the formula for any lenses we bring him. Some day no doubt we shall recognize that it is the job of the social scientists to do this for the nations of the contemporary world (Benedict 1989 [1946]: 14).

Benedict's reference to lenses, both biological and manufactured, as an analogue for culture constitutes an example of what Fabian (1983) termed visualism: the saturation of anthropological writing with visual metaphors. Fabian argued that such metaphors not only presented those represented in the text as distant Others, objects of power and knowledge, but also elided the mutuality

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and interaction that produces knowledge in the field. Benedict, of course, could not conduct fieldwork for the book from which this quote comes, which was written at the behest of the American government in the midst of a war. Observation played no role in her research, which involved instead extensive interviews and secondary materials. Still, her book was part of a project involving several American anthropologists to examine ‘culture at a distance,’ as the United States emerged as a global power, which is certainly congruent with Fabian’s critique. At the very least, Benedict’s reliance on optical metaphors speaks to a broader literature on the significance of vision in the production of knowledge.

But what is less common about Benedict’s reference to lenses is that she highlights what they do. Readers do not look through her lenses, but are forced to notice their existence. The landscape seen through them, for that matter, is not ‘god-given’ but a product of the lenses’ mediation. While attention is being increasingly paid to the significance of mediation (Latour 2005), especially in relation to an ever-increasing array of visual technologies that require training in order to see anything with them at all (Grasseni 2007), much of the literature on relations between vision and knowledge (as well as vision and power) ignores such matters. I find particularly relevant the inspiration Benedict finds in the mundane technology of spectacles.

Spectacles play a part in the allusions to matters optical that I explore in this article. My way into this topic is through Dutch and Balinese anecdotes about meetings between envoys of the Netherlands Indies and members of Bali’s pre-colonial ruling class. Highlighting the mediation of different visual technologies, these anecdotes present forms of seeing with significantly distinct epistemological, political, and ontological implications.

The key Dutch narrative comes from a book published not long after the events it describes, authored by a participant. I will contrast this account with Balinese anecdotes that I heard during fieldwork in the 1980s from elderly members of cadet branches of the Klungkung

dynastic line, the last realm conquered by the Netherlands Indies, in 1908. These elders neither witnessed nor participated in the events they recounted, and of course much had happened since the events they related: colonial rule; the defeat of the Dutch and Bali’s incorporation into the new nation-state of Indonesia in 1950; and the deadly political struggles that followed. Nonetheless, that they speak of visual technologies during audiences of the same type, and that all of the narrators were members of the ruling classes on both sides of these encounters, provides common ground—and so a good starting point for a symmetrical treatment of how domination, knowledge, and reality take form through the sense of sight.

Some of what I rehearse here rests on familiar ground, drawing on analyses of Euro-American ocularcentrism or visualism, the tendency to favor vision over other senses, especially in theories of knowledge and forms of representation (Jay 1993, Fabian 1983). Here of particular importance are accounts of how ‘imperial eyes’ (Pratt 1992) operate in the representation of non-Europeans to produce relations of power.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, however, I use stories from Bali to look back at colonial spectators, and to counter familiar assertions about vision, knowledge, power, and reality. Thus this article contributes to a growing archive on the use and meaning of the senses in non-Western societies.

Why the emphasis on vision? Anthropologists rightly have criticized the excessive attention scholars have paid to sight, and have urged greater attention both to other senses and to the integration of sensorial experiences (see, e.g., Howe 2003, Jackson 1989). Nonetheless, vision remains crucial, not only to modern ideologies (see, e.g., Jay 1993, Levin 1993, and below for a fuller discussion), but also to ongoing relations of power, including those of global domination (Pratt 1992, Jay and Ramaswamy 2014).

While building on this literature, however, I also bring it into relation with a different set of concerns. Most anthropological work on the senses highlights the way that culture shapes perception, and thus ‘the way that people

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<sup>1</sup> As Pels (1996) notes, the dominance of visual ideologies in European philosophy, art, and science also generated counter-hegemonic visual traditions, including surrealism and occultism. These often drew on reports about the practices of non-European peoples.

perceive the world' (Classen 1997: 401), or asserts that work on the senses offers evidence of 'alternative epistemologies' (Howe 2003: xvii). In short, such incidents reveal, among other things, how knowledge or perceptions differ. But the world itself does not. Various sensory regimes afford distinct perspectives, but on the same reality. Thus much of this literature on the senses adds strength to the familiar (and 'Benedictine') assertion of the multiplicity of cultures, while retaining an uncritical commitment to the singularity and unity of nature.

But what might eyes see or not see? And what might they do? Seeing does not only establish power and produce knowledge. What people do with and say about seeing, how eyes make worlds, is equally at issue. In this article I argue that Balinese tales reveal aspects of visual practice elided by ocularcentric epistemologies and ideologies. Looking back at European interlocutors, they draw attention to what seeing entails in the process of worlding. Eyes are more than tools that allow access to a pre-existing reality. Not only are they instruments of power (Fabian 1983, Mulvey 1975), trained to see certain things and in certain ways (Klima 2002, Grasseni (ed.) 2007), from particular perspectives (Haraway 1991); eyes contribute to assembling worlds.

### **Through the Colonial Looking Glass: An Audience in Badung, 1847**

The first of my optical allusions appears in a book written by Wolter Robert baron van Hoëvell, a Dutch Orientalist and Calvinist minister, who traveled through Java, Bali, and Madura in 1847. He stayed in Bali with Mads Lange, a Danish national acting as the agent for the Netherlands Trading Company. Van Hoëvell describes a visit with Lange to one of the rulers of Badung in south Bali, during which he met a court priest:

In the last forecourt we met the most eminent of the Brahmans of the realm of Badung. His appearance was not attractive; he was an old, ugly, dirty person, who squinted horribly. A particularly long walking stick, which he carried in his hand, from which he at the same time took his title, was the sign of his rank. Such a stick or staff is called '*danda*' and after this staff he is called '*padanda*,' i.e., staff-bearer. The Brahmans, you see, are divided into two sorts: ordinary Brahmans, who all bear the title of '*ida*,' and

'*padandas*,' such persons who have enjoyed a complete education from another '*padanda*' (their teacher or '*guru*'). To ascend to this high rank they undergo all kinds of tests that prove their ability and submission to the teacher. So they put their head, for example, under the guru's foot, and drink the water that trickles from his feet with his ablutions.

