

Live or dead?

how dialogic is theatre in Bali?

In

To change Bali

essays in honour of I Gusti Ngurah Bagus.

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Denpasar: Bali Post.

Foreword

'Live or dead?' has been through several incarnations. Originally it was written as a paper presented to the **VA|AVMI symposium on performance and mediatization** as part of the Research Project on *Verbal art in the Audio-Visual Media of Indonesia* 2-5 December 1998, at the University of Leiden. When I was asked to contribute to a Festschrift for the distinguished Balinese anthropologist, I Gusti Ngurah Bagus, a revised version seemed apt in view of Ngurah Bagus's long-standing interest in theatre and cultural change in Bali. Shortly afterwards, the editors of *Media worlds: anthropology on new terrain* Faye Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod and Brian Larkin asked me to include a much shortened version in the collection, which was published in 2002 by the University of California Press as 'Live or dead? televising theatre in Bali.' Subsequently a former student of mine, Angelina Karpovich was editing a collection on *Genre in Asian film and television* to be published by Palgrave Macmillan and asked if I had anything suitable. Of the various pieces I offered, she chose 'Live or Dead?' which appeared in a revised form in 2010. The present version is the one first published. There are two main reasons for this choice. First it is the complete original text. Second, of all the publishers whom I approached for permission to put a published work on my personal website, the only ones to refuse point blank have been Palgrave Macmillan.

What pushed me to write about the implications of televising theatre in Bali was the frequency with which experienced Balinese actors and viewers would complain that, compared to performances *in situ* with live audiences, performing in a studio felt dead. This is not an abstruse issue. Theatre in Bali was, and partly still is, both a popular and a mass medium, and is obligatory at the frequent village temple festivals across the island. Theatre is implicated in Balinese social life in many ways. Not least it is a conversation – or argument – that people have with one another about how to understand and address what is going on, what it is to be Balinese and so on. Actors often more than, say, priests used to be considered local intellectuals. So the switch from performances largely being by local people for local people to increasingly academy-trained actors paid first by state television then increasingly by commercial media corporations raises a host of questions.

In this piece my concern is about one aspect of these changes. There was much discussion about whether, and if so how, television was changing both how people performed and how they watched. Rather than attempt some Olympian judgement on something so complex, variable and subject to conflicting opinions, I set out to examine the relationship between different performances and what actors and viewers said about them. To compare like with like, I chose two televised plays in different genres – *Derama Gong*, demotic theatre that had been the vogue for some twenty years, and *Arja*, Dance Opera, which combined singing, dancing and acting – that villagers who were aficionados of theatre particularly liked. I invited the two theatre troupes in question to the research village to perform during temple festivals to packed local audiences. So the analysis started with villagers' commentaries. (On this occasion I did not as sometimes, e.g. *The Prince of Nusa's Vow*, discuss the performances in detail with the actors, because at the time I was primarily interested in audiences which, as theatre had initially been the most popular choice when watching TV, brought theatre and television audiences together.)

When I am asked by inquiring editors whether I have something suitable for a collection on media in Asia, I usually send several, mostly unpublished, pieces for them to choose from. I am not sure why, but this is the piece they have often chosen.

Live or Dead? How Dialogic is Theatre in Bali?

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Balinese actors usually say they much prefer performing before live audiences than in recording studios. In this chapter I examine some of the differences discernible in the same plays as acted in front of village audiences and as broadcast on Indonesian state television. Such a study suggests that far more is at stake than actors' unfamiliarity with the exigencies of performing for television, with the inevitable differences between acting on stage and in television studios. Balinese theatre, especially in the genres I shall be considering, is largely extemporised around a minimal plot. So the circumstances under which the play takes place and the performance of the audience are crucial to what happens. Theatre involves not just ad-libbing the exchanges between actors, but also a less obvious, but overlapping, dialogue between actors and audience. In a different and little remarked upon way, the audience also performs. Acting to camera therefore transforms the occasion. An inquiry into the details of differences in theatrical performances raises far wider questions about what is involved in dialogic models of social action and in communication itself.¹

Such a study picks up on the work of Professor Gusti Ngurah Bagus in several respects. It starts with an appreciation of the centrality of ethnographic and historical detail to any analysis. On an island which, since the days of Bateson and Mead if not before, has been at the eye of endless theoretical storms, there is a danger of what actually occurs being blown away in the flatulence of academic fashion. Ngurah Bagus's work also stresses a recognition of the importance of a detailed linguistic understanding. On the whole the grander the theoretical debate about Bali the greater the chances that the protagonists do not speak Balinese at all.² An appreciation of language in use involves you in engaging with the sensibilities and critical understanding of those whom you study. This third kind of dialogue challenges the gulf which practice—or practitioners—find convenient to throw up between experts and their objects of study.

