

The missing subject

Balinese time and the elimination of history

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**Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Studies 31, 1:
123-172**

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Some grand narratives

A little-known American television serial, *Sledgehammer*, has a small but dedicated Balinese following. In the opening sequence a large white male hand picks up a big revolver on a silk cushion, points it at the camera and a voice says: ‘Trust me. I know what I’m doing.’ The gun instantly fires at the camera/viewers, shattering the lens. Reassured that Bali has finally succumbed to global narratives and that I know what I am doing, we may boldly go where some million and a half tourists a year go, guided by narratologists, anthropological and other, whose self-appointed and often remunerative task it is to explain what it going on.

While Pirandello only had *Six characters in search of an author*, there seem to be hundreds of authors in search of the Balinese. In this Chapter I wish to consider one aspect of that search. It is how certain authors (who include, not coincidentally, some of the most professionally celebrated anthropologists) have depicted Balinese time and character and, in so doing, have constituted Balinese as subjects; or more commonly failed to. Whatever the authors’ differences, paradoxically by focusing on time they have denied Balinese any sense of history, which I argue includes the capacity to reflect critically on their own actions. They have portrayed Balinese as passive subjects of a transcendental agent: their own collective representations, or culture. This culture in turn is unitary, insular, timeless and ahistorical.

The authors write as if there were some abstract essence, Balinese culture, which forms a logically consistent and sociologically integrated system, isolated from the rest of the world. It is timeless in that its essential features have remained, if not constant, at least constant in their ability to restructure events according to a fixed cultural template, leaving Balinese musing sadly on their inability to match past perfection. Deprived of any sense of dialectical relationship with the past, Balinese culture is ahistorical, unreflexive and unselfcritical. It devotes itself to spectacle and romance. Absorbed in itself, the Balinese state – an instantiation of that transcendental agent – wobbled along merrily until it not so much collapsed in the face of superior Dutch firepower as it was finally liberated from the vulgarities of power to attain its apotheosis as pure simulacrum. Such a representation of people as passive subjects of their own collective representations is not peculiar to Bali of course. It underpins orientalism and anthropology as the study of collective representations or culture equally. Bali’s task in the grand world division of the Other is to exemplify a particular aesthetic cul-de-sac of the human condition.

Should you think I exaggerate, consider this quotation from Clifford Geertz’s *Negara*:

The stupendous cremations, tooth filings, temple dedications, pilgrimages, and blood sacrifices, mobilizing hundreds and even thousands of people and great quantities of wealth, were not means to political ends: they were the ends themselves, they were what the state was for. Court ceremonialism was the driving force of court politics; and mass ritual was not a device to shore up the state, but rather the state, even in its final gasp, was a device for the enactment of mass ritual. Power served pomp, not pomp power (1980: 13).

Nor was this depiction of a brief, if gloriously self-absorbed, moment. Geertz continues:

The scale of things varied, and their brilliance, as well as the details of their immediate expression. But not, as far as I can see, between, say, 1343 [the conquest by Majapahit] and 1906 [the conquest by the Dutch], what they were all about (1980: 134, my parentheses)¹

The drawback of this beguiling image is that it bears precious little relationship to Balinese, their neighbours', travellers' and, later, Dutch accounts of what was going on. It is hard to square, for instance, with the scope of Balinese military activities at different times, both within the island in the depredations of Gusti Panji Sakti of Bulèlèng, and beyond in the Balinese involvement in the slave trade and conquest.

What is involved in Geertz's grand, if idiosyncratic, vision of Balinese history as a series of *tableaux vivants*? For a start he chose to eschew the dreary business of investigating the sources which exist and critically evaluating them, a task he left to later intellectual under-labourers (Schulte Nordholt 1988, Vickers 1989, 1995a), whose studies, most effectively if unfortunately, toll the knell for his imaginative reconstruction. Geertz focused instead on the Balinese 'symbology' of kingship (1980: 98-120). The problem is that, on his own account, symbols are precisely those kinds of cultural 'inscriptions', which are peculiarly timeless and resistant to change (1973c), which act to 'establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men' (1966: 4). The kinds of representations that Geertz selects are those least likely to encourage argument about change: there is no mirror stage, but a stage of mirrors.

What enables Geertz to elucidate with such certainty what Balinese did in the nineteenth century? And what position does he assume as commentator or narrator? Geertz's access to past Balinese thought is made possible by the properties of 'culture' as he propounds it. It is a 'totalizing concept of culture' (Fabian 1983: 156) in which "'history" is interiorized into "culture"' (McGrane 1989: 114). Achronicity is inherent. By definition, it is enough to study culture to understand history. The interpretation is that of the authoritative, academic commentator at once both immediate, familiar, empathetic and distant, allochronic, omniscient. The interpretive movement (the hermeneutic circle) is less between the whole and its parts than an elision of presence and absence to imply an intimate objectivity.

Culture underwrites Geertz's venture in another way.² For

¹ Unless stated otherwise, all italics and parentheses are in the original quotations. I am grateful to Ron Inden, Margaret Wiener and Linda Connor who was the reader for RIMA, where this chapter first appeared, for very helpful critical comments on the draft of this chapter.

² The axiomatic assumptions of wholeness, coherence and the explicability of culture in its own terms however are incompatible with any serious recognition of contingency or indeterminacy. Again 'if "culture" is the radical democratization of difference' (McGrane 1989: 114), such a cultural study may prejudice itself before it begins. Suppose – which seems to be the case – that major Balinese discursive themes included the following: in some circumstances, the present depends upon, and is explicable by recourse to, the past; practices do *not* necessarily form a consistent whole; difference is *not* always to be explained democratically. The scope for misunderstanding is vast.

anthropological understanding is a way of making the world feel safer, a way of extending the edge of order so that we can comfortably say that people are fundamentally the same everywhere and that ‘cultural differences’ are merely something like different mental images of the same basic reality (McGrane 1989: 118).

Anthropology understanding itself is however a privileged realm. Whereas all other thought is the product of its social and cultural circumstances, anthropological thought – and with it the superior realization of the anthropologist – is exempt. Anthropology lives by seeing and interpreting everything as culture-bound ... everything but itself (McGrane 1989: 125). Geertz’s idea of culture is a mythical charter. It underwrites the conditions of his unique, but unreciprocable, insight into long dead others, to make them living – if necessarily passive – subjects of anthropological understanding. This understanding is asymmetrical: it is something the anthropologist does to others, not they to him. So powerful is the technique that it does not even matter whether the subjects are alive or dead, nor even whether Bali has changed between 1343 and 1906 or not.

A brief review of Geertz’s approach confirms these suspicions. As he treats them, symbols are multiply detached from social actualities. We are offered no account of their situated use; nor of how Balinese understood them. Indeed, the notion of ‘symbol’ is not even Balinese (Hobart 1982b: 14-15), but the product of a radically distinct political epistemology, Romanticism (Todorov 1982: 147-221). So the very categories for analyzing their thought are alien. It is incumbent upon Geertz to address the difficulties, rather than by-pass them by suggesting that ‘a history of Bali for us’ somehow obviates the problems. Dutch and Balinese understandings of events and relations seem to have been irreconcilably divergent (and probably far less concurrent within each side than a retrospective analysis suggests). How appropriate is it for anthropologists to obliterate or ignore what happened among other peoples, so that their readers may enjoy an enhanced – if parochial – consciousness of what it is to be human?

For all his claims to be working from Balinese representations of their own past and polities, Geertz’s account is strikingly devoid of any critical consideration of the huge range of Balinese texts which might be relevant to such a study (on which see, for instance, Hinzler 1976, 1986; Rubinstein 1988). That most of the texts have not yet been translated (cf. Berg 1929, 1932; Worsley 1972) is questionable grounds for someone interested in Balinese representations to ignore them. Geertz’s dramaturgical metaphor of Bali as a ‘theatre state’ has tragi-comic resonances, and is strangely hybrid. They are in fact doubly trapped, because their ethnographer and author has condemned them to have lived out their charade within an image of theatre which is contemporary western and not even their own.³

It was therefore little surprise that a younger generation of scholars should have challenged this vision of the timeless, essentially unchanging Balinese polity. Vickers, for instance, has argued that such an account conflates hegemonic Balinese representations from three different periods. In the first, which he identifies with the apogee of the kingdom of Gèlgèl in the sixteenth century, the sovereign, Dalem

³ On Geertz’s sense of theatre see Hobart 1983.

Baturènggong, portrayed himself as the ‘World-Ruler’ who articulated a polity which embraced parts of East Java and as far as Sumbawa (1989: 41-53).⁴ The second period followed the reputed collapse of Gèlgèl by 1651 into a mosaic of small realms, the lords of which represented themselves as ‘romantic princes’ (Vickers 1989: 53-64), as instantiating or exemplifying the eponymous hero of the Panji stories. Significantly, in these accounts, Panji is not recognized at first as the rightful incumbent, but must demonstrate his supremacy in war and bed. Whether it was a matter of the scrabble of lordlings or fratricide among greater lords’ many offspring, protagonists for power or position required criteria of success by which to recognize their own achievements and to command it in others.

With the onset of the nineteenth century there eventually emerged nine kingdoms, identifiable by name and ruler, if not by bounded domains or uncontested power. By this time the inscription of retrospective dynastic genealogies was under way (Vickers 1989: 65-76), although it is less clear if it only began then. What does seem to be evident though is that the scale of celebrations of kingship, at least in Klungkung (1989: 65), began to become particularly spectacular only at the stage that Balinese rulers had to contend with the impending Dutch. The great ritual contests appear as central in colonial and post-colonial representations by Balinese rulers, but were missing in their earlier representations of kingship (Margaret Wiener, personal communication). It would appear that Geertz has retrojected a particular moment in Balinese history and made of it a timeless totality.

Valuable as Vickers’s analysis is as a corrective to symbolist ahistoricism, the argument is, perhaps inevitably, partly circular. In correlating periods of the Balinese polity with their textual representation, Vickers is obliged to draw heavily on these very texts for the evidence of those periods. Nor can outsiders’ accounts offer an independent yardstick to escape from this circularity, because they are mediated by descriptions, stories and commentaries provided by Balinese themselves.