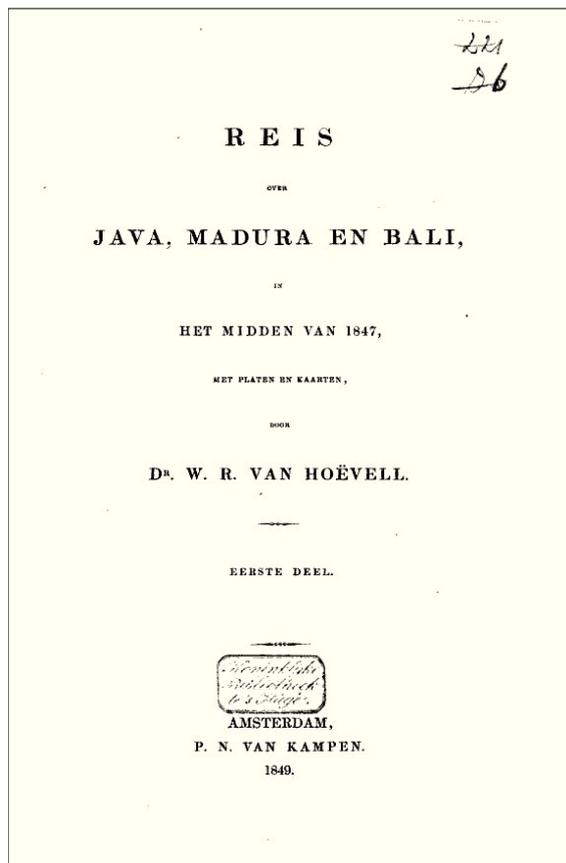
The specimen of these Balinese men of learning whom we met in the princes' forecourt was named '*Padanda Agong Sindhoewati*'. The last name indicates the village Sindhoewati . . . where he lives. He originally belonged in Karang-assam, but about twenty years ago he had to leave that realm, inasmuch as he had kept up an illicit correspondence with Gianjar, with which Karang-assam was then at war. But the fame of his erudition, and perhaps no less his astuteness, won him a comfortable position in Badong, for he became the first house priest of the princes there. And such a person is a man of great importance. He is the spiritual master of the prince, and the latter is his disciple, who must make a *sembah* (respectful obeisance) before him and in this way attest to his inferiority to the priest. In all religious matters and affairs of state, and even in the usual activities of life, in the declaration of war, the taking of wives, and what not, he is consulted.

Mr. Lange told this venerable personage that I was the '*padanda agong*' (high priest) of Batavia. I could see by his face that this made an impression on him; he grimaced at me in a friendly fashion and ordered me to take a seat next to him on the couch that bore his holy body. Immediately after we were seated, he asked to be allowed to see my spectacles. It will be clear to you that this instrument, for me indispensable, frequently aroused the deep interest of many prominent persons on Bali. When I satisfied his desire, he looked at the spectacles from all sides, and finally tried to set them on his nose. After much effort he succeeded. It is very possible, that, in addition to being cross-eyed he was also myopic, and now for the first time in his life saw through spectacles that accommodated such an infirmity. At any rate, when he had looked about to all sides, he declared that the spectacles pleased him exceedingly, that he could see perfectly through them, and that he would do me the supreme honor of keeping them.

I was perplexed by the affair. I could not possibly spare my spectacles, for then I might as well begin the return trip to Batavia immediately. And to refuse something to such a venerable personage would have been against all rules of Eastern courtesy and propriety. Mr. Lange, who understood in what a difficult situation I found myself, came to my aid. He pointed out to his High Venerableness that these spectacles were only suitable for [someone of] a more youthful

age; that old people like himself could make no use of them without quickly becoming blind. 'You see better through them for a moment,' he said, 'but that is just like a lamp that flares up on the point of going out. There are such instruments for people of your age, and I promise to send for one from Batavia'.

The *padanda* was content; at any rate he gave me back my spectacles and appeared to have lost nothing of his goodwill. He asked me various questions about my journey and the purpose of my arrival on Bali. He tried to learn a thing or two about the Netherlands Government's intentions with respect to the princes, with which, if not at war, it was then nonetheless a very tense situation. Very politely I intimated to him, that I, as '*padanda*' of Batavia, did not concern myself with affairs of state, and for this reason must make no answer to his questions (van Hoëvell 1854:58-60; translation mine).



As van Hoëvell notes earlier in his book, the Netherlands Indies government and the rulers of Bali's numerous realms had established diplomatic relations in 1840 that quickly

became strained. Only a year before van Hoëvell's visit the Dutch had launched a military expedition against the ruler of north Bali, after a series of incidents in which he refused to relinquish rights to salvage from shipwrecks or to treat Dutch envoys as his equals. In 1847 he was fortifying in preparation for a second engagement, which came in 1848. These conflicts were to result in the Dutch conquest of north and east Bali in 1849, giving the colonial state its first hold on the island. Throughout these troubles Dutch envoys considered Badung's rulers, who controlled the liveliest port on the island and had enmities of their own with the princes to the north, their allies.

Readers of van Hoëvell's three-volume account of his travels no doubt would have considered him a highly credible reporter. Apart from his position as a minister to the Batavian congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church, he was a public figure who played a major role in both scholarly and political circles. At the time of his travels, van Hoëvell was President of the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences, which became a center for Orientalist research largely due to his efforts. He also founded and edited the widely read *Journal of the Netherlands Indies*, to which philologists, Orientalists, and colonial administrators contributed pieces. Only a year after his visit to Bali van Hoëvell was forced to leave the Indies, after he criticized the government's treatment of Eurasians. He spent the rest of his career in parliament, leading the faction opposing the notorious cultivation system in Java. Despite his reputation as a humanitarian, however, this anecdote shows that he shared and even helped to produce attitudes that made the colonial project possible.<sup>2</sup>

Mads Lange, his guide, lived in a multicultural borderland. At this time he was both the political and commercial agent for the Netherlands Indies Government and the harbormaster for Badung's rulers, in charge of all imports and exports in Kuta, Badung's busy port. A Danish expatriate who came to the Indies in hopes of adventure and wealth, he could have come out of a Joseph Conrad novel: he had two wives, one Balinese and one

<sup>2</sup> Like other critics of Dutch colonial policy, van Hoëvell never entertained the possibility that the Dutch might leave Java to the Javanese. Instead, critics who argued for reforms to improve the welfare of native populations underlined the need for European rule. For debates over Dutch colonial policy see Furnivall (1944).

Chinese, and his daughter eventually married the Sultan of Johore.

Pedanda Agung Sinduwati, the priest van Hoëvell describes in such unflattering terms, was one of two consecrated Brahmanas who served as *bagawanta* (court priest) in Badung.<sup>3</sup> As *bagawanta* he would present offerings and make holy water (i.e., water charged with the qualities of particular divinities) at rituals to ensure the prosperity and safety of the realm. He would determine auspicious and inauspicious days for beginning activities such as building, planting, studying, writing, marrying, cremating, going to war, making a journey, or holding a ritual, and he would officiate at rites of passage for members of the royal household. In addition to his ritual expertise, a *bagawanta* advised the court on matters of state. Such a priest would be well versed in numerous texts and textual genres, including those concerning the complex Balinese calendar, metaphysics, and cosmology. He would also strive to keep himself a fit vehicle for mediating with divinities by practicing ascetic disciplines and cultivating modesty and self-control.<sup>4</sup> The Pedanda presumably accepted Lange's claim that van Hoëvell was his equal or he would not have invited him to sit beside him or asked to try his spectacles; keeping them would have established a bond between them. His friendliness should be read, however, within the context of Badung political strategies at this time.

Van Hoëvell's tale is doubly optical, both in the spectacles that serve as its center point, and

in its detailed portraiture. Of course van Hoëvell, knowing no Balinese, could only understand his encounter through what he observed (and Lange's translation). Yet the story's optic is invidiously colonial. It seems a simple report of an amusing incident. It is not. Note that the Pedanda Agung is portrayed as preoccupied with status, a classic Orientalist trope that was highly politically relevant, given recent conflicts with north Bali's rulers.<sup>5</sup> Note too that van Hoëvell tells the tale as a joke on the Balinese. Part of the joke lies in the irony of the contrast between the exaggerated respect with which van Hoëvell speaks of the priest—referring to 'his holy body,' calling him 'his High Venerableness'—a respect that he implies the priest feels is his due, and van Hoëvell's portrait of him as 'ugly,' 'dirty,' 'cross-eyed,' and finally ignorant and gullible.