Gusti Ngurah Bagus's work stands in an interesting relationship both to these subjects of study and to the role of theory. His approach is demotic in several senses. It starts with people as agents or subjects of

action. It refuses to objectivise people into the instruments or tokens of historical and social processes. And it concerns itself with the popular and with popular culture. Significantly theory here is not a means of projecting the author's predilections and prejudices onto the object of study. Nor is it part of that elitist academic determination to encompass and overwrite the discursive practices of others, to authorise them (Asad 1986; Hobart 1990a) and to deny the revolutionary potential inherent in the inevitable antagonisms which exist in any political and social formation. Gusti Ngurah Bagus's work instead treats theory as the means to interrogate evidence critically, that is it must itself in turn be subject to critique. Theory on this account is not an ideological means to pre-empt, muzzle or trivialise critical inquiry.

Background

Theatre in Bali is a vast topic. Not only are there many differing, changing and new genres, but until recently there were innumerable, local, part-time clubs of actors and dancers, besides the better-known professional troupes. My concern however is with one aspect of theatre in Bali, that is as a set of changing practices. The evident differences between live and televised performances have implications for the reframing of theatre and television as Indonesian mass and popular media transform.

How I became interested in studying theatre is germane to my argument for a dialogic study of social life. Where possible, I have tried in different ways to involve the intellectual concerns of those I am working with in the research. At the beginning of a visit to Bali in 1988-89, inquiring about discourses of development broadly conceived, I brought together the people I had worked with on a previous visit and asked what they thought of the idea, what was important to examine and how I should go about it? This led to a discussion of what were in their view the important occasions, sites and personnel involved in the rapid change taking place in Bali.

Interestingly no one mentioned government development initiatives and quickly dismissed their importance when I mentioned them. Partly perhaps because tourism affected those present indirectly rather than directly through art shops and the handicraft industry, they concluded that tourism might be a major source of wealth and a force to be reckoned with, but how it impacted on Balinese society depended in turn upon other processes. All were media occasions. The most important of these, they agreed, were public meetings, pronouncements through mediums (*balian*) from the non-manifest (*niskala*) world, and theatre. Of these, they considered theatre to be the most important, because that was

where recognition and discussion about the significance of what was happening was aired publicly. On reflection, theatre seemed therefore a more sensible starting point for research than a study of development projects and policy-making (which always threatened to become an exercise in ideological massage anyway). And, rather than treat Balinese as able only to provide raw material for the knowing anthropological mind, it had the advantage of making critical discussion itself part of the object of study.

Subsequently I noticed that in the evenings the coffee and food stalls, which had previously been the centre of social life, were quiet or had closed down. If Balinese theatre were being broadcast on television, the main square was deserted. When I asked those at the original meeting how television fitted in the picture, they admitted that their previous analysis was becoming increasingly retrospective. Not only did people mostly watch theatre on television, but what they saw on television was forcing ordinary people to rethink the world about them. The follow-up to these thoughts led to the Balinese Television Project and my subsequent research on mass media in Indonesia.⁴

The impact of television on theatre can be judged by the fact that, on the best estimate, over eighty percent of theatre troupes in Bali disappeared during the 1980s, as audiences were set on watching only the best, once they knew what it was like. With theatre becoming a mainstay of local television peak-hour scheduling, I found myself caught up in frequent conversations between actors, who used to complain about the rigidity of the medium. As a central part of the television project has been recording broadcast Balinese theatre, a way of testing and fleshing out the actors' appreciations was to commission performances of the plays previously recorded from television.⁵ We chose the occasion of local temple festivals in Tengahpadang, because that is when Balinese themselves put on theatre plays.

By the time it came to record the temple performances, we had the problem of how to decide which examples to request from the large number in the archive. Again, the obvious way was to involve local aficionados of theatre and ask which plays they had enjoyed the most and which they also considered to be good examples of their respective genres. The choice of plays excerpted below is partly theirs.