The critical historiography of Bali has only just started. Given the patchy, heterogeneous and contradictory nature of the Balinese and other sources, the problems of how to read them, let alone the question of how different Balinese on different occasions have actually read them, I suspect even the adumbration above is far too neat. For the analysis relies upon a simplistic sociology of knowledge in which groups are mechanically linked to world-views (see Geertz 1960; cf. Hobart 1982b). Balinese representations of their own polities have been too many, varied, complex and important to be tidied away in a largely timeless vision of a theatre state. On what occasions were such representations invoked, to whom and with what effects? People do not, after all, simply ‘represent’ the state as it is or was. Particular persons or groups represent events and relationships *as* something to someone on some occasion, usually for some purpose. Balinese rulers were doing much else

⁴ I discuss contemporary representations of Balinese kings, following Gramsci and Laclau, as articulating heterogeneous parts of the polity in Chapter 7. Who actually did the representing in each instance is, as far as I can gather, still a moot point. Insofar as the portrayal was endorsed, if not instigated, by the ruler, or subsequently appeared as being, the representation appears as the product of a complex agent, the court, exemplified in the ruler (see Hobart 1990b: 94-98).

besides being ‘obsessed’ (Geertz’s value-laden and rather sneering expression) with their own spectacles. They discussed and worried about the significance of the Dutch and how to deal with them long before conquest was imminent (Wiener 1995a). The obsession, if any, is Geertz’s in insisting on reducing the polity, and courts as complex agents, to a floorshow for a handful of Balinese princes. Despite Geertz’s desire to distance himself from Dutch representations of Bali (e.g. 1961), he manages in one majestic sweep to echo the Dutch bourgeois bias in favour of Balinese royalty and to interpret them using an allochronic, allotopic, democratic epistemology.⁵ Subsequently, Balinese have come on occasion to reiterate images of royalty in theatre and on television which seem distinctly modern. I suspect though that such reworking may owe more to their involvement in post-revolutionary Indonesia and the wider world than to either Leiden or Princeton.⁶

On what grounds should we assume that Balinese accounts, even within a notional ‘period’, necessarily portrayed a single overarching vision, or that there was a single idea of Balineseness? Writers have focused almost exclusively on royal representations of themselves. That other groups, such as *Brahmana*, might have quite different accounts of what had happened was neglected until recently (Rubinstein 1991). Even restricting discussion to representations of royalty at a particular time, how consistent (and by what criteria?) were particular accounts with one another and how monologic were they? Even where dynastic chronicles (or however one wishes to gloss *babad*) of rival families agreed on certain basic events, they differed sharply at points in the significance with which they were attributed.⁷ On the latter question, as far as I know, relatively little work has been done. As they had less chance to inscribe it, the views of the governed remain largely unknown and so, conveniently, are glossed over as if they had had no thoughts at all.

Interestingly, in his analysis of what he argues appears to be a nineteenth century Balinese painting by a commoner, Worsley (1984) suggests the possibility of there being contrary images of the aristocracy and their relationship with their subjects within the painting. Behind all this lurks the vital question of how scholars arrive at definitive-seeming interpretations, in this instance of the nature of long-gone Balinese states. Even where the argument has been made by careful and critical analysis of texts or paintings – and I can find little evidence that Geertz, for instance,

⁵ Anthropologists are much given to this double distancing of the people we work with, as Fabian has argued at length (1983). Interestingly, my first teacher in matters Balinese, Hooykaas, warned me against this bias of his colleagues and advised me not to assume the centrality of either courts or high priests in studying Balinese society.

⁶ An example of Balinese reworking their past is the television film *Gègèrnya Semarapura*, first broadcast by TVRI on 26th. August 1992, which seems to me retrospectively to introduce ideas of Indonesian Independence into the original colonial conflict.

⁷ An example is the accounts of the *Babad Manggis* about the royal house of Gianyar, and the *Babad Dalem Sukawati* about the powerful lineage of Cokordas. Balinese, who have to live with the consequences of rival enunciations, are often more sensitive to the problems of inscription and generalizing than are their foreign academic commentators. I well recall the late Cokorda Gedé Agung Sukawati’s expostulating to me on reading the resumé of the history of Gianyar in *Kinship in Bali* shortly after it was published (Geertz & Geertz 1975: 119-125). His concern was that what had happened was a matter of dispute between the two *babad*. Even if the purpose was a summary, the effect was to turn one side of an argument, here of the Déwa Manggis, into fact, the more authoritative because of the authors’ celebrity.

studied any originals – what relationship, if any, do the analyses bear to what Balinese have actually made of them? For instance, it is quite possible that the presuppositions according to which Balinese constituted, argued and reworked their polities are sufficiently incommensurable with the analytical models of academic commentators that they cannot simply be characterized as some deviant symbolic or imaginary transformation of European polities.⁸ At the least it would seem that far too much was going on to sum up five and a half centuries of political change by stating simply that ‘the scale of things varied, and their brilliance’.

Needless to say Western narratives dwell on other aspects of Bali’s past. Death especially features as a complex trope. Balinese cremations and the immolation of royal widows is obligatory in almost every historical account. It is far from clear how many of the authors actually witnessed and how much they saw of the cremation in Gèlgèl in 1633, which they described in flamboyant detail and with so much righteous horror. Nor was this crucial solely to travellers’ and, later, administrators’ depictions of Bali.⁹ The same retooled accounts recur from Covarrubias’s *Island of Bali* to the later grand anthropological representations of Bali in Clifford Geertz’s *Negara*, James Boon’s *The anthropological romance of Bali* and Stephen Lansing’s *The three worlds of Bali*, synecdochically as the essence and ultimate goal of Balinese culture. I cannot speak about pre-conquest Balinese concerns but, by most subsequent accounts, cremation as part of practices for apotheosizing dead forebears, is widely regarded as an inescapable obligation upon the living, in return for their forebears having undertaken the practices required to transform the young into socially mature beings. (Cremation anyway is only part of one route to apotheosis, even if later stages were appropriate only to the great, and wealthy, courts.) There are serious and irreducible differences between the concerns of alien commentators and Balinese.

It is by no means coincidental that ‘ritual’ bulks so large in the accounts of the anthropologists mentioned above. Ritual is above all pre-narrative, anti-historical: the means of destroying time and precluding history. By contrast to a vibrant, rational, historically aware West for ever bent upon progress, terminal civilizations like Bali are trapped in myth, moribund, involuted into museums. Fittingly, they act out their own lack of a future – stolidly, absorbedly, compulsively? – in rituals of death. Not only are rituals *en clé de mort* but, according to anthropological wisdom, death forms the paradigm occasion for ritual.¹⁰

⁸ Inden (1990: 162-262) has argued forcefully that administrators, academics and other commentators almost without exception have managed to misunderstand the workings of polities in India. Their various imaginings of ‘divine kingship’ and ‘the Hindu type of government’ bear directly on the inter-textual background to analyses of Bali.

⁹ Linda Connor’s critical analysis of the European preoccupation with death in Bali is important not just as a corrective to repeated misconceptions – for instance ‘widow immolation’ neither always involved widows nor burning – but, recursively, it probably tells us more about European concerns than it does Balinese (Connor 1996, n.d.). My gloss on her work is that it suggests projection and displacement to be widespread anthropological practices.

¹⁰ Are cremations, like cockfights, a kind of ‘meta-social commentary’ (Geertz 1973d)? What the former lacks in chanciness, it makes up in inevitability and relevance (even the most determined cockfighter cannot avoid his own death). It does not take a great leap of the imagination from the destruction of the body human to the body social. In their cremations, are Balinese enacting the

If Western narratives of Bali rely on uncritical intellectual anthropophagy of earlier writers, death is a theme that articulates representations of Bali with action. For these descriptions were agentive. Widow burning provided one of the main public justifications by the Dutch for intervening in the affairs of the island. Metonymically, the preoccupation of Balinese rulers with lavish cremations indicated their failure or inability to attend to the ‘proper’ business of government. Metaphorically Balinese culture was crumbling. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, foreign commentators depicted Balinese as savage and bellicose. By the close of the nineteenth century, the Balinese had become moribund (Vickers 1989: 53). Just as the tigers that reportedly roamed the island were being killed off, Balinese were being narratively domesticated.¹¹ With colonization, Bali began the next phase of its transmogrification – into a museum, a zoo, a laboratory and, finally, an international theme park and tourist resort – the while miraculously remaining timeless and unchanging. These descriptions have been agentive in that they have affected how the Dutch and Indonesians have administered Bali and have used its image for planning Bali’s development. Balinese have not been passive in this process. On occasion some among them have enthusiastically promoted this vision of their essential difference. Nor have they always been uncritical. In Tengahpadang, according to the guide books a ‘traditional’ centre of woodcarving (no one in fact carved there until about 1983), one of the standing jokes is: ‘Where can you still find a tree in Bali?’ Answer: ‘In an art shop.’

In short, as with so much anthropology, for all the determination of its practitioners to do otherwise, the effect of much anthropological writing is to inscribe our own categories onto (even into) others and, in declaring (carefully doctored) difference, at once to exoticize and tame them. For this reason I carefully stayed out of the long running ‘time debate’ on Bali. My purpose here is not to contribute to the debate, which was a one-sided monologue for several shades of professional opinion mongering. (There are no Balinese or Indonesians are involved for instance. I have taught the arguments to postgraduate anthropologists at Universitas Udayana in Bali, who were dumbfounded at what the ‘experts’ made of them.¹² Rather, my aim is to examine some of the professional practices of anthropologists. In this instance, these include constituting their object of study, determining what counts as evidence, imposing parochial categories which masquerade as universals, writing evaluations under the name of descriptions and producing accounts which are remarkably detached from, and impermeable to, the practices they purport to describe. The effect is to deny that those they write about

refiguration of their own society? Many people noted at the time of my first fieldwork in 1970 that the costs of cremations were directly undermining much of the old order. One or two jaundiced commentators remarked to me, while watching cremations, that it was as if it were Bali that was being consumed.

¹¹ According to Schulte Nordholt (n.d.) colonial philologists, anthropologists, administrators and other caring professions also helped in other ways. You cannot abolish the power of rulers, order the abandonment of important practices, impose Peace and somehow leave the culture essentially unchanged (see Hobart 1983 on Geertz 1980).

¹² As with any general assertion, there are exceptions. Duff-Cooper (discussed below) was more sensitive than the others to local usage (his essay, 1990, was published in a collection in Bali), as on occasion was Howe (also discussed below).

are self-monitoring agents, instruments and patients, who reflect critically on (the circumstances of) their own and others' actions. The result is to make understanding something which ethnographers do, unreciprocally, to others. Understanding then ceases to be a mutual struggle of beings in the world and becomes objectivized knowledge with a spray-on humanist finish. I argue my case for Bali, but as should be evident, the argument applies more broadly. What indeed is rather frightening is that the time debate has involved a number of the best – or at least the most celebrated – anthropologists of their time.

The problem of narrative

As my concern is representations of the past, before I turning to the issue of time in Bali, it is necessary to consider the issue of historical writing. The reason is that it has been the subject of much recent argument among literary critical specialists, people on the border of philosophy and history, and others. So great are the claims made, fashionably, on behalf of narrative that it is necessary to review what is involved in some detail. Bits of debris from the argument have even landed in the quiet backwater of anthropology in such guises as the reflexive critique of ethnographic writing which stressed the centrality of literary and narrative forms in Western representations of others (e.g. Boon 1982; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Geertz 1988). Indeed Boon has come delightfully close to summing up the whole – or what he regards as the important bits – of Balinese culture in terms of narrative genres. Narrative has been more generally mooted as fundamental to time, history and indeed human experience of the world itself. Balinese themselves also use on many occasions what one might be tempted to call narratives, from popular stories, to *babad*, to the Mahabharata and Ramayana, as available examples (*conto*) or analogies (*pra(tiw)imba*) by which to evaluate the significance of actions and events, and their likely outcome. So, if we are to reflect critically on foreign commentators' or Balinese representations of the past, should we not begin by considering how far, and in what way, problems of history resolve themselves into issues of cultural differences of narrative style? In short, to what degree are debates about Indonesian and Malay ideas about the past (e.g. Soedjatmoko 1965; Errington 1979; Vickers 1990; cf. Sweeney 1987) actually about different conventions of writing and telling stories?