Van Hoëvell's anecdote belongs to a well-established speech genre. For centuries travelers' tales of this sort had played their own quiet role in European expansion. By establishing difference as inferiority and by ridiculing the 'pretensions' of indigenous ruling classes, such tales naturalized European supremacy.<sup>6</sup> Absorption of such attitudes by metropolitan readers created support for imperial projects. Thus van Hoëvell's text constituted an intervention in ongoing negotiations between the Netherlands and Bali's rulers.

Object lessons like the one van Hoëvell offers form a common feature of the genre. Scenes of non-European fascination with—and

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3 This was according to R. Friederich, a Sanskrit scholar van Hoëvell sent to Bali with the first military expedition in 1846 to learn about and collect Balinese manuscripts; the other one was Pedanda Madé Alangkajeng (1959:107). Both priests lived near Taman, in Sanur.

4 Despite van Hoëvell's assessment, it is unlikely that Balinese would have judged the Pedanda unattractive. Of course Brahmana priests are supposed to be indifferent to the world—as a sign of which they no longer shave or fuss over their physical appearance. But Balinese appraisals of attractiveness commonly go beyond corporeal beauty, and often have otherworldly dimensions. Allure is a feature of what Balinese regard as power (*kasaktian*), which stems from relations with other-than-humans (see Wiener 1995). Given his or her constant involvement with deities in daily rites, a *pedanda* should, in fact, draw people to him or her. Van Hoëvell's description of the Pedanda as dirty is even more puzzling, given not only Balinese understandings of priests (whose primary activities center upon acts of cleansing, by sprinkling objects and people, including themselves, with holy water), but also common practices (Balinese bathe twice a day and evidence suggests this is a very old practice throughout Southeast Asia, in contrast to Europe; see Reid 1988:50-52). Possibly the Pedanda had rubbed his body with *boréh*, poultices made of herbs and roots that are intended to promote health, especially in older people. *Boréh* is usually applied after the morning bath and allowed to dry on the body, to be washed off at the evening bath. It ranges in color, depending on the ingredients used, but certainly might make a person look 'dirty' to someone not used to the practice.

5 Indeed, clearly colonial envoys were equally attuned to relative status.

6 On imperialism and travel literature, see especially the classic study by Pratt (1992) but also Thomas (1994) and Chidester (1997).

amused reports of their misunderstandings of—things such as guns, mirrors, railways, and watches appear in innumerable texts.<sup>7</sup> As Adas (1989) suggests, such tropes mark an increasing tendency to explain and justify European domination in technological terms. As technical innovation emerged as an index of superiority and advancement, readers and writers of travel books came to expect that others would find that technology marvelous and desirable. There is something particularly intriguing about ocular examples like this one, however. As I note below, for European thinkers, disciplined observation had become a defining feature of knowledge practices leading to mastery over nature; as objects that extended the eye's range, lenses both enabled and stood for such practices.

Vision thoroughly permeates van Hoëvell's anecdote. Much of its impact stems from his detailed description of the Pedanda's appearance. Yet van Hoëvell's optical realism is also deceptive. Consider, for example, the Pedanda's desire to keep his spectacles. It seems unlikely that van Hoëvell's prescription suited his eyes. Anyone who has tried on another person's glasses knows that the world often looks blurrier, rather than clearer, through lenses not corrected to one's own irregularities. Although van Hoëvell reports that Pedanda Agung declared he could 'see perfectly well through them' (or at least writes that Lange said that the Pedanda said this), it is by no means evident what the Pedanda saw when he looked through those lenses, or that his visual experience was his primary reason for wishing to keep them.

### **Blinding Revelations: A Clash in Klungkung, 1902**

Colonial encounters have commonly produced counter-knowledges and counter-histories (Pratt 1992:2). In this particular instance, no corresponding Balinese report of Pedanda Agung's encounter with van Hoëvell exists. But tales are told about other such meetings, some of which mention matters optical.

My second anecdote moves us forward in time about 50 years, and some 25 kilometers east to Klungkung, to the court of Bali's paramount ruler, the Déwa Agung. The Déwa Agung figuring in this story ruled from 1850, three years after van Hoëvell's visit, to 1903. At his death, Klungkung was one of only four Balinese realms still independent of Dutch rule. The incident recounted probably occurred in 1902, not long after the ruler of Gianyar, a region the Déwa Agung regarded as his, placed his realm under Netherlands Indies protection. Responding to his continuing complaints of interference from Klungkung, the Dutch resident stationed warships off Klungkung's coast and confronted the Déwa Agung with a list of demands. In 1986, the late Anak Agung Gaci, member of a cadet branch of Klungkung's royal clan, told me what happened then:

I was alive when the Dutch first came to take the fruit of the land, though I was still small. They had a meeting; my father told me about it . . . The Dutch were going to claim land here. I remember that time. Who knows what [the Déwa Agung] intended. He became angry at the envoy, and, it is said, made the Dutchman fall down unconscious. Now I've been told—I'm just telling what I've heard, isn't that so?—that what he said [was], 'What do you want, White Eyes?' He only said that much and the Dutchman fainted . . .

Other elders told me a similar story. Some said that all the Déwa Agung had to do was to hiss at the envoy 'You White Eyes!' This is interesting enough. But there is more: according to others the Déwa Agung incapacitated the warships' guns and afflicted their crews with diarrhea and vomiting by merely glancing in their direction.<sup>8</sup> So what did the Déwa Agung mean by the epithet 'white eyes?' And how did he produce such a dramatic effect with his own dark eyes?

With that potent expression the Déwa Agung clearly was not just describing the Resident's appearance. 'White Eyes' might seem to parallel van Hoëvell's unflattering remarks

7 For examples, see Adas (1989); Connolly and Anderson (1987); Sahlins (1981); as well as the 1980 film *The Gods Must Be Crazy*. British missionaries often presented looking glasses and even, on occasion, spectacles to Tswana and other African peoples (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991).

8 People shared these stories during my fieldwork in 1985-86 on memories of colonial encounters and on the meaning of power. As I discuss elsewhere (Wiener 1995), most were elderly members of Klungkung cadet lines, who were happy someone was interested in what they knew.

about the appearance of Badung's high priest, expressing an aesthetic assessment of the novel phenomenon of light-colored eyes. But apart from the fact that by 1902 the blue, green, and grey eyes of some Dutchmen were nothing new, that the Déwa Agung addresses his interlocutor as White Eyes (to startling effect), rather than describing him this way to a potentially appreciative audience (as van Hoëvell does), undercuts the glib comparison. In short, he is not merely commenting on the Resident's appearance; instead, he brings to bear the power of his voice and of his own eyes.

The words, though, matter. Another story, not about colonial encounters at all, offers some insight into what that phrase says about how the Déwa Agung understood Dutch envoys. As a Balinese version of the expulsion from the garden, it is rather more humorous than Genesis, however:

There was a time, it is said, when humans had completely black eyes, like dogs. At that time they could, like dogs, see gods and spirits. One day, however, a god walked by a person sitting in the woods. The latter called out 'Where are you going, lord? [the customary Balinese greeting]'. The god was deeply offended at being addressed in those circumstances. From that time on human eyes have been partially white, so they no longer can see such beings.