To clear one matter out of the way, recognition of the diversity of narrative genres would seem a useful corrective to two forms of anthropological philistinism. One is to treat cultures simply as abstracted assemblages of collective representations, symbols, myths etc. without considering how people, whether participants or anthropologists, actually use them. The other is to imagine that ethnographic writing is some genre- and narrative-free enterprise.

It is when we turn to what narrative involves that the going gets tricky. Like many enticingly simple-looking ideas, what what you get is not what you see. For instance, is narrative an epistemological device to organize how we talk or write about events? Or does it have some ontological status, either as a necessary aspect of thought, or even of the world? Or is it because how we appreciate the relationship between events is invariably mediated by, and therefore indissoluble from,

narrative? To what extent does narrative appear centrally implicated precisely by virtue of setting up an endless deferment about the dichotomy of what exists and what we can know? Does narrative determine, or merely affect in some unspecified way, what we understand? Narrative is not an innocent idea. It entails a messy metaphysics¹³ Is narrative what people do? Or is it some kind of entity: an abstract substance? In a fairly simple sense, narrating may be considered as the practices of people, who delineate events in speech (or other) acts, while others evaluate and interpret what is said in acts of listening. Narrative in this sense is a congeries of critical distinctions which people have made on different occasions. It is all too tempting however to imagine it to be something more, some transcendent entity or process which structures thought and its many manifestations. In this way, narrative easily lends itself to being invoked as the synonym for, and hypostatized essence of, culture. As we shall see, Bali has been lumbered with more than its fair share.

As an abstract substance, narrative lends itself to endless division and classification. Being abstract, there are few constraints on the imagination of the analyst. Indications that such epistemological essentializing is taking place is that it becomes as easy to narratologists to distinguish and proliferate genres as it is hard to fathom the criteria of differentiation. The reader gets lost in a classificatory maze. When done by a real expert the closure is so total that what one is inquiring about effectively disappears, to be reconstituted as a product of the method. Consider, for example, the following statement by Boon. ‘Like any *essentially* metaphorical procedure, ethnology thus resembles the arts of visual illusion’ (1977: 18, my stress). Having dissolved the complexities and indeterminacies of our engagement with the world into an epistemological game, the self-authorizing author is free, within the broad limits of Western conventions, to imagine the object, now totalized, by an act of will, so as ‘to convey a sense of the whole society, to typify it in some vivid, compelling manner’ (1977: 18). That the effect is to deny the people studied such agency and will as was still left to them does not emerge as a problem. In this instance, Boon empowers himself magically to dispense with the differences of place, history and discourse, as he sets out to develop ‘an extended analogy between Bali’s dynamic, lustrous culture and Indo-European principles of "romance"’ (1977: 3).

Whether there is much dynamic or lustrous left over, except for the sheen of polished metaphor is apparently not the question. Instead it is whether Bali should be epitomized as ‘epic’ or as ‘romantic’. If you think I was exaggerating in talking of narratology as slicing up an abstract substance, what about the following assertion?

Epic posits constant, consistently principled, heroic familial aristocracies whose leaders establish the lawful and the just at the expense of the enemies of right. Romance portrays vulnerable, disguised protagonists, partial social misfits who sense surpassing ideals and must prove the ultimate feasibility of actualizing those ideals often against magical odds (Boon 1977: 3).

¹³ For example, as the literature makes clear, narrative involves presuppositions about human nature. I suggest that it is the idea of narrative appearing to engage with those difficult Kantian categories of the *a priori* like time and causation that gives it a certain ‘buzz’.

Note the active voice by which narrative genres become transcendental agents which have the power to bring about classes, values, institutions. Where Geertz amalgamated historically distinct Balinese acts of representation, Boon has dispensed with history altogether and recreates sequential political formations as a matter of choice between narrative genres. If Vickers is correct, Boon has succeeded in evaporating a crucial period of a hundred and fifty years of political action and thinking. Bali as a whole becomes, if not reconstituted as a genre, at least refined out of its disorderly existential nastiness into a fit object for literary critical indulgence. What the threats of *jihads*, successive Dutch, Japanese, Indonesian governments, the mass tourist market and even generations of academics have so far failed fully to bring about, Boon seems fair set to achieve at a narrative stroke – the final objectification of Balinese.¹⁴

Is it actually so straightforward to classify and analyze narrative genres in somewhere like Bali?¹⁵ According to what frame of reference would you decide? Utterances which a European or American academic might classify as evidently a statement or request might be treated as an order. A well known example is the Javanese *perintah halus*, an indirect statement or request, which may well be intended and understood as an order (Anderson 1972: 42). And, to take examples from a *Prèmbon* theatre piece about the prince of Nusa Pencia, which I recorded in Bali, what speech genre is involved in exclaiming ‘Oh dear!’ (*Aduh!*)? Or asking why something is so? Or replying to a statement by adding the name of the person to whom it was addressed? According to the Balinese who were watching with me, in

¹⁴ Boon has complained that I misunderstand him (1990: 209, fn. 2). He does not address though the probably irreconcilable differences in our respective approaches. One aspect emerges from his remarks on an early piece of mine (1978). In suggesting that Balinese commented on their own cultural link of the flow of water with ideas of purity and pollution by noting that water *did* in fact flow downhill, I was hoping to entice the naive symbolists then around to leap in and disagree. I had not expected a scholar of Boon’s intellectual sophistication to fall for it and reiterate the closed nature of thought (aka. symbolic facts, 1990: 78) by arguing that a

welter of machineries usher "nature" along with everything else into a discourse of irreducibly discrepant codes, posed and counterposed in contests of advantages and rivalry, vanquishings and victimage (1990: 79).

We are offered representation without the possibility of intervention (see Hacking 1983). Hermetic semiotic systems replace argument about the underdetermination of objects and events in the world and the adequacy of past practices of thinking to engage with the problems. Difference is reduced to discrepancy between codes. Discourse, in Foucault’s sense of the partly dispersed maze of practices of power/knowledge are emasculated into games of thought without an object. For Balinese have become signifiers in the play of someone else’s mind, not agents working in and on a world.

If indeed I misunderstand Boon, which I am not so sure, at least I am in good company. Johannes Fabian arrives at almost identical conclusions. ‘Like other symbolic anthropologists, Boon keeps his distance from the Other; in the end his critique amounts to posing one image of Bali against other images... The Other remains an object, albeit on a higher level than that of empiricist or positivist reification’ (1983: 136).

¹⁵ What is it about reconstituting events and actions in terms of narrative genres, or treating actions (if not events) as narratively constituted, that leads to hypostatization? For a start, if all public speech is narrative in form, then the notion threatens to become meaningless. And in what ways is it helpful to think of images and icons as narratively structured? Even Todorov, the self-proclaimed founder of narratology, had difficulty subsuming description under narration (1990: 27-28). Many other illocutionary modes (in Searle’s sense, 1971) are non-narrative, such as ordering, asserting, asking, questioning, cursing and flattering. Are they then genres, even if not narrative in nature?

the context of these utterances, they all served to affirm, *ngawiaktiang*, what the previous speaker had just said. Allocating whole swathes of works to grand genres like ‘epic’, ‘romance’ or ‘genealogy’ presupposes not only that the works are homogeneous, but that they contain formal essences which exist independently of commentators identifying them as such. The fact that the attempt largely anticipates detailed critical analysis of the works in question, let alone inquiry into Balinese presuppositions, commentaries and practices, suggests it is, under almost any description, yet another short-lived triumph of scientized aestheticism over actuality.

At this juncture I part company with Ricoeur’s analysis of narrative, for two reasons. First, although he recognizes that narration is an act which depends for its completion upon a reader or audience (in his *mimesis*, 1984: 70-87), Ricoeur has systematically to downplay the role of the agents who commission, write, order a reading or performance of, narrate, listen to, and discuss a work, let alone the purposes and circumstances in each instance. Consequently he has to avoid the implications of Mink’s neat point that telling and retelling a story are different (Ricoeur 1984: 157-58; Mink 1968). His search for the essential, universal features of narrative structure requires him, as does indeed his notion of narrative as surmounting or encapsulating contingency (1984: 39-45), to ignore the situational particularities in which narrators and audiences actually deployed, recognized and worked upon different kinds of narratives. Second, in authorizing his account through recourse to a replete, unified genealogy of Western thought,¹⁶ Ricoeur is forced to invoke a massive array of presuppositions about the timeless, essential nature of imitation, representation (which he takes to be the same, cf. Collingwood 1938: 42-43), creativity, meaning, symbols, tropes, rules, types etc. (1984: 52-87), and the industry-standard range of dichotomies with a few added revisions (concordance:discordance::meaning:meaningless::order:disorder::real:imaginary, 1984: 44-46). Approaching, say, Bali with a battery of classical Greek definitions (*muthos*, *poiesis*, *sunthesis*, *teleios*, *mimesis*, Ricoeur 1984: 48), as if these had some perduring essence even within Western thinking, is more epistemological sledgehammering than critical inquiry.

As the Balinese example above indicates, there was nothing inherent in the utterances which made them identifiable as instances of affirming the truth of what was said. A focus on genres, narrative or otherwise, isolates the text from the conditions of its production and the subsequent situations of its use. It is not self-evident, even in a written work, in what way an ostensibly narrative statement should be – let alone in fact has been – understood. Ricoeur at least attempts to include readers or spectators (1984: 46), but his model of the text and its production as central (1979) make them an afterthought in the hermeneutic circle. Herein lies

¹⁶ As one would expect, Ricoeur has to salvage the continuity of a constituting consciousness and a ‘continuous chronology of reason’ (1988: 217-19) from Foucault’s sceptical dismissal of it as disrupted and decentred (1969).

While Ricoeur takes myth as ‘emplotment’, partly I assume as a poke in the eye to Lévi-Strauss, anthropologists have widely treated myth as either pre-narrative, or so strange a form of narrative, as to require radical structural or symbolic surgery. Employing the sobriquet ‘myth’ for any narrative practice shorn of the situations of their use, of which the anthropologist cannot make sense, suggests a greater failure on the part of the anthropologist than anything inherently mystifying about myth.

the rub. Classifications of narratives may appear clear-cut. But this is achieved at the expense of considering the purposes of speakers or narrators and how they are understood by their audiences. Narrative easily becomes an essence, a total phenomenon and a transcendental agent, which replaces the complex or human agents who wrote the account and do the narrating, listening and understanding.

This may, I hope, make it clearer what sort of history anthropologists like Geertz and Boon have in mind. We know precious little about the circumstances and consequences of the reading of historical works in Bali as situated social acts, or even how they are understood by audiences. Nor does it matter for analyses of this kind. For instance, serious problems about the ownership of a temple in Tengahpadang, led in late 1979 to the reading of a short section of the *Babad Dalem Sukawati* (a work belonging to a local aristocratic lineage) to see if it could throw light on the matter (see Hobart 1990b for details). Commentaries on the reading by different interested participants are fascinating, because they bear very little relationship to any received wisdom about what such works are all about.¹⁷ A problem arises: which is the narrative? Is it the script extrapolated for the purpose from one version of the *babad* itself? Is it the ‘translation’ on that occasion from *kawi* (Old Javanese) into Balinese? Is it what the audience understood by the reading? To the extent it is this last, as there were different understandings by rival interest groups, which version are we to take? Had there been public debate afterwards, there would be a case for taking the version which prevailed as the definitive narrative, until such time as it was superseded. However, there was no such public discussion (Hobart 1990b: 110-14). Even this broadening of the field may be inadequate though. Most of the original owners of the temple were excluded from the proceedings. What of their understanding of the *babad*?