Here the white of the human eye impedes visual access to other-than-human entities. Between the odd color of the pupils of many European eyes, reminiscent of the blue cast of the eyes of elderly Balinese (who often have poor vision), and European modes of speech and action, I suggest that the Déwa Agung took light-colored Dutch eyes as evidence of a profound blindness to divinity. Significantly, *buta*, the Balinese term for 'blind,' also refers to entities that may have destructive effects on human welfare, and may take over when humans act out of strong and immoderate emotions or desires.<sup>9</sup> Constituent elements of the cosmos and the body, they are given regular offerings, *buta-yadnya* (small

ones every fifteen days, but also massive rites, such as the one held 'to cleanse the land' after the bombing of a nightclub in Kuta in 2002), to keep them in check and ensure their benevolence; tooth-filing, a key rite of passage, aims to reduce their impact on individuals. Balinese frequently play with the dual meaning of *buta*, 'for in their grip,' as I heard on more than one occasion, 'people are blind,' unable to see beyond their own desires, and therefore inclined to act out of negative passions such as anger, greed, confusion, jealousy or other strong emotions, without thought of consequences and in ways that keep gods at a distance. Conversely, people also told me that anger makes one blind in this way. This, I suggest, is what the Déwa Agung implied in calling the Dutch envoy 'White Eyes,' and what motivated his show of force.

Just as no Balinese commentary exists concerning van Hoëvell's visit to Badung (which involved nothing Balinese would regard as worth remembering), there is no trace of this event in colonial archives. Even if a Dutch envoy did indeed faint or the crew of a Netherlands Indies warship suffered acute gastrointestinal distress, it is highly unlikely that any colonial official would have attributed these to the glare of Klungkung's ruler—which would, of course, only justify the Déwa Agung's epithet further for those Balinese present on such an occasion, or for those who recalled and told these tales.

Stories like this one make claims about power even if they do not parallel those of van Hoëvell. If van Hoëvell's book contributed to shaping colonial policies and attitudes, tales told in Klungkung referred to people long dead, in what was by then merely a small district in the Indonesian nation-state. Not long before I heard this story district bureaucrats began to commemorate Klungkung's 1908 conquest, and their activities included a seminar and publication. But such official projects ignored elders and the stories they knew; by telling them to me some hoped to preserve them in some form.

<sup>9</sup> *Buta* is often translated into English as demon, but this is misleading. Some *buta*, the *panca mahabhuta*, are, as in the Sanskrit term from which this Balinese word derives, constitutive elements of the material world, including the human body: earth, water, fire, wind or breath, and space or ether (*akasa*). Others make up the minions or retinue of deities, or even constitute the negative form of deities. They often are spoken of as the *buta-kala*, *kala* referring to time and the god of time (*Betara Kala*) as well as to entities very similar to *buta* in the way they are represented or dealt with ritually. Balinese rites do not aim to exorcise them, as one might a demon, but rather to keep them in check.

This Déwa Agung was not the only person to call Dutchmen ‘White Eyes’.<sup>10</sup> His grandson, I was told, shouted ‘Kill me, White Eyes!’ to the Dutch soldiers who found him wounded, under a pile of corpses, when they conquered Klungkung in 1908. Nor are van Hoëvell’s the only spectacles to appear in accounts of travels among the Balinese. When British naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace went to Lombok in 1856, he met a Balinese ruler and several court priests. Wallace’s spectacles ‘were tried in succession by three or four old men, who could not make out why they could not see through them’ (1962 [1869]: 128). Even more intriguing, the Déwa Agung of my anecdote wore glasses himself: he asked a visitor to Klungkung in 1881 to send him a pair of spectacles from Java stronger than those he then wore (Jacobs 1883:108).

Clearly, European optics piqued the interest of Balinese priests and rulers. Perhaps they were all myopic or far-sighted, and simply appreciated ocular technologies.<sup>11</sup> Priests and princes were more likely than other Balinese at the time to read and write palm-leaf texts, and therefore more likely to value devices that could improve their vision. But both the interest in spectacles and the Déwa Agung’s potent insult also suggest that members of Bali’s ruling class found something important in what Europeans did with their eyes, that they inferred a relationship between spectacles (which sometimes could blind), light-colored eyes, and acts judged as arrogant, belligerent and rapacious.<sup>12</sup>

## European Ocularcentrism and Optical Technology

Optical technologies carried a robust semiotic load in colonial texts not only because of the changing significance of technology, in general, in signaling European superiority, but also because of deeply entrenched visual ideologies in Euro-American societies. As many have noted, ocularcentrism saturates European understandings of knowledge and truth in both ordinary language and philosophical analysis.<sup>13</sup> An extraordinary number of terms for cognitive operations involve vision: English-speakers talk of ‘seeing’ to refer to gaining knowledge or forming a clear mental operation, of ‘views’ to refer to opinions, of ‘insights’ and the ‘mind’s eye’. Etymologically, *idea* comes from a Greek verb meaning ‘to see’.<sup>14</sup> Dutch employs similar tropes: *denkbeeld*, ‘idea,’ translates literally as ‘thought image’; to consider, *beschouwen*, cognate with English *show*, involves looking over; and contemplation is *bespiegeling*—a *spiegel* being a mirror (compare English *speculate*).

Ocularcentrism entails more than the visual metaphors embedded in European languages, however. Vision became central to philosophers and to technologies of truth production in new ways beginning in the seventeenth century, with the emergence of science’s ‘modest witnesses’ (Shapin and Schaffer 1985), innovations in optics and art, and a philosophical turn to epistemology. Lenses became iconic of these novel visual practices.

The Dutch were strongly associated with these developments. In their seventeenth century ‘Golden Age,’ financed in large part by

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10 Balinese were not the only people to call Euro-American colonizers by this epithet. A colonial official in the Batak region of Sumatra reports the use of this phrase during an insurrection around 1915 (van der Meulen 1981:45); various people have told me that some Native Americans used the same expression, but what it meant I do not know.

11 To be sure, in colonized regions of Indonesia, as well as in states such as Siam that never came under direct European rule, people often adopted (and adapted) European modes of dress or furnishings (e.g., Schulte Nordholt 1997; Peleggi 2002).

12 Earlier relations with the Dutch East India Company might have provided a political precedent for this Balinese interest in spectacles. Company agents presented two pairs of spectacles as a gift to the ruler of Palembang in the western part of the archipelago on at least one occasion (Andaya 1989:29). Whether such gifts were Company policy, however, and if they ever were made to Balinese rulers, I do not know.

13 See Levin 1993 and Jay 1993, who traces ocularcentrism to the Greeks, and explores its complex (and contradictory) consequences in Western thought.

14 For a full discussion of such visual metaphors, see Classen 1993, who also shows that other senses, especially touch, played a role in the development of English terms for cognitive processes. She contrasts the distancing and objectifying effect of vision-based terms with the activity and effort suggested by those based in touch.

the Dutch East India Company's monopoly over the spice trade, the Netherlands became the center of optical science and technology, the foremost site not only for cartography (Schmidt 2003) but also for the manufacture of and experimentation with instruments to extend the eye's range, including spectacles. During the same years Dutch artists were prolifically producing an art of the 'real,' developing new genres such as landscapes and still lifes, and depicting everyday life. Indeed Vermeer was born in the same year and in the same city as van Leeuwenhoek, famed for his experiments with microscopic lenses, and, like van Leeuwenhoek, Vermeer experimented with optical technologies (Huerta 2003).

For Alpers (1983), art paved the way for science. The Dutch trusted lenses, she contends, because they already were used to a particular kind of pictorial representation. She describes seventeenth-century Holland in general as a 'visual culture'. Visitors were astonished to find paintings, prints, and even maps, in inns and bourgeois homes. According to Alpers, 'like lenses, maps were referred to as glasses to bring objects before the eye' (1983:133).<sup>15</sup> In public anatomical theaters curious onlookers could watch experts teach anatomy through the dissection of human bodies, with Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp* only one of many such scenes produced by Dutch artists and printmakers.<sup>16</sup>

That Descartes and Locke—who in different ways presented human knowledge as a relation between mind and world—spent several years living in the Netherlands may explain the role that vision plays in their otherwise opposed positions. Descartes' description of the mind is awash with metaphors centered on clarity and light, and he was sufficiently intrigued by Dutch experiments to write a book on optics. For Locke knowledge derives from sense perception, but

sight forms the most comprehensive sense; he constantly draws analogies between understanding and the eye. As Rorty (1979) notes, from this time on, the predominant trope of epistemology was ocular.