A short excerpt from the *babad* illustrates some of the problems of defining the essence of narrative. At one point the reading told of Cokorda (Ida Déwagung) Gedé Karang, who had settled in Padangtegal, some eight kilometres from Tengahpadang. It went something like:

‘He resided in Padangtegal. He built a shrine there. He built a shrine in the Pura Dalem Padangtegal.’¹⁸

The *kawi* was even more cryptic than its paraphrasing in Balinese, which is what I translated above.

Ricoeur has stated that, in narrative,

¹⁷ I have over twenty hours of commentaries on tape and I hope in due course to have an opportunity to write at some length about the reading and different commentaries.

¹⁸ A Pura Dalem is a temple, present in almost every village to Batara Dalem, The Insider, the Goddess Durga, and associated with death, healing and the cures of various illnesses. I give below the original *kawi* (K) and the gloss given immediately afterwards in Balinese (B).

K: Hana ring bumi Padang Tegal.

B: *Sawèntené Ida malinggih ring Padang Tegal.*

K: Sampun sira ngawangun pariyangan.

B: *Sampun makarya naler palinggih Ida irika.*

K: Wongyèng Pura Dalem Padang Tegal.

B: *Irika Ida makarya palinggih ring Pura Dalem Padang Tegal.*

the configurational arrangement transforms the succession of events into one meaningful whole which is the correlate of the act of assembling the events together and which makes the story followable. Thanks to this reflective act, the entire plot can be translated into one ‘thought’, which is nothing other than its ‘point’ or ‘theme’ (1984: 67).

Indigestible as it is, Ricoeur’s point (sic) is that narrative transforms events into a coherent unity (always?) and makes them intelligible. The argument is partly circular and works in reverse. To be intelligible something must be coherent and part of a meaningful whole (the imperative which drives the hermeneutic circle). Events must therefore *be construed as* meaningful and part of a whole, otherwise we could not understand them. As there is nothing about events which makes them *ipso facto* understandable, the world of action has to be presumed to have a pre-narrative structure! This is one reason I said that the approach involves a messy metaphysics.

Whether the *babad* even matches Ricoeur’s minimal definition of narrative is also open to question.

For a simple narrative already does more than report events in their order of appearance. A list of facts without any ties between them is not a narrative (1984: 148).

How many ties are needed to make a list into a narrative? And how far must these be in the work rather than inferred by listeners? What, indeed, would it look like for relationships ‘to be in the narrative’, independently of some reader interpreting it to be so? You begin to wonder whether the whole enterprise is not devoted to

merely corroborative detail, intended to give artistic verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative (W.S. Gilbert, *The Mikado* Act II).

The *babad* also breaches Ricoeur’s condition of concordance, of completeness, wholeness and the necessity of events to the whole, such that chance appears as design (1984: 38-43), not just in the section read, but in the *babad* itself, which is incomplete, as future chapters remain to be written. So it lacks the ‘teleological function’ of having a ‘conclusion’ or ‘ending’ (1984: 150). One might though consider the *babad* to be a narrative, insofar as the events have been arranged to make the story followable, in Gallie’s sense (1968: 22-31; cf. Ricoeur 1984: 149-55), but by whom and in what way? Whether it is a meaningful whole, in what sense it was designed to be, what ‘meaning’ would be here, what is involved in translation, whether there is one thought, whether this is the point and whether the theme is identical to the point is another matter. On each of these issues Balinese have their own elaborate ideas.¹⁹

Evidently we are dealing at the most with a fairly minimal kind of narrative, which Balinese often label *gi(h)ing*. Whether one chooses to translate the term as ‘plot’, ‘narrative’, ‘outline’, ‘skeleton’, ‘ribs’, ‘agreed résumé’, ‘the bare facts’ or

¹⁹ If I may be forgiven for tantalizing, to explicate each of these points would require more background than there is space for here (for a discussion, see Chapter 5 above). I am not, of course, arguing that Balinese do not order events and actions narratively (although whether that is the best term, I am not sure). Granted their interest in the consequences of actions, on all sorts of occasions Balinese retell stories to review what happened, learn from it, instruct others and so forth.

whatever makes a great deal of difference to what constitutes a 'narrative genre'. I introduced the brief passage above because it gave rise to about half an hour of intense discussion and argument among the Balinese to whom I played the tape back.²⁰ If so much 'inter-text' is necessary to understand the text and what just a few Balinese made of it, what on earth would a notion of narrative confined to the written word look like if you do not include the different backgrounds which participants bring to bear on any occasion? Recourse to some essential 'narrative' itself provides an authorial means of closure of the underdetermined relationships between actions or events, for it is ill-suited to talking about the actual situations in which agents speak and act, and comment on their own actions. A notion which appears to encompass time paradoxically lends itself well, not least by 'universalizing the plot' and 'the characters' (Ricoeur 1984: 41), to ahistorical and unsituated essentializing and classifying.²¹

What bearing does this argument have on representations of history and time? On my understanding, in opposition to historians who have argued that history is a disciplined inquiry the goal of which is accurate knowledge, philosophers like Gallie and Mink have claimed that the narrative structures of historical writing of the past differ fundamentally from the past itself. More mildly, Ricoeur proposed that the world of action has its own 'pre-narrative structure', which lends itself to narrative configurations, although the two remain ultimately different. 'The ideas of beginning, middle, and end are not taken from experience: they are not traits of real action but effects of poetic ordering' (Ricoeur 1983: 67; cited in Carr 1986: 15). However, such arguments presume that narrative constructions of history, which are what make humans really human, are a trans-cultural form of necessity. How delightful to see the old chestnut of human nature as eternal verity popping up yet again.²² The implications of evoking human nature are, however, far from democratic. As Fell has noted, to argue that the capacity for narrative construction 'has been unevenly cultivated in different cultures leads to the unpalatable conclusion that some cultures have been slow to develop their historical sense and their worldview is then evaluated as a less than fully mature human outlook' (1992: 376). Nothing seems to have evolved much from Confucius: 'By nature men are nearly alike; by practice, they get to be wide apart' (*Analects* 17, 2). Democratic notions of culture turn out to have paradoxical entailments when considered critically.

²⁰ Among other themes were why there were two Pura Dalem in Padangtegal (one especially for high caste people) and whether members of the aristocracy could worship at such temples without fear of pollution.

²¹ If one looks at the pedigree of narrative, these attributes are hardly surprising. It is the turbo-charged version of Russian formalism. Todorov indeed was one of the original formalists. As with its successor, structuralism, narratology 'all but renounces chronology altogether for...synchrony' and relies upon the familiar and worn 'dichotomy of "narrative" and "system"' (Pechey 1989: 43; syntagm *versus* paradigm, *parole versus langue* etc.). It ignores the overlap and transformability of elements from one category to the other. By extrapolating purportedly essential features of social practice, narratologists need not worry what people actually said and did. So it is not surprising to find it much favoured by those who prefer to keep their distance from the rough-and-tumble of ethnography and to pick delicately at pre-pickled facts.

²² Consider: 'Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode' (1983: 85; cited in Carr 1986: 182). Ricoeur draws here on his reading of Heidegger.

Even the radical attempt to sever the link entirely between narrative and the past does not escape difficulties. Ankersmit, for example, has argued that historians' concepts and narratives are sufficiently epistemologically loaded and incommensurable with the past as to be unable effectively to represent that past remotely as it might have been (1983). The focus therefore should be 'no longer on the past itself, but on the incongruity between present and past, between the language we presently use for speaking about the past and the past itself' (1989: 153). The past is not just another land, you cannot get a visa to go there. As with critiques of ethnographic writing (Clifford & Marcus 1986; cf. Hobart 1990a), the unfortunate consequence is an aesthetic preoccupation with the writer and the language of writing, which dismisses the object of study altogether and leaves us with thought about thought without an object. It also fossilizes the past as something dead and unchanging and ignores Collingwood's point that historians and others continually rework the past (1946: 205-334) in a scale of forms (1933: 54-91; Inden 1990: 33-35), so changing that past by thinking critically about it. For 'all thinking is critical thinking; the thought which re-enacts past thoughts, therefore, criticizes them in re-enacting them' (1946: 216).

In an attempt to mediate the differences, Carr has recently defended narrative against the realists (positivists and pre-theoretical historians), arguing that 'narrative structure pervades our very experience of time and social existence' (1986: 9). And, against Ricoeur, he visualized all societies as battling in some way to confront 'time and its inherent threat', because there is 'a genuinely universal human trait: the struggle against temporal chaos, the fear of sequential dispersion and dissolution' (1986: 183, 184). If Ricoeur's argument looks suspiciously teleological and universalist, Carr's additionally faces the obvious charge that chaos is not part of the world, which is simply there, but a function of frames of reference for ordering the world. None of the protagonists in the debate take practice seriously. Past narrative practices both affect subsequent practices and form their preconditions. As I take it here, following Collingwood (1946), history is not simply the cumulative effects of past events, but practices of rethinking and reworking the past in the light of present interests, which are themselves constituted out of past practices of thinking. Nothing, and certainly not the past, stays still.

Collingwood's approach not only recognized, but required, that thinking and discussion at the time of an act differs from subsequent rethinking. They differ in degree and kind; as does the thinking of a European or American scholar about what Balinese thought, or think, about their own texts. Although they are evidently preliminary, the work by Errington (1979; but cf. Tu 1979 and Sweeney 1987) and Vickers (1990) on Malay and Balinese historiographical practices respectively suggests that people may write about and understand their past in ways far more radically different than most narratologists had even dreamed.

What worries me particularly about recourse to narrative as an abstract substance is how far it is removed from the practices of the people to whom it notionally refers. Story-telling in Bali often involves interjections by listeners; shadow theatre and historical plays use dialogues or polylogues, with all sorts of speech genres and subject positions (for Java, see Becker 1979). Following Volosinov (or Bakhtin-as-Volosinov), I take dialogue to be doubly and immediately social, both as public

utterances of agents (not individuals), in speech, writing or whatever, and involving ‘the *active reception of other speakers’ speech*’ (Volosinov 1973: 117).²³ By contrast, narrative – as against narratives or stories – is far more thoroughly an abstract and objectivist analytical evaluation, which turns speech acts into ‘language’ and its compounds, into the ‘inert immutability of self-identical norms’ (1973: 63). So narratologists constitute time as durations or sequences, which are determined by the analyst as agent. It remains unsituated and ahistorical. By contrast dialogue is situated, historical and in principle open. Each stage in a dialogue potentially goes beyond, reworks and reframes what was said and done before. How it develops depends on those taking part, not just on the analyst. There is sadly still some truth in that anonymous aphorism: ‘The only lesson history has taught us is that man has not yet learned anything from history’. What I hope we may have learned from this discussion of narrative is to be alert to intellectual practices which claim to tell us about other peoples’ histories.