Thus European sciences, art, and philosophy came to entangle reality with what eyes could perceive. But not just any kind of visual perception would do. True knowledge mirrored—another visual metaphor—a world accessible to specific kinds of examination. These differentiated active, observing subjects from passive, observable objects; techniques of detachment and standardization rendered the knowing subject insignificant and yielded what Latour terms 'immutable mobiles' (1986). This was knowledge of eyes that could see without being seen, as in Foucault's discussion of the panopticon.

Visual practices, in short, became ineluctably entwined not only with knowledge but also with power. Foucault (1979) famously traces these relations among vision, knowledge, and power in a range of emergent disciplines and spaces. (Here, too, the Dutch took the lead: Europe's first penal institution, the infamous Rasphuis, was in Amsterdam [Foucault 1979: 120-21]).<sup>17</sup> But Foucault limits himself to Europe, ignoring the role that exploration, trade, resource extraction, and colonialism played in the knowledge-power associations he identifies. Marx insists that 'the forming of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world down to the present' (Marx 1974: 96): this is assuredly the case with European vision.<sup>18</sup> Neither Foucault nor Marx, however, connects the developing hegemony of epistemologies based on practices of observation and objectivism to the growing global domination by North Atlantic corporations and polities. Only recently, in fact, has the 'reciprocal constitution' of 'the global empires of Europe and modern

15 Some accounts of modern ocularcentrism attribute the growing importance of visualist epistemologies to the rise of print-media and literacy (see Classen 1993, who summarizes arguments by Ong and McLuhan). In this regard, the Netherlands was also a center for the production and consumption of books. It has been said that more books were printed in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century than in the rest of Europe altogether—and the literacy rate was equally unsurpassed (Haley 1972).

16 Dutch traders brought to Asia medical books printed in Holland that represented human anatomy through images of dissection. According to Kuriyama (1992), in Japan they not only generated interest in European forms of knowledge, but also stimulated a virtual revolution in modes of representation.

17 For the Rasphuis and seventeenth-century Dutch culture see Schama 1988.

18 Both Levin (1993) and Classen (1993) cite this passage.

regimes of visibility' been explicitly recognized (Ramaswary 2014:1).

Hence more than a taste for the visual may be read into the omnipresent maps on the walls of Dutch homes. And when it came to making non-Europeans the object of the scientific gaze the Dutch were again at the forefront. The Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences (the same society of which van Hoëvell was later president) was the world's first learned society concerned with matters Asian. And the Dutch also established the world's first Ethnology Museum, in Leiden in 1837. By the time van Hoëvell visited Bali, visual practices were being connected to imperial ambitions and particular forms of reality not only by ethnology museums but also by photography (and soon world's fairs). Indeed, only after photography's invention did Vermeer achieve international fame, and only then was Dutch Golden Age art labeled 'realistic'.<sup>19</sup> This was the visual culture informing van Hoëvell's narrative.

### Eyes Knowledge/Power, and Reality in Bali

To appreciate the Déwa Agung's diagnosis of the Dutch as 'white-eyed', as well as his own potent ocularity, discussion of European visualism requires a symmetrical engagement with what knowing, seeing, and power entailed in pre-colonial Bali. As Balinese anecdotes already suggest, the visual ideologies and practices in which Balinese rulers or priests fostered expertise differed from the gaze characterizing the epistemology of empire and its particular constructions of the world.

Pre-colonial Balinese visual and narrative arts contain nothing like Dutch portraiture. They do not detail what a lens-trained eye might see, or represent motionless objects or views. Instead, they highlight events unfolding in time or provide evidence of influence.<sup>20</sup> Take, for instance, descriptions of royal audiences in Balinese chronicles. These linger on every feature of royal dress and list in excruciating detail the important personages present. Rather than emphasizing a reality visible to the eye, however, accounts of such events stress their impact on those attending—and hopefully on readers or auditors too—and are strewn with subtle allusions to the ruler's allure, which extends beyond his human subjects to more-than-human allies and constitutes evidence of his power (see below).<sup>21</sup>

As Vickers (2005) demonstrates, nineteenth century Balinese arts were interconnected. Narrative texts could be read, of course, though that process rarely involved a silent solitary reader. Commonly, however, they were treated as sources for improvised performance: actors incorporated lines of written poetry into the enactment of a single section that simultaneously commented on current events. Balinese painters presented multiple episodes from such narratives on a single canvas. Nowadays known as *klasik* (classic), and produced mostly in Klungkung, this style of art depicted and depicts legendary heroes, deities, and historical personages through iconographic conventions of headdress, skin color, body type, and mouth and eye shape. Such representations show little interest in what Euro-Americans call

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19 Rydell speaks of 'the growing importance of visual arts in the late nineteenth century,' and the cognitive shift the move toward photography afforded (1984: 44-5).

20 Consider, for example, the following crowd scene from a nineteenth century historical poem about a ritual in Klungkung (Vickers 1991: 121):

People came to watch (the performances)  
 Pushing and shoving each other as they crowded in to see.  
 Those who were right at the back  
 Got to watch by climbing on people's backs  
 And making themselves obvious by sticking their heads from side to side.  
 They stood on tiptoe panting,  
 And still couldn't see anything.  
 But there was no way out if they tried to leave.

21 Thus, from the *Babad Dalem*: 'His teeth were rubbed so they shone like pearls. He had chewed betel twice, and his lips had a trace of lime on them, like a drop of honey, and his gums were reddened. The hearts of all who saw him, looking like the god of love, were enchanted, and all of the young women were disturbed' (Wiener 1995: 115).

realism. Or, to put it another way, Balinese visual and narrative arts, in conjunction with other activities, assemble a different real.

Balinese cognitive vocabularies also draw on different idioms than European ones. Words commonly translated as ‘knowing,’ ‘thinking,’ and ‘understanding’ have nothing to do with sight or even sensory perception. Balinese terms for knowing—*tawang*, *uning*, *weruh*—imply expertise and skill: not knowing *that* so much as knowing *how* (Hobart 1985, 1995). And terms for ‘thinking’ and ‘understanding’ simultaneously invoke desire, will, and intent.

Consider, for instance, *midep*, ‘to understand,’ from the root *idep*. Said to be what distinguishes humans (and deities) from animals, with whom humans share the faculties of energy and voice, *idep* refers not only to a host of mental activities (it can be glossed as knowing, imagining, thinking, believing, and experiencing—processes that epistemologists or cognitive psychologists would be hard put to regard as equivalent), but also to interpersonal acts such as paying attention, taking to heart, and obeying (Zoetmulder 1982:623).<sup>22</sup> *Manah* refers not only to thoughts but also to feelings; its near equivalents *kayun* and *keneh* mean both ‘to think’ and ‘to will’ or ‘to wish’. In contrast to epistemologies that treat thought as a product of detached observation, in Bali it entails focused intent. Perhaps most striking, *kaadnyanan*, a term for exceptional and profound knowledge, also refers to power or efficacy. Conversely, words for seeing (*ngaksi*, *nyingakin*, and *nyuranin*, distinguished, like many Balinese verbs, by the status of the seer) imply nothing regarding knowledge.