Time in Bali

If most approaches to narrative turn out to be a- or anti-historical, do anthropological discussions of Balinese time fare better? And why have anthropologists considered ideas of time in Bali in particular to be an important issue in the first place? I must be synoptic here. Bali has long been declared different (see Boon 1977: 10-49). Consider the title of an article by the Dutch colonial anthropologist Korn: *Bali is a thing apart, is more delicately strung than any other part of the Indies* (1925, translation from Wertheim *et al.* 1960.) Although they may have owed more to the painter Walter Spies’s Romantic image (Vickers 1989: 105-24) than to other genealogies of Bali, Bateson and Mead reiterated how deeply different Balinese were in their studies of Balinese character and history (see below). The stage was set long before for the unembarrassed entry of Clifford Geertz, whose work *Person, time, and conduct in Bali* (1973f, originally published in 1966) started off the subsequent debate by linking cultural ideas about time with Balinese representations of personhood and social action.

The background to the argument is briefly as follows. Some fundamental categories of thought like time are, in a certain sense, not universal and *a priori* (by virtue of how the human mind works) as Kant maintained, but socially determined. Following Durkheim,

²³ A sustained critique of the presuppositions of narrative by Bakhtin actually predates its apotheosis. Appeal to narrative converts the dialogue and heteroglossia of social action into monologue, in which the speech of agents or subjects is replaced with objects of an author’s discourse. The underdetermined relationships between discursive events become determined and fixed, not by those doing the narrating, still less the hearing, but by the superior knowing subject of the analyst. On this account, narrative is the antithesis of dialogue, the two coexisting uneasily. Bakhtin’s formulation of his approach to the novel at one point was, oxymoronically, ‘the stylistics of genre’ (1981: 259). Regrettably, at times, Bakhtin seems caught up in a similar dichotomy to the formalists, by opposing narrative as social and structural to dialogue as psychological and embodying the voice of individual experience (Hobart 1991b: 213-15), a dichotomy exacerbated by many of his commentators (e.g. Hirschkop 1989).

human thought is consummately social: social in its origins, social in its functions, social in its applications. At base, thinking is a public activity... The implications of this fact for an anthropological analysis of culture...are enormous' (Geertz 1973f: 360).

Bali is an important test case because 'not only are Balinese ideas in this area unusually well developed, but they are, from a Western perspective, odd' (1973f: 360). Where Geertz is more original is in linking perceptions of time with ideas about personal identity and proper conduct. Such ideas are far from mere clothing on a common humanity.

Any development which would effectively attack Balinese person-perceptions, Balinese experiences of time, or Balinese notions of propriety would seem to be laden with potentialities for transforming the greater part of Balinese culture (1973f: 409).²⁴

Conveniently though, Balinese have to be imagined as not odd enough to constitute such categories as time, person and conduct in different ways, far less use them in a distinctly different manner. Either would have been distinctly awkward. They turn out to be just like us, even down to the same way of using the same kind of symbols or, shades of Wittgenstein's lion, we could not understand them. Yet they must be sufficiently different (culture, after all, *is* difference), or they would not be worth studying and publishing about.

On Geertz's account, culture not only dominates, but pervades. What to a less penetrating mind might appear odd, to the experienced hermeneutic sensibility exemplifies the cunning of reason. Just as systems of personal naming 'depersonalize' Balinese, calendars 'detemporalize' the passage of time and the 'obsessive ceremonialization' of social life 'anonymizes' Balinese as social actors (not agents). The time-reckoning made possible in Balinese calendars are

clearly not durational but punctual... Their internal order has no significance, without climax. They do not accumulate, they do not build, and they are not consumed. They don't tell you what time it is; they tell you what kind of time it is (1973f: 393).

Balinese might not be punctual, but their time is. As I did field research at a time when Balinese had access to printed calendars, I cannot say how many people previously knew of the Hindu solar-lunar *Saka* system with numbered years or for what purposes they used them. Those I knew relied, however, regularly on well known events – volcanic eruptions, plagues, wars, elections and other miseries – from which to calculate important occasions, a point which Geertz de-emphasizes.

How did Geertz though establish such a definitive reading of Balinese calendars? For instance, on what grounds did he conclude that the Javanese-Balinese calendar of overlapping weeks reflects 'the very structure of reality', as opposed, say, to constructing a kind of mathematical order, or to exploring the possibilities of

²⁴ Note the methodological holism. To the extent that culture here consists in significant part precisely of ideas of person, time and propriety, the argument is circular.

juxtaposing, or superimposing, different qualitative sequences to create a distinctive compound?²⁵

As with subsequent contributors to the time debate, Geertz assumed that formalized systems of time-reckoning permit a single, determinate interpretation independent of the situations of their use. They have a meaning that may be extrapolated without regard to the understandings and purposes of the agents and the subjects of actions. As Quine remarked, ‘meaning is what essence becomes when it is divorced from the object of reference and wedded to the word’ (1953a: 22). There is also a hidden comparison, which is decidedly ethnocentric and idealized. That calendars have a meaning, the notion of meaning itself and the interpretive procedures employed are all presuppositions of certain strands of contemporary western academic discourse, not ones widely used by Balinese. The effect is simultaneously to create a semi-savage essential Balineseness and, recursively, to suggest some consistent entity, the West, which mystically embraces the whole of Europe and America, i.e. civilization.

Subsequent discussion about time in Bali has hinged more on Maurice Bloch’s reframing than on Geertz’s original argument. Bloch’s analysis should be sufficiently well known that I may be brief. Bloch’s expressed aim was to question the Durkheimian argument that ‘the categories of understanding and systems of classification are social in origin’ and so culturally relative (1977: 279). Were they so, then change to social organization would be impossible, because ‘this leaves the actors with no language to talk *about* their society and so change it, since they can only talk *within* it’ (1977: 281). Bloch therefore proposed that culturally specific, especially ritual, conceptual structures (i.e. ‘super-structure’) coexist with practical, non-ritual and universally shared concepts (i.e. ‘infra-structure’) in contexts of ‘uninstitutionalised power’, where ‘where man is in most direct contact with nature’ (1977: 285). The former mystifies exploitation and hierarchy through ‘static and organic imaginary models’ of society; whereas the latter has

its own cognitive system for the actors and its realisation can be, and is, used occasionally to challenge that other consciousness, of an invisible system created by ritual: social structure (1977: 287).

With Bloch we are brought back to universal features of human nature and the attempt to explain the conditions and limits of diversity.²⁶

Where Geertz and Bloch disagree is over the precise relationship, and the relative importance, of superstructure and infrastructure, and so whether a society is integrated around a single more or less coherent cultural system, or two differentiated, but interlocking, sub-systems. Otherwise Geertz and Bloch share

²⁵ Geertz’s argument draws substantially upon Mead and Bateson’s broader vision of Balinese culture, for instance in their depiction of Balinese character and their avoidance of climax in favour of a ‘steady state’, because of the supposed Balinese fear of the unexpected and emotion. So, one might ask similarly, by what criteria did Bateson or Geertz determine that Balinese are without climax? They take the argument so far, one wonders how Balinese cope with sexual intercourse. For a critique of the supposed Balinese avoidance of climax, see Jensen & Suryani 1992: 93-104.

²⁶ Although Bloch did not state explicitly why concepts of time are so fundamental, it is necessary to his naturalist approach which, old-fashionedly even for the 1970s, stressed causation, causal processes being only possible within universal, linear and irreversible time.

many similar presuppositions. Societies are closed, bounded entities. What people think is adequately described by reference to unambiguous collective representations. The true nature of time is unproblematic: the problem is accounting for Balinese peculiarities. (What 'Balinese' is here is quite unproblematic.) Both authors describe society in terms of languages, conceptual structures and cognitive systems, each being necessarily unitary, consistent, monologic and closed. For, if they are not, there is no reason one cannot criticize actions or statements by drawing upon others. (I avoid saying '*within* a language or system', because that treats them as bounded entities.) Neither Geertz nor Bloch makes more than a token gesture in the direction of practice, because what individuals think and do is sufficiently socially determined as not to merit detailed study. So both insouciantly refer to people as '(social) actors', who follow the script formed by their collective representations, of which someone else is the author, instead of, say, compound, complex or sometimes singular situated agents of their own actions, among many possibilities. They both displace agency onto some ontological entity:²⁷ Geertz onto a transcendental culture or meaning, Bloch onto a foundational infrastructure or human nature. But, in either event, it is the knowing western subject who claims to be the immanent intelligence of that entity. The anthropologist therefore emerges as the author who 'authorizes' the terms of Balinese existence (see also Asad 1986: 160-63). Fortuitously the same anthropologists also know exactly what time is, whereas the unfortunate Balinese do not. Indeed the nature of time is so self-evident as not to require discussion (cf. Gell 1992). How pleasant that that most contested and elusive notion should finally turn out after all to be so untroublesome. It was left Duff-Cooper to point out that 'English "time" cannot be relied on for "any precise task of identification, interpretation, or comparison"' (1990: 45, citing Needham 1985: 156).

Several writers have subsequently taken issue with Bloch and, in so doing, by omission if nothing else, have tended to bolster some version of Geertz's position by ignoring Bloch's criticisms. It is not coincidental, I suspect, that of the contributors to the debate, neither Bloch nor Bourdillon ever worked in Bali. On his own account Geertz's fieldwork in Bali totalled seven months and he 'never learned Balinese very well' (1991: 606). It is a strikingly honest and remarkable clarification of what Interpretive Anthropology is about.

Thereafter the debate came to be focused more on ethnographic problems than on the grand theoretical issues. Leo Howe, who actually did research in Bali, argued that Balinese do indeed have a single, coherent and distinctive concept of durational time. Taking issue with 'Bloch's claim that the Balinese possess two distinct conceptions of time', Howe stated 'instead that they have a single coherent concept of duration' (1981: 220). This 'is conceived of as being, in the main, cyclical but for all that the people are fully aware of the irreversible flow of time'. Both notions are not confined to ritual but permeate 'all spheres of the culture' (1981: 223). ('Ritual', incidentally, is treated by all these authors as a substantive, identifiable category of

²⁷ Anthropologists are so given to slipping in ontological entities, usually transcendental, sometimes foundational, but commonly supplemental, that I think it is time we gave these a name. I propose the 'Ont'. Just as Sherlock Holmes occasionally encountered a three-pipe problem, so do anthropologists a three-Ont problem, but rather more often.

action, rather than at most ‘an odd-job word; that is, it serves a variety of more or less disparate uses’, Needham 1985: 156.)²⁸ ‘Cyclicality seems to be inherent in the system’ (1981: 227), all cycles having ‘similar properties, namely, segmentation, orientation and irreversibility’ (Howe 1981: 229). Balinese representations of duration exhibit ‘properties of both cyclicality and linearity’ (cycles returning not to the same temporal, but the same logical, point, 1981: 231). That Balinese do not speak in these terms does not matter. The ignorance of the native is axiomatic to most anthropology. I wonder what would happen to our presumptions about explanation were it ever finally to dawn on enough anthropologists that the people we work with may have thought through matters more subtly than have their self-appointed commentators and analysts?