*Kaadnyanan* brings us back to the Déwa Agung’s ability to render a Dutch Resident unconscious or to make sailors sick by his glare and voice. Earlier I suggested that assessments of the significance of light-colored European eyes might be understood in relation to the

claim that the white of human eyes prevents them from seeing divinities. If Balinese cannot see deities, however, vital activities aim to relate to them in other ways. For Balinese, power and efficacy result not only from alliances with particular persons, or the possession of certain things, but most crucially from associations with more-than-human entities: deities, ancestors, *buta*, and spirits.<sup>23</sup> Sometimes these entities initiate contact, through frightening visions, a temporary bout of illness, or another unpleasant experience, or by gifts of, for instance, gems or unusual things. More often humans seek to establish or perpetuate connections, through the performance of rites, the mediation of certain material objects, the study of particular texts, and/or the performance of ascetic acts, including meditation, breath-control, nocturnal visits to temples, and dietary restrictions.

Here we might consider the example of studying texts, seemingly a familiar way to acquire knowledge through the mediation of one’s eyes. But in Bali this path requires considerable work. Texts of many genres are written in an elusive and allusive style, and may offer different, even contradictory, accounts of correspondences between letters of the Balinese alphabet, calendrical units, body organs, social ranks, and more-than-human entities. But the goal in studying them is less theoretical comprehension than a practical mastery of a particular ability. And even study requires more than mental labor. My adoptive Balinese father, an unconsecrated Brahmana who studied a variety of texts, told me repeatedly that if I wanted to understand his enigmatic allusions to ‘the letters of the body’ I must learn to ‘know myself’ by eating, as he once did, nothing but potatoes (a filling and cheap but far less desirable substitute for rice) for 42 days, and by learning to master my reactions. Such knowledge is embodied, but not sensory.<sup>24</sup>

Those who engage in such myriad practices seek relations with entities that ordinarily cannot

22 Although Zoetmulder titles his dictionary Old Javanese-English, the texts on which he bases his definitions were all collected in Bali, and are still known to traditional Balinese intellectuals. This range of meanings seems fairly close to what such persons would understand the same root to signify in contemporary usage.

23 I use these terms for the sake of convenience, though, with the exception of ancestors, each has problematic metaphysical entailments.

24 Some Balinese intellectuals assert that humans have ten senses: the five familiar to Euro-Americans and five involving action (speech, manual dexterity, sexuality, excretion, and walking; see Bakker 1993: 71, 115, 258).

be seen.<sup>25</sup> Balinese friends with such interests have told me that what is most real, what people call *niskala*, is undetectable through ordinary perception.<sup>26</sup> Students of such matters (and texts) refer to the highest register of such reality with epithets such as ‘Emptiness’ (*Sunia*) and ‘Inconceivable’ (*Acintya*). Paradox and indirection inflect talk about these topics, as when friends explained to me why ‘full places are empty (of *niskala* forces) while empty places are full’. Caution is also common. Indeed, Balinese are generally guarded about claims to knowledge, but they are particularly so in speaking about extraordinary forms of efficacy (*kasaktian*), involving capacities beyond those of most people and about *niskala* beings, as in the way Anak Agung Pekak Gaci punctuated his anecdote about his powerful ancestor with ‘so it is said,’ ‘I’ve been told,’ and the dialogic ‘isn’t that so?’

One cannot analyze such practices with the tools of epistemologists, for whom truth involves a correspondence between representation and reality. Truth here is not a matter of matching an idea to a perceptible world; instead, it involves assessing likely connections by demonstrations of efficacy. In addition, not only does knowing require activity, but *what* is known is hardly passive. Thus, when liturgies of the kind Pedanda Agung likely deployed in his rites enjoin a priest to *idep*—‘to think of,’ ‘intend,’ or ‘imagine’—a named *niskala* entity, they aim to make them present, to activate their powers in a particular time and place.

Such statements suggest that vision does play a role in Balinese knowledge/power, but the eye here is not that of a distanced observing subject, nor is it in theory identical for all subjects. Rather, it is formed by a praxis that is

simultaneously embodied, intellectual, and affective.<sup>27</sup> What the eye can see—and do—depends on a person’s capacities, inherited or acquired. Some people, for example, are born with the ability to see spirits.<sup>28</sup> There are also procedures through which one can make normally invisible entities visible (though texts that contain such instructions warn the user not to be frightened). Through other, more morally dubious practices (such as sorcery), one may affect what others see, by, e.g., appearing in a form other than that of a human. In short, some Balinese agents cultivate visual experiences of a kind that European philosophers abjured as either impossible or deceptive. And even here the root of *kakawian*, a term for what we might call ‘visions,’ has nothing to do with sight; it means ‘to compose’ or ‘to write,’ as well as referring to the language in which older texts are written.

Thus Balinese speak of eyes (or at least of some eyes) less as organs of knowledge than of efficacy. There is, for instance, a set of analogies in Balinese between the sun, *Surya*, the ‘eye of the day’ that witnesses human action; *pedanda*, the suns who officiate at and thus witness their clients’ rites (addressed and referred to by their clients as ‘my sun,’ *suryan titiangé*, and whose eyes, *penyuryanan*, are spoken of with a word that derives from that root); and rulers, the suns of their realm, *suryan jagat*, whose presence as witnesses at state rituals hopefully ensured their success. And the potent gaze of such persons could make others serene—or nauseated with fear. In general, Balinese talk less of what eyes see than of what can be seen in eyes. A friend, for example, remarked when I showed him some photos of pre-colonial Balinese: ‘People were more powerful in those days. You can see it in their eyes’.

25 Sometimes, however, one may detect the presence of deities through a sweet scent.

26 The making and use of images permeates Hindu and Buddhist practices elsewhere in Asia, as well as earlier in Indonesia. Visual practices such as consecration rites to open the eyes of such images, or *darshan* in contemporary devotional Hinduism in India in which people not only go to temples to see images of deities but to be seen by them as well (e.g., Babb 1981), are not, however, part of Balinese Hinduism. Indeed, it is noteworthy that when gods ‘come down’ to earth in temple rituals, they inhabit empty seats, piles of cloth, or small generic images, rather than the highly differentiated forms found in India.

27 Wikan (1990) argues (though I think she overstates the case) that it is impossible to distinguish feeling and thinking in Balinese and that it is therefore best to speak of thinking-feeling or feeling-thinking.

28 A social hierarchy informs assessments of such abilities, however. Some regard such a capacity negatively when not controlled by will; those with such experiences may seek help from healers. On the other hand, certain kinds of healers are precisely persons who have had such experiences in the past, and maintain permeability to invisible agents. Often non-elite women become healers of this kind.

Potent eyes do not only exist in the past, of course. During a visit to a *pedanda* whom I hoped to interview, the Balinese friends who accompanied me found his intense and deliberate gaze disconcerting. They drew my attention to the way he stared into your eyes as if seeing right through you. ‘All he had to do is look at me,’ said one, ‘and I felt afraid’. Another friend informed me that to return such a gaze is to engage in a silent battle to see who is more powerful. Those in the know, he added, can always tell a powerful *balian*, an expert in healing and harming, from his eyes.

Balinese make much of eyes as well in both classic painting conventions and everyday social life. In the former, the shape of a figure’s eyes indicates his or her character. Narrow, almond-shaped eyes mark those who are *alus*, refined or capable of exercising restraint. By contrast, large, round, and/or bulging eyes indicate those who are rough (*kasar*), hard (*keras*), or terrifying (*aeng*). Such beings at best act impulsively or boldly, but typically exhibit behavior marked by excess, that stems from unconstrained emotion, such as desire, rage or greed. Hence *buta* and similar entities, or monsters (*raksasa*), are depicted with such eyes (and often fangs and tusks, and large stomachs, as well).