There are several difficulties with Howe’s account. First his analysis treated duration as a fundamental property of time, which the philosopher D.C. Williams long ago pointed out rests upon the pernicious spatial metaphor of ‘the myth of passage’ (1951). Because time, as conceived in such analyses, is abstract, it is constituted as a describable phenomenon by the use of such techniques as metaphor, without which the analysis becomes vacuous. Time is neither cyclical nor linear: such descriptions are, rather, implicated in ways of world-making (Goodman 1978). Nor can definitive interpretations of how people perceive or conceive time be read off collective representations without an act of determination by the anthropologist. What we are left with arguably is successions of events and the ways in which such sequences are variously represented for whatever purposes by people under different conditions. Tautology and catachresis are two great standbys of the anthropologists’ repertoire, without which many of our preoccupations turn out to be largely imaginary.

Howe also reverted to the *status quo ante* Bloch: a monolithic view of culture as a closed, coherent, unitary system. Collective representations by themselves are sufficient not only to explain what people do, but fully determine not just what Balinese can say, but what they perceive. He also by-passed the question of how people are able to criticize and change their own social arrangements.

Further, through a delightful etymology, Howe returned to the theme of timelessness, which he displaced onto the gods, who are *niskala*. Howe took *niskala* to derive from *nis-*, a negative prefix, and *kala* ‘time’ (1984: 197). Unfortunately, on most accounts, *niskala* is a Sanskrit and Old Javanese term, deriving from a quite different root, which Balinese commonly employ in a similar sense to indicate ‘non-manifest, invisible’. As etymologizing is a popular Balinese style of argument, they may on occasion make such derivations as Howe’s. However, to take one such etymology as authoritative and definitive of Balinese thinking would be to be seriously mistaken. On a more general point, it would be fun once to write about the role of misplaced metaphor and linguistic confusion in the constitution of Bali as altogether a most unlikely place.

²⁸ I would go much further and argue that ritual is an imaginary category, required in much academic discourse as the antithesis or foil to give the notion of rationality the semblance of relevance (see Chapter 7).

It was left to the late Andrew Duff-Cooper to argue that previous authors, including Howe, 'did not address Balinese conceptions of time' (1990: 45) and had taken ethnographic tidbits out of context. Duff-Cooper's concern was to show the integrity and distinctiveness of Balinese ideas of time as part of Balinese culture as a 'form of life' (e.g. 1986, 1987). Regrettably this led him to flirt with taking closure and coherence as methodologically axiomatic, if not as actually 'there' in some sense (a problem encountered by other Wittgensteinians, e.g. Winch 1958). I must confess to a similar desire to argue the importance in the first instance of approaching Bali in Balinese terms. The questions arise: which Balinese terms? And which Balinese, on what occasions? Balinese practices are diverse and vary situationally; and people disagree over their significance and purpose. This century alone Bali has in many ways been transformed. There is no essential Bali – or Balinese culture – which constitutes the subject of the innumerable predicates given to it. Ironically, you could argue that it is the narratives of anthropologists among others, which have created Bali and Balinese as objects.

To return to Bloch, I suggest the problem is not that he has gone too far, but in many respects not far enough. Heterogeneity is confined by his opposition of super- and infra-structure to two (more or less dialectically related) sub-systems, which are at least implicitly coherent and correspond to determinate sets of social actions. Instead of one closed system, he offers a closed system coexisting with an open one. As John Peel has noted of Bloch's position:

we are still left with the view that cognition is only dependent on culture to the extent that the environment is itself culturally ordered...[and] the two discourses are treated as *entirely* distinct from one another' (1992: 420).

Johannes Fabian has pointed to the 'naive realism' of Bloch's account (1983: 43); to which I would add a thoroughgoing essentialism, which purports to establish the essence of representations of time, be these cultural or 'real'. It is not just Balinese, but reality itself which has become domesticated and packaged for consumption. As Jean Anouilh once put it: 'I like reality. It tastes of bread' (Catch as Catch Can).

Were one to start instead by considering something of the range of Balinese practices, it is far from clear that these can salubriously be 'boiled down' to, or explained in terms of, determinate properties, be these structural, narrative or whatever. Bloch's critique of holistic accounts of culture (e.g. 1985: 33-46) is itself open to Ernesto Laclau's ('post-Marxist') criticism of Marxist's accounts of ideology that they assumed 'an essence of the social order which had to be *recognized* behind the empirical variations expressed at the surface of social life' (1990b: 90). Arguably there is no such social totality and no '*determinate* object (i.e. society). Rather, the social always exceeds the limits of the attempts to constitute society' (1990b: 90-91). Assertions of the determinate nature of society and the 'meaning' of particular representations are themselves hegemonic acts whether they be made by the participants or by anthropologists.

Perhaps the issue is not about the determination of representations of time, but in more Habermasian vein (1984, 1987b) about the possibility of human communication? Bloch interwove this with his realist thesis. He wrote that surely we

could not communicate with ‘people with a different concept of time...[whereas] the existence of anthropology itself bears witness to the fact that it is possible, if with certain difficulty, to communicate with all other human beings, however different their culture’ (1977: 283). Affirming the consequent in this manner led Bloch to assume that there is such a thing as ‘normal communication’ and that it is ‘based on universal notions of time and cognition’ (1977: 287; on ambiguities of the use of ‘normal’ see Hacking 1990: 160-69). As Fabian argued, this observation

either rests on an equivocal use of *communication* (one that would have to accommodate such instances of patent noncommunication as the denial of coevalness in anthropological discourse); or it is naively positivistic in that it tries to convince us that the success of a project legitimates the means or even explains how it works (Fabian 1983: 42).

There is a certain *ipse dixit* in the comfortable assurance some anthropologists pretend to the worth of our projects. On whose authority do anthropologists declare the success of anthropological ventures?

Quite how sharing a *concept* of time – whatever that might be – guarantees the possibility of effective communication escapes me. Unless, like Fabian, one transforms the problem into one of intersubjectivity, which is to invoke a quite different historical discourse and one I am far from sure Bloch would endorse (1983: 42), anymore than, for quite different reasons, would I. Who judged communication, of what kind and to what degree, to have been successful, by what criteria and under what circumstances?

Bloch’s argument underwrites not only the boor who came away from a party remarking how much people had enjoyed listening to him, but more pertinently colonial and post-colonial hegemonic representations of other peoples. Do not both presume communication to have taken place? Bloch makes explicit a widespread assumption about communication, which the other contributors take for granted or slide round. We have here two vintage and cherished fallacies without which anthropology is in serious trouble. The first, the Myth of Mutual Comprehension, is that, if people exchange words they understand one another. The second is the Conduit Metaphor of Language according to which language (symbols, signs etc.) is a medium or vehicle. So it must contain something: that something being meanings – or the equivalent of your choice – which are shared by virtue of the exchange (Reddy 1979). It is striking quite how often, and to what effect, Geertz uses the term ‘vehicle’ in *Person, time, and conduct in Bali*. For all their trumpeted differences, the participants in the debate about time in Bali dance around much the same epistemological maypole.

Their determination to show how odd or different Balinese ideas of time are tells us, by implied contrast, more about the anthropologists’ own presuppositions about time and history. It goes something like this. Time is really linear and irreversible. And this accurate perception of time, if not standard in the (highly inspecific) west, is at the least typical of its advanced cognitive development, unlike much of the rest of the world (Hallpike 1979: 340-383). The images of time conjured up resemble the points on a straight line, t_1 , t_2 , t_3 etc., reminiscent of elementary geometry and mechanics. Time may be represented without undue difficulty using spatial

metaphors. The point of difference is whether it is linear, cyclical, punctuated and so forth. To varying degree the authors in question have overlooked the fact that metaphors represent something as something else. To treat time as spatial is catachretic. If ‘the metaphor is probably the most fertile power possessed by man’ (Ortega y Gasset, *The dehumanization of art*), then its abuse is correspondingly dangerous. Anyway how much clearer is it what space essentially is than time? And, whatever anthropologists may choose to do in their analyses, to impute spatial images of time to Balinese is unwarranted. Balinese commonly neither use such images, nor apply measures of distance (long, short etc.) to the relationship between events. Like so much anthropology, the argument depends upon, and largely exists only by virtue of, conflating other people’s and western academic discourses in a fine denial of place, history and agency.

The contributors to the debate get more than a little confused over whether time, following Kant, is a category prior to experience, and so universal or, following Durkheim, social in nature, and so variable. Most, unwittingly and inelegantly, do a sort of intellectual splits. *My* understanding of time is timelessly accurate and universally exportable, *your* benighted misunderstanding is social, particular and wrong. That is why it needs explaining and why, by the grace of western science and some gullible funding body, I am on hand to do so. In their post-Durkheimian enthusiasm, the contributors tend to forget that academics’ notions of time also have their own particular social history. Now ‘time’ may be a concept of demonstrable usefulness through which to describe certain kinds of relationships between events for certain purposes, and to quantify differences as matters of degree (e.g. Peirce 1986: 276-78), paradigmatically in physics. Quite what bearing the complex mathematical models of, say, space-time physics have on ethnographic descriptions of culturally elaborated categories of process is unclear, except that it lends pontifications about time an aura of mystifying authoritativeness. It does not follow that there is some identifiable, uncontested essence, ‘time’, itself unchanging, which encapsulates all aspects of such relationships as one might be interested in. Nor does it follow that there may not be alternative descriptions of these relationships, which do not presuppose some general concept of which the relationships are but particular instances.

In short, there is no such thing as time, as conceived in the time debate. And, in this sense, the participants in the debate are waxing eloquent about nothing. This is not to say that Balinese, as other people, do not represent the relationship between events in all sorts of ways for different purposes. They evidently do. But it does not help anthropologists much to postulate such an eternal essence ‘time’, which transcends the historical situations of its use and provides an absolute measure. Appeal to such an absolute measure, in these circumstances, turns out to be an act of power, which makes other peoples not just exotic, but misguided.

What is missing from the generalized concept of time, as variously represented in the time debate? In an elegant insight, Geertz himself suggested that, to Balinese, days may be of *different kinds*. Regrettably he does not really pursue his own insight into the qualitative discriminations people make about events and about the relationships between events. Geertz hesitantly moves towards the recognition that there are many different, and incommensurable, kinds of time in Bali, then turns

firmly and irrevocably away from the implications of his own thinking to the safer ground of well-turned phrases about an increasingly unlikely island.

Anthropologists are arguably interested by and large not in some recondite *time as such*, but as a condition of explicability of the relationships between events. This touches on the problematic issue of the relationship of time and causation. Bloch takes concepts of time to be so fundamental that, if they are relative, then 'it inevitably justifies the conclusion that *all* aspects of culture are relative' (1977: 282). Quite why this conclusion is entailed he does not explain, nor relative to what. Bloch's argument implies however that, without universal, linear, real time, people could not appreciate causation, which he takes as granted they do in order to engage in practical activities like politics and agriculture. One does not have to step outside a European discourse of physics to discover that the necessary connection is far from self-evident.

In Newtonian physics it is presupposed that some events...have causes and others not... In the nineteenth century we find a different presupposition being made by the general body of scientists: namely that all events have causes... In modern physics the notion of cause has disappeared. Nothing happens owing to causes: everything happens according to laws (Collingwood 1940: 49-50).

Theories of causation, as of time, involve presuppositions, which may seem self-evident at a given discursive moment, but in the light of later critical argument come to look like questionable assumptions. Time and causation, like nature (Collingwood 1945), have a history.

Dragging time into anthropological explanation creates problems all of its own. I remain unconvinced as to how it helps us to understand other peoples' practices. And it highlights curious features of anthropologists' own explanations. Bloch, for instance, might be surprised to realize that the account of causation he requires, rests upon a Kantian metaphysics (Collingwood 1940: 51).²⁹ If, as Lévi-Strauss suggested, an 'imperious and uncompromising demand for' causation and determinacy (1966: 11) is a feature of magical thought, it looks to be something anthropologists may be more preoccupied with than are the natives.

Equal problems confront Howe. To lay out the structure of Balinese collective representations does not of itself explain why Balinese do what they do, unless he adds that humans are not just bound, but constituted, by structural laws. Similarly, Geertz's explication of Balinese cultural meanings, even if one accepts his interpretation, do not account for what Balinese actually do, short of reducing Balinese to pre-programmed automata (Hollis's 'Plastic Man', 1977). Meaning becomes the agent in Balinese culture, and they but its conduits. In different ways, we run into a thoroughgoing determinism, which Bloch himself noted of much anthropological explanation (1977: 279-282). Be it society, structure, meaning or relations of production in real time, such deterministic explanations extrude from inquiry, because they cannot deal with or even recognize, chance and the thinking of ordinary people in the heterogeneous worlds of practice. Even less do they engage with historically and culturally different ways of representing underdetermined

²⁹ His recent work on cognition as a pre-linguistic, fixed, determinant, generic human disposition (1991) has Kantian overtones.

events. Time does not seriously enter any of these analyses, except as some notionally objective yardstick against which to measure the other and find it wanting.

The contributors to the time debate either equate time with, or treat its segments as the basic building blocks of, history. Insofar as time and history have been largely implicated in different academic discourses, strange as it may sound, time has precious little to do with history. In the strong sense I adopt here, historical thinking is reflective and critical. Re-evaluating one's understanding of past actions and processes changes oneself, one's understanding and what one understands or knows about (Collingwood 1946). So time, on this account, is not then simply a fixed linear scale: humans come to understand it differently. Granted how elusive the notion of time is in post-Newtonian physics alone, the authors are remarkably confident in enunciating what time, or its perception, really is all about. And, whatever their disagreements, their vision is strikingly mechanical and ahistorical.

Whether history is the unfolding of time (the lotus metaphor)³⁰ or the invocation of accumulated ancient authorities (ancestor worship I would argue is more a practice of anthropologists than it ever was of their subjects of study), it is curiously transparent. For 'real' time and history are apparently extra-discursive and unproblematically appreciable anywhere in the world. If anthropological descriptions of Balinese narratives are peculiarly flattened by their erasure, or closure, of time, the issue of narrativity does not feature at all in accounts of 'real' time or history – presumably because anthropologists see it as it is. This is a naive realism: one which shafts Balinese through its uncritical self-assuredness. That talk of time and history might be part of a hypostatization of practices in academic narratives, or that these narratives are a superb means to closure, seems to have passed the protagonists by. Although they may not have realized it, Bloch apart, the contributors have denied Balinese a capacity to be reflective agents and for historical and critical thinking, which is precisely what mostly the same authors have done with personhood. As Collingwood put it,

there is not, first, a special kind of process, the historical process, and then a special way of knowing this, namely historical thought. The historical process is itself a process of thought, and it exists only in so far as the minds which are parts of it know themselves for parts of it. By historical thinking, the mind whose self-knowledge is history not only discovers within itself those powers of which historical thought reveals the possession, but actually develops those powers from a latent to an actual state, bringing them into effective existence (1946: 226).

Significantly, substituting 'cultural' for 'historical' here produces curious results. While historical and cultural approaches may both claim to be part, not a special kind, of thought, a divergence occurs from the second main clause of the second sentence in the quotation onwards. Whereas historical thinking furthers and actualizes itself, cultural thinking arguably cancels itself out. Cultural self-knowledge becomes *true* knowledge, which transcends the cultural circumstances of its origin. Culture manages at once to be a transcendent, absolute, yet relative, notion. No wonder anthropologists are confused.

³⁰ I am grateful to Professor Richard Davis from Yale University for this neat image.

Consistent with postulating time as an essence, the cultural refractions of which may be mapped, the contributors expatiate merrily about time without any reference to history, as if history were subsumed in a discussion of time.³¹ To return to Geertz: as Balinese deny time insofar as they can, *a fortiori* they deny history, an insight he attributes to Bateson.

As Gregory Bateson has pointed out, the Balinese view of the past is not, *in the proper sense of the term*, really historical at all. For all their explanatory myth-making, the Balinese search the past not so much for the causes of the present as for the standard by which to judge it, for the unchanging pattern upon which the present ought properly to be modeled but, which through accident, ignorance, indiscipline, or neglect, it so often fails to follow (1973g: 334, my italics; cf. 1980: 18 for an almost identical passage).

What though *is* the proper sense? And how does Geertz decide so confidently what history ‘really’ is? Most unfortunately, Geertz’s own writings on history in Bali (1980) exemplify beautifully what Collingwood castigated as the conventional ‘scissors-and-paste’ method. It is that method of collating materials ‘drawn from “authorities”, that is, from the works of previous historians who had already written the histories of particular societies at particular times’ (1946: 33). Maybe Balinese are fortunate to lack history in Geertz’s ‘proper sense of the term’.

What though did Bateson actually write?

The modern Balinese is forced to recognize that he lives in a changing world but this is not his ideal, and he does not think in terms of it. He does not think of the past as of a time that was different and out of which the present has sprung by change. The past provides him with patterns of behaviour, and if only he knows the pattern he will not blunder and he need not be tongue-tied (1937: 307).

Just before this passage Bateson made the important point that when ‘we’ renovate a relic, if we do not know its past, we invent one or celebrate the mystery, whereas Balinese carefully eschewed such speculation.

The myth which they constructed contains no reference to the past; it is a bare skeleton of relationships in the present... The Balinese of Bajoeng are remarkably uninterested in the past as a source of romantic validation for the present... (1937: 306, 307).

A quite different, and more Balinese, re-interpretation of Bateson is possible. As the world is continually changing (*matemahan*), the past is now *niskala*, non-manifest. If one does not have access to evidence of what was actually the case (*tattwa*), it is imprudent to speculate from traces (*laad*), far less treat it as a safe ‘source of romantic validation’ (cf. Boon’s depiction of Bali above, as against the bare facts presented in the *babad*). If Balinese are constituted by their own, and others’, past actions, then understanding those actions and their consequences

³¹ The dismissal is entailed, as I suggested, by the idea of culture as total. As I understand him, this is less of a problem for Bloch, because the essence of ritual, and so ritualized notions of time, is precisely that, being ideological, it remains ‘unchanged when other things are changing’ (1985: 45). History, by contrast, is identified with processes in real, linear, irreversible time, as either the backdrop against which productive forces unfold or as the foundational agent of economic and social change. Bloch’s vision of ritual has many of the same history-free features that culture has to Geertz (Thomas 1989: 24-27).

(*karma pala*) is an important, if imperfect, guide in trying to avoid future blunders. Learning from previous actions and what happened is a means to critical reflection. Balinese may have a historical sensitivity of a degree and of a kind Geertz has not imagined.

At no point have any of the authors considered how ‘Balinese write texts to illuminate the patterns of historical events’ (Vickers 1990: 159). Still less have they considered how these texts are read, performed in plays and used by audiences. Had they done so, they might (but then again they might not) have considered the possibility that Balinese use the past in many different ways in different circumstances for different ends. Among these is the use of past events, in theatre for instance, to comment critically on both past and present, to change matters and peoples’ awareness. The denial of a sense of history to Balinese, the lack of inquiry into how the past is used and the reification of time go hand-in-hand not with Balinese detemporalization of person, time and conduct, but with these anthropologists’ detemporalization of Bali in a magnificent displacement worthy of the finest moments of orientalism. (The readings of selected collective representations owe more to previous western interpretations – Howe’s reliance on Barnes’s study of Kédang (1974) and Geertz’s idiosyncratic one on Bateson (e.g. 1937, 1949) – than to careful consideration of what Balinese say and do.) Some years ago an American pianist touring Britain performed a piece for *piano versus orchestra*, which seems at times a sadly apt simile of the relationship of ethnographer and the people they work with.

What is the subject?

In depriving Balinese of history, the contributors to the time debate have denied Balinese the capacity to be active, critical subjects,³² a theme borne out by how several of the same commentators have represented Balinese personhood. In *Person, time, and conduct in Bali*, Geertz took it that a description of Balinese personal names as ‘orders of person-definition’ (1973f: 368) is adequate and sufficient to establish ‘the meaningful structure of [their] experience’ (1973f: 364). His aim was ‘a scientific phenomenology of culture’ which would determine ‘the conceptual

³² The term ‘subject’ is deeply ambiguous and I use it here merely for simplicity, because it links with existing academic discourses. The problem is that the term conflates a whole range of different kinds of usage. At one time or another, it has been used ontologically of an underlying substance (or substrate) and so of which of which all other entities are predicated but which is itself not predicated of anything else. So classically, it is the subject of predication. This easily becomes confused with the logical and grammatical subject. Apart from that people are political subjects, and partly related to this, they may also be ethical subjects. These usages are relatively simple however compared to the complexities surrounding humans as philosophical subjects. For Descartes, the subject was a thinking thing or substance. For Kant, it was ‘the ground of thought’ and so self-constituting. For Hegel, it is what can contain its own contradiction within itself. You will note that the whole discussion is couched within the terms of a particular European philosophical debate and pays no attention to other ways of imagining humans. For instance, Indian Samkhya has elaborated philosophical accounts of the subject, popular Balinese versions of which I discuss in Chapters 2,3 & 7. (For a discussion of philosophical Samkhya, see Larson 1987.). For these reasons I prefer to make use of the notion of agency, which has the additional advantage that some analyses (e.g. Collingwood 1942; Inden 1990) are reasonably commensurable with how Balinese talk about such issues.

structure embodied in the symbolic forms through which persons are perceived' (1973f: 364). Geertz's immanent object of study – concepts, structures, symbols – is timeless, ahistorical and most unsuited to the task of articulating changing practices, not least because of the nature of his transcendent object, culture. Indeed the notion of 'symbol' with its fan of ultimately inexpressible meanings (Todorov 1982: 189-98) is what hermeneuts do to signs when they wrench them from their situations of use and let them dissolve gently under the patient scholarly gaze. Geertz set out with the archaeological, if not indeed forensic, presupposition (see Chapter 2 above) that an interpretive method could discern through recently disembodied symbolic forms the underlying conceptual structure of Balinese personhood independent of actual usage. Apart from shooting himself in the head by using a western common-sense notion of names and ignoring rather elegant Balinese epistemological practices (see Hobart 1995), Geertz assumed that ideas of personhood reduce to names. Further, he, Geertz, knew what the meaning really was. He presumed Balinese to be incapable of talking about, reflecting on, still less changing their practices of naming. In other words, to the extent that they are agents or subjects at all, not positions or inscriptions of their culture, they are passive: they know what labels apply to them and how to use them, but nothing more.