In addition, friends sometimes told me that love, or at least attraction, begins with the eyes, with the play of glances through which interest is conveyed. Someone may become enthralled by the luster of a suitor’s eyes, and that effect can be achieved deliberately, by asking an expert to inscribe certain letters or figures with water or honey on one’s lips and eyes. Seeking such an ability is not limited to those in search of amorous adventures but is a dimension of political praxis as well (Wiener 1995).

Given different ideologies and training, Dutch and Balinese eyes also saw different things. Compare, for example, accounts of Goa Lawah, a temple named for its cave filled with thousands of bats. A colonial agent named van Bloemen Waanders (who declared the temple ‘not at all remarkable’) described it by estimating its dimensions (length, seventy feet; breadth, twenty-five feet; height, twenty-five to thirty

feet), and commenting on its stone deposits, its lack of stalagmites, and the ‘pestilent atmosphere generated by layers of bat excrement’. According to him, ‘superstition and fear . . . keep the Balinese from going inside these caves . . .’, in contrast, obviously, to himself (van Bloemen Waanders 1870).

For Balinese, however, Goa Lawah is not a natural phenomenon but a place of power. Hence Balinese see it differently. People seeking relations with the *niskala* realm may meditate at the shrines just inside the cave in the dead of night; a temple priest there informed me that it is not dark if one concentrates one’s thoughts on the deity there. With such goals, the cave’s dimensions are irrelevant, and its odor an element of the self-mastery needed to achieve one’s aims. People say that the cave leads to Bali’s most important temple; an eighteenth-century prince once traversed its entire length. But to appreciate how Goa Lawah can generate power requires a different experience of it than van Bloemen Waanders’. What made colonial agents’ eyes white was their disinterest in such practices.<sup>29</sup> They paid attention only to what their eyes could see, to the kinds of things Dutch painters so lovingly depicted, for instance, or that contemporary natural sciences highlighted.

Such Balinese practices should not be assimilated too quickly to what is familiar, as enchanted and/or pre-modern. To propose that European theories and modes of knowing are to Balinese as empirical is to mystical (and implicitly to characterize Balinese experiences as entailing beliefs rather than forms of knowledge), obfuscates Euro-American ontological commitments and ignores alternative philosophical traditions.<sup>30</sup> Such characterizations presuppose reality to be as hegemonic European epistemologies present it, rather than always constructed by practices, which enlist specific kinds of nonhumans.

Hence I argue that there were differences between what Dutch envoys described and what Balinese rulers were up to. Which brings us back to van Hoëvell’s spectacles.

29 Which is not to say that no Europeans manifested an interest in such phenomena; the tradition of European occultism (a word also linked, note, to the sense of sight) demonstrates otherwise.

30 I am thinking here of Whitehead and of William James’ radical empiricism.

### Revisiting Badung in 1847

Given that Europeans themselves took lenses to index their superiority, and that they clearly were effective in accomplishing their goals, it is perhaps not surprising that members of Bali's ruling class took an interest in such instruments. Perhaps they thought that spectacles would enable them to see as Dutch envoys did, or to appropriate their powers. Yet these devices apparently also were linked to blindness to the entities crucial to the practices of Balinese priests and rulers, and might account for Dutch avarice and bellicosity.

Thus the flip side of the interest Balinese manifested in Dutch spectacles was the Déwa Agung's exasperation with the whiteness of Dutch eyes. Note that in 1881, when he requested new lenses, the comportment of visiting Dutch officials suggested that they acknowledged his power. But as colonial policies shifted towards increased intervention in the 1890s, envoys became less deferential and more demanding, and the whiteness of their eyes became increasingly relevant. It matters that the same ruler who wore Dutch spectacles also named their debility. Perhaps only someone who had experienced their optical technology first-hand could 'see' its limitations. Moreover, not only does he appear through colonial reports a canny observer of Dutch mores, skilled at playing their games when he chose, in Klungkung he has a reputation as a man of power. Some say that is why there are no photographs of him, as there are of his brother, and of his son and heir. Klungkung's last court priest had heard from his father that the Dutch made repeated efforts to photograph him but that none of the images turned out. He could not, as the *pedanda* put it, be 'caught' in a camera lens. In short, a ruler powerful in Balinese terms, who had some experience with Dutch visual technology, could not be rendered as a fixed immobile portrait.<sup>31</sup>

With such insights into Balinese practices, can we illuminate the Balinese side of van Hoëvell's meeting with Pedanda Agung Sindhuwati? Certainly understanding something

of what counts as knowledge and reality in Bali subverts van Hoëvell's droll lesson about European superiority.

Lange's explanation concerning van Hoëvell's spectacles would sound very different in the Balinese words that he presumably used, for in saying that they were unsuitable for 'old people' he would evoke particular associations. The literal, high Balinese gloss for 'old person' is *anak lingsir*. Being an *anak lingsir* is not, however, a matter of age: a seventeen-year-old ruler would be an 'old person,' whereas a man of eighty who had never married would be spoken of as 'still young'. *Anak lingsir* are persons responsible for the welfare of others: priests, rulers, heads of households, people whose skills and connections to both humans and deities enable them to organize rites, or those involved with texts or healing. In claiming that an old person who wore van Hoëvell's spectacles could go blind, Lange, however inadvertently, suggests they could lose their connection with *niskala* forces: in effect, they could become white-eyed.

Some have cited this little tale as proof of Mads Lange's cleverness, of his expertise in dealing with Balinese.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps the joke was on Lange, or on van Hoëvell. Certainly Lange's lie undermined van Hoëvell's status, for if his glasses were not fit for a Balinese 'old person,' he could not after all have been a priest of much power and knowledge. At the same time Lange inadvertently explained to Badung's high priest why Dutchmen had such strange eyes.

As we know from the Déwa Agung, of course, there is no inherent incompatibility between using European optical devices and associating with Balinese gods. Nowadays Balinese enjoy the full array of visual technologies—not only eyeglasses, but computers, televisions, and cameras (often on their 'hand phones')—while continuing to make regular offerings to secure relations with appropriate entities, and, hopefully, to ensure the continued good operation of these devices.

Yet some still find Euro-Americans white-eyed. While in this article I treat Balinese stories as memory traces, they also speak to the moment

31 This particular narrator implicitly contrasted this ruler with his son, under whose reign Klungkung was conquered and who is not recalled as powerful. For other ways that the Dutch were unable to 'catch' this particular ruler see Wiener 1995. Photography no longer connotes power or its absence.

32 See Nielsen 1927: 94 and Schulte Nordholt 1981.

at which they were told. By the 1980s, mass tourism, which began in the colonial 1920s, was in full flower, even if Klungkung remained on its periphery. An industry associated with its own particular visual technologies and habits (the infamous ‘tourist gaze’), photographic and painted images of bare-breasted Balinese beauties in the 1920s and 1930s led some to declare the island a paradise. Tourism and its omnipresent imaging affected the optics of encounter. For one, Balinese developed a new style of painting, in part influenced by European expatriate artists and by novel patrons (such as anthropologists Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, who conducted fieldwork in Bali in the 1930s and commissioned hundreds of paintings in the town of Batuan [H. Geertz 1994]).

Then too the ubiquity of cameras naturalized their effects. Mead, in her analysis of the 25,000 still photographs Bateson took that served as the basis for their analysis of ‘Balinese character,’ wrote

The Balinese are unusually photogenic and tend to compose in groups so that half the work of photography is done for the photographer. They were unself-conscious about photography, accepting it as part of a life which was in many ways always lived on a stage (Mead 1970:259).<sup>33</sup>

Balinese have developed their own wry responses to camera-wielding foreigners. Some paint the tourists, depicting them as busily inserting their cameras in the paths and faces of Balinese trying to go about their business, especially when that business involves highly photogenic rituals to connect with *niskala* entities. Such photography may itself involve some blindness. An even more amused response appeared in a painting in the 1980s by well-known Batuan artist Madé Budi: it portrays Euro-American tourists surfing and cavorting in the seas around the island, oblivious to the bulging-eyed, long-toothed monsters that surround them as well as to the deities in the sky above.

### Optical Mediators: A Last Look at Van Hoëvell’s Spectacles

A new visual culture redefines both what it is to see and what there is to see.

-Bruno Latour

When Balinese call Europeans white-eyed they are not saying that they cannot see that *niskala* forces surround them, as in Madé Budi’s painting, for neither can Balinese. Engagement with *niskala* beings is, as already noted, not a matter of looking but of acting, in ways that keep *buta* at bay and make deities more present. Such acts have an effect on the world, one that, a Balinese acquaintance suggested, tourists actually feel, since it is what attracts them to the island in the first place.

Earlier, I contrasted such Balinese practices with the ocularcentrism both embedded in etymology and taking fresh forms as a new visual culture emerged in places such as The Netherlands. That new visual culture did indeed redefine what it meant to see, as well as what there was to see. The contrast with Bali, however, is not as stark as it may appear. Much of the North Atlantic material I addressed concerns visual ideologies, statements about the importance of looking in science or governance, or about realism in the arts. European elites began to claim that they uniquely saw things as they really are: the people, landscapes, and interiors of bourgeois homes depicted on canvases; the natural world observed by empirical sciences; a Balinese *pedanda* who, despite the way Balinese treat him or he regards himself, is in fact ugly, dirty, and prone to grimacing. Good observation, by revealing the world, was held to yield unprecedented mastery. Such ideologies, of course, are crucial to colonizing projects of many kinds; these visual cultures not only are now hegemonic but continue to be ineluctably linked to assertions of Euro-American advancement.

<sup>33</sup> This theatrical metaphor is startlingly reminiscent of Clifford Geertz, who developed it into a key trope for Balinese culture (1966, 1973, 1976, and of course 1980). There is no space to pursue this in detail, but I find Fabian’s critique of visualism highly relevant to the ways both Mead and Geertz situate themselves as spectators and the kinds of claims they make about Balinese. Despite their advocacy of the culture concept, their analyses of Bali fall flat, especially when compared to their prior ethnographic research elsewhere. Seeing through their very un-Balinese spectacles, these anthropologists, both of whom were excellent observers, end up with cardboard Balinese, whose motivations and actions appear utterly bizarre. For critiques of Geertz’s theatrical metaphor in particular see Hobart 1983, 1991, and n.d.

Since vision does not preoccupy Balinese intellectuals, there is much less to say about Balinese visual ideologies. But once attention shifts to what Europeans are doing with their eyes, rather than what they say about looking, they appear much less dissimilar to Balinese—or at least dissimilarity takes different forms. For instead of passively observing eyes and what they see of already existing phenomena, modern European visual cultures require lots of activity, involving many, many objects.

Contrary to visualist ideologies, neither laboratory sciences nor ‘realistic’ art merely derives from close observation of a pre-existent reality. As those conducting empirical studies of science have demonstrated, in laboratories scientists engage in a host of interventions, manufacturing situations that do not exist prior to such work (e.g., Shapin and Schaffer 1985; Latour and Woolgar 1986 [1979]). Labs are not places where people step back and observe, but rather bustling sites of intense engagement with artifacts. Vision certainly plays a role in scientific knowledge—witnesses had to look to see feathers fall in Boyle’s air pump, for example—but such events were fabricated, thoroughly constructed. In short, no one simply saw ‘nature’. The same is true of making maps, of surveys, and of course, as Fabian notes, of fieldwork.

It is also the case in ‘the art of description’. Whether in the staging necessary to set up a tableau, or in the use of specific media to achieve particular effects (brushes, canvas, paints, lighting, or instruments such as a camera obscura), immense activity is needed to generate an impression of casual looking and of happenstance viewing. In general, ‘realist’ art cuts from the scene represented all of the work done to arrange and stage, including the myriad sessions in which things are placed just so to create the sense of a moment captured. The artist, too, disappears, discernible only through evidence of a point of view. What is rendered on canvas is the outcome of complex maneuvers requiring myriad artifacts.

In short, it takes considerable labor to produce an image of unmediated contact. The trope of vision ignores the constant mediation

necessary to generate knowledge and produce power. For that matter, even spectacles do not simply render ‘reality’: they only allow wearers to perceive what counts as the norm when an eye of a particular shape is struck by light waves and sends a signal to a human brain; not only is the normative standard an historical construction, but the very differently made eyes and brains of other species assemble different worlds. Visualisms of all stripes elide such assembly.

By ignoring such work, European epistemologists generate an illusion of pure subjects on the one hand, and pure objects—reality—on the other. I find more convincing those who treat reality as the outcome of the collective work of humans and myriad nonhumans.<sup>34</sup> And both Europeans and Balinese do such work. The distinct emphases in Balinese and European anecdotes are not a matter of Balinese being pre-modern, mystical, or religious where Europeans are modern, disenchanting, and scientific. They are rather due to the different nonhumans with which their tellers associate. In laboratories and art studios, Europeans learned new skills for engaging nonhumans. But the nonhumans in question were things rather than *niskala* entities.

Van Hoëvell’s account of his visit to Badung draws on familiar forms of descriptive realism. Van Hoëvell paints a portrait in words—we can almost see the Pedanda. In fact, in this verbal picture he looks extraordinarily like a figure from Dutch Golden Age art, simultaneously individualized as in a portrait and caricatured as in comic scenes of everyday life. What van Hoëvell describes, however, is as mediated as such art genres. What he sees during his visit to the Pedanda has been prepared by familiarity with books in this and related genres, by his involvement in Batavian intellectual and political life, by Mads’s Lange’s translations, by prior experiences with Javanese, by the Protestant rejection of priestly mediation with divinity, and, of course, by his spectacles.

And this brings me back to the story he tells. For in addition to being saturated with the knowledge and power of the imperial gaze, his narrative also draws our attention to that

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34 Here I have in mind not only Latour (1993), who first forced me to think along these lines, but speculative philosophers such as Whitehead, to whom such reading has brought me.

humble object. Pedanda Agung's move to keep van Hoëvell's spectacles abruptly spotlights the crucial work that they do. Without his lenses, van Hoëvell is incapacitated; he might as well, he declares, go back to Batavia. He can see nothing. There would be no clever descriptions of naïve and grotesque figures who expect deference without them. In short, the reality van Hoëvell assembles through his text, which contributes to colonizing strategies and undermines Balinese hierarchies, depends on this artifact.

I began this article with an optical allusion by Ruth Benedict, who drew on spectacles to explain the anthropological concept of culture. She wanted to make readers aware of their eyes and eyeglasses, to look at, rather than through, them. For Benedict, the eye/I that sees is not simply given; it is as much a product of society as of biology. As Marshall Sahlins insists, following Benedict in inserting culture as a mediator between knowing subjects and known objects, 'there is no such thing as an immaculate perception' (1985:146). Nor do lenses, as Benedict reminds us, reveal the truth of the world.

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