In a subsequent article, once again Howe supplemented and modified Geertz's analysis of personhood by pointing out that there are other classes of being, by contrast with which humans are defined, namely gods, spirits, animals and witches (1984). This attempt to define beings in a hierarchy of more or less rigid classes involved some delightful ethnographic contortionism. For instance, Divinity, as 'remote and exceedingly abstract' (1984: 195), could be dismissed, as could figures in Hindu epics enacted in theatre. Exit two categories of agent which are important to Balinese in all sorts of situations. Howe's argument underplays the complex relations of interdependence or transformability between kinds of being as well as the degree to which classes are heterogeneous and overlapping. It also fails to address at all the difficulties which Balinese appreciate in trying to ascribe being which may be non-manifest to monothetic classes. Unlike Geertz, appreciating that the structural order he had posited was incompatible with Balinese practice, Howe qualified his argument.

Although everyone I talked to structured the situation using the same set of concepts, there appeared to be significant differences concerning the content of these... the Balinese conceptual structure...provides guidelines, possibilities and potentialities. It rarely, if ever, specifies a particular course of action (1984: 201, 203).

This admirable recognition leaves Howe caught uneasily between conceptual structure and practice. The problem is that, if the conceptual structure is so indeterminate and the 'content' of concepts fluid, Howe veers close to arguing that what Balinese share is less concepts, symbols or abstract structures, than the changing usage of words, utterances and articulatory practices, a quite different approach, which I suggested years ago (see Hobart 1979: 6-10).

As in the time debate, Duff-Cooper complemented Howe's argument, here with a discussion of how humans are constituted as fit to take their appropriate place in the order of things according to certain Balinese collective representations (1985).

Howe hesitantly, Duff-Cooper enthusiastically, replicate the idea that there is some essential, general system of collective representations which is necessary and sufficient to define and constitute Balinese. Duff-Cooper put it unambiguously. ‘The empirical individual is, in Balinese thought, construed merely as a locus for the interaction of a number of formal notions’ (1985: 82). Thought here is a synonym for a system of cultural categories. Both accounts revert however to the assumption that the conceptual structure has some definite existence that is independent and determinate, not only of the occasions of its use, but as determining what Balinese are and what they think. Balinese emerge as more (Duff-Cooper) or less (Howe) passive subjects of their own cultural categories.

Indeed for Duff-Cooper this passivity is re-affirmed culturally, because ‘men are merely receptacles, as it were, for the working of Widhi [Divinity] in many forms’ (1985: 71, my parentheses). Without knowing the circumstances under which Balinese stated such a view, it is difficult to judge whether we are to understand this as cosmogonic, anthropogenic, epistemological or simply a blanket assertion.³³ In stating that humans are but the sites where formal notions interact or the instruments of Divine Will, Duff-Cooper has however the virtue of making explicit two ways, analytical and exegetical, by which anthropologists turn their subjects into objects or conduits.

The arguments about Balinese notions of personhood point to a little-considered presupposition about the workings of memory. The ‘concepts’ which they are reputed to share – like Divinity, animality, evil – are portrayed as being mysteriously and faultlessly reproduced both in Balinese and through Balinese on appropriate occasions. So Balinese emerge less as fallible, self-critical agents than as complicated machines, in which the necessary programmes have been installed by the Ultimate Agent. Whatever that might be varies according to the commentator. Remembering reduces – occasional glitches in the hardware apart – to the exact replication of information by fixed control codes. It has ceased to be an act by agents, instruments or patients in particular situations, in which what was known is reworked in the knowing, telling, forgetting and rethinking. I often cannot remember quite what I wrote a few hours ago, let alone what structural-functionalism is all about. But Balinese amazingly remember perfectly, without reworking in so doing, the shared concepts they learned under very diverse circumstances – just as, apparently, do their ethnographers.

Attempts to demonstrate just how strange the Balinese are and, at the same time, to explain, or explain away, the evident extent of personal and cultural diversity by recourse to an underlying essence are nothing new. It has a noble pedigree. Retrospectively it has become fashionable to criticize Bateson and Mead’s *Balinese*

³³ There are occasions when dignitaries of the Parisadha Hindu Dharma, the Administrative Council for Balinese Hinduism enunciate similar doctrines, usually to demonstrate that Divinity is unitary and all-powerful, as required under *Pancasila*, the Indonesian state ideology. Otherwise, when I have heard Balinese draw on such images, far from being gross conduits for an agent upon whom they derive such awareness as they have, humans partake of the Divine in differing degrees and kinds such that they have become able to reflect critically upon their origin and to act in defiance of that originary agent. Even this is a gross simplification of the ways in which even I have heard Balinese talk in different situations.

character as encumbered by questionable theory (in this instance Freudian). As we have seen, much the same could be said of most writing on Bali. My concern is quite different. It is how precisely Bateson and Mead echo prevailing anthropological concerns at the time, when they set out to reduce observable variation in behaviour to ‘a culturally standardized system of organization of the instincts and emotions of individuals’ (1942: xi). The evidence for the crucially different nature of the Balinese character is documented in over 700 photographs. So it must be true.

Balinese culture is in many ways *less like our own* than any other which has yet been recorded. It is also a culture in which the ordinary adjustment of the individual approximates in form the sort of maladjustment which, our own cultural setting, we call schizoid (1942: xvi)... [With the rise of] dementia praecox among *our own* population continues to rise, it becomes increasingly important for us to know the bases of childhood experience which predispose to this condition (1942: xvi, my italics and parentheses).

The argument is less interesting for what it purports to say about Balinese than how an American and a British author use Bali to postulate a shared transatlantic culture: one which dispenses among other things with historical, regional, ethnic and class differences. Balinese eccentricity – and Vickers (1989: 118-24) singles out Mead as a key figure in its propagation – serves as an experimental case, in which Balinese serve as laboratory animals. They also turn out to be essential to unifying some imaginary Anglo-American ‘culture’: one of the few successful instances of ‘the special relationship’ much touted by British politicians in moments of desperation. And Balinese are the objects or passive subjects of their own culture, through which this is achieved. Perhaps this is why, for all the writing on them, they remain strangely a spectacle. There is little sense of getting close enough to hear what they are saying to one another.

Some less than happy thoughts

There is a missing subject, in several senses, in the barrage of predicates fired off in the general direction of Bali. In taking ‘time’ as the proper topic of investigation, anthropologists writing on Bali have eliminated history. In so doing, they have taken the capacity of being subjects – that is self-aware, self-critical, self-disciplining agents away from Balinese. In place of historically situated agents, they have substituted fantasy projections of some unitary subject of predication, ‘the Balinese’, or the abstract substances of ‘time’, ‘culture’, ‘conceptual structure’, ‘symbol’, ‘ritual’ as imaginary discursive subjects. The subject, in the sense of self-critical agent, presupposed in these accounts is the anthropologist who is author of, and authorizes, the putative Balinese in her own terms.

At select gatherings of Balinese specialists (which have mostly tended to exclude all but a few token Balinese), I sometimes hear sage murmurings about how much knowledge there is about Bali these days. Clifford Geertz put it rather better: ‘we know them, or think we do, inch by inch, however far we remain from understanding them’ (1983d: viii). We know and understand only too well what we want to know about Bali. The cost (and probably the aim) has been that of eliminating Balinese from participating in these processes, except as ‘informants’,

from critical reflection on their own society and history. In this sense, Bali has become so over-known in such stereotyped, but often incommensurable, forms that, conversely, it remains delightfully under-known. I am interested in knowing, or learning, about rather different matters for rather different reasons. Here I wanted to reflect on the implications of anthropologists' writings as part of the transmogrification of these 'savage', 'independent' people into the smiling, docile Orientals of travel fiction, whose function is to service the international tourist industry including, notably, the sexual fantasies of its clientèle. More generally I wish to discuss how Balinese represent their own history to themselves and others, and so reflect critically upon how to act in an increasingly hypermodern society.

As we seem to know so much about Bali, perhaps I ought to end with some questions about this surfeit of knowledge, or at least certainty. What conditions the kind of representations of, or projections onto, other societies, which western authors have made? Is the recourse to 'regional traditions of ethnographic writing' (e.g. Fardon 1990) an adequate explanation? If much history is the history of the Other for us, who are the 'we'? It seems at moments as if the missing subject of many anthropological accounts is ourselves, which we can only constitute narratively as a unitary essence by contrast with some imagined Other. In the writings of Foucault, is the lingering Saussurean dichotomy of empty and arbitrary semantic oppositions waiting to be filled, not itself the imposition of a historically particular epistemological moment onto the world? And who empowers themselves to colour in the expectant spaces on this world canvas? Is a post-Saidian appeal to the necessities of colonial power and knowledge in constituting 'alterity' a sufficient solution? If European nation states were as powerful as often presumed, what purposes were served in repetitively caricaturing those whom they had conquered, or were about to? How much were representations a striving after recognition and a need to imagine selves and others accordingly? Balinese-Dutch dealings between 1817 and 1908 suggest something of this kind was going on, a recognition in the end partly denied the Dutch as masters by their foremost would-be subjects' suicide in a neat narrative self-termination.³⁴

Most of the authors on Bali whom I have cited wrote on the post-Independence period. Short of postulating some post-colonial epistemological imperialism, why did these authors, whether compulsively or unthinkingly, cannibalize and reiterate previous representations, under such different intellectual, social and political circumstances? Mead and Bateson stated their aim as the scientific establishment of cultural difference with Bali as the laboratory. Is this an adequate explanation of their successors' purposes? Phrased in these terms, have not Bali and Balinese become mainly important as objects of academic and tourist indulgence? They are above all objects of our not so recondite pleasures. I am not convinced though that one can ask such 'why' questions without falling into the essentialist trap of postulating some originary intention. Perhaps we should think instead in terms of the consequences of motivations, which look quite different in historical retrospect.

³⁴ I rely here on Margaret Wiener's work (1995a, 1995b 1999), including her nuanced analysis of the extent to which the Dutch strove to obtain Balinese recognition of their power and superiority. On the other hand, she shows quite how far certain Balinese royal representations succeeded in obliterating the Dutch and their claims to agency in Balinese narratives about this period.

Sadly, it might be that, with so many descriptive and narrative devices available, it has simply become professional practice to use them. If replicating past, partly forgotten and underdetermined motives and practices is part of professionalizing anthropology, then there is much to be said against professionalization. One of Pirandello's characters in search of an author however gave as good an answer as any:

A fact is like a sack which won't stand up when it is empty. In order that it may stand up, one has to put into it the reason and sentiment which caused it to exist.

Colonial and Indonesian officials, businessmen, visiting dignitaries, scholars, travel-writers and tourists have so thoroughly worked over Bali as to leave the sack turgid. Or is it just very sodden?

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