Primarily for reasons of cost, we restricted ourselves to the two most popular and commonly performed genres. The first, *Derama Gong* (hereafter simply *Derama*), sprang up in the late 1960s, not coincidentally after the abortive coup *d'état* in 1965. The plots are sometimes adaptations of written stories from the Pañji cycle, more often they are fictive creations. Sometimes, they are notionally set in the

Javanese kingdoms of Kuripan, Daha and so on of the Pañji stories, sometimes not. Although the period in which they are set is pre-colonial Java or Bali, they are 'modern' in the sense that the characters draw upon new fashions, such as the hero and heroine holding hands, and introduce contemporary themes and interests. Derama is in spoken Balinese; song and dance are fairly incidental.

By contrast, *Arja* is of far longer standing. De Zoete and Spies described it in *Dance and Drama in Bali* as corresponding 'most nearly to our idea of opera, or rather of musical comedy... sentimental situations are developed as nowhere else on the Balinese stage [prior that is to Derama]. There is something of the comedy of manners in its construction' (1938, 196-97, my parentheses). Depending on fashion, some male roles, especially refined ones, are played by women, while some of the coarser female roles may be played by men. The plots of Arja are drawn from a wide range of literary sources, the Mahabharata, Javanese romances, Chinese tales of passion and others beside. The aristocratic figures sing, part of the time at least, in verse of different metres, *pupuh*, partly in *kawi* (a literary register of Balinese and Javanese), partly in high Balinese, and are paraphrased by their servants or ministers. For a time during the 1970s and 1980s, Arja lost out in popularity to Derama. By about 1990 however Arja, which retained a certain classic integrity, had come back into vogue. Audiences had become bored with Derama, which had become increasingly derivative. With hindsight Derama looks increasingly like an ideological form peculiarly suited to the New Order regime, like *Séndratari* (on which see Hough 1992). Based on invented stories in a never-never land, where the good win through and the bad get their just deserts, Derama bears little relationship to any contemporary social, political or economic realm of lived experience.⁶

The Derama in question was first serialised on Balinese television between March and April and the Arja between June and July of 1991. The Derama troupe was one of the best known on the island. Bhara Budaya, and the Arja actors were from the state radio company, Radio Republik Indonesia. The live performances were filmed as part of the television project in August 1992 during temple festivals in Tengahpadang. Both live and televised performances lasted some seven hours. The dialogue was extemporised in both, as was some of the singing in the live Arja. The bare outlines of the plots were set, but the order of scenes changes somewhat, especially in the Derama, partly because there were slight differences in the cast for the live version and this encouraged them to play to the actors' strengths and preferences. I am not concerned here with the structure of the plots, but with the

relationships between the various parties involved in the occasion as a whole.

If they found a play was interesting, my Balinese colleagues would tend to talk about it, sometimes for days afterwards. I spoke at length subsequently with several of the actors, but my translation and analysis of the performances also relies heavily on the commentaries provided by a number of villagers from Tengahpadang who were enthusiastic and often knowledgeable theatre-goers. As I have outlined who these were elsewhere (e.g. Hobart 1999a), I shall mention only the immediately relevant figures with whom I worked as a group, the setting in which Balinese most often talk over theatre. Three were themselves actors. The oldest was a well-known Arja teacher and dancer, then in his early nineties. The ex-village head previously mentioned also happened to be a skilled player of ministers and servants in Derama. There was also a wealthy farmer and devotee of shadow theatre; a very clever, but poor, flower-seller; and a tenant farmer who knew a great deal about theatre, but who assumed a guise of naive stupidity in company. His granddaughter who was training as a actress-dancer at the Academy of Performing Arts (*Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia*) in Denpasar also took part. Various other friends and relatives who had watch the plays would drop in and out of the discussions.

Warming up the Audience

A favourite theme among actors, and a corollary of interactive theatre, is the difficulties of getting the play started in the first place. Even if you are experienced and have danced in a place many times before, you do not know who comprises the audience that night, what mood they are in, nor what they will respond well to. (So the meal served before the performance is an occasion to sense the venue, topical local concerns and so forth.) The problems of performing on television become obvious. You know little of your audience, nor have any means of gauging their receptiveness. Not only is there no script to rely on, or blame; but Balinese audiences require to be wooed into becoming engaged.

In Derama, it is commonly servants, either male or female, playing comic roles whose job it is to warm up the audience.' So let us have a look at how the same pair of male servants worked a television audience to a local live show. The play was about Gusti Ayu Ratih (the title of the play), the sheltered and beautiful daughter of a minister to the court of Daha to whom the heir to the throne becomes attracted. He seduces and impregnates her but, ensorcelled by a princess from another kingdom, he abandons her. She goes mad and runs wild in the forest before a wise

hermit realises the nature of the problem and sets her and the prince to rights. The opening half-hour or so has virtually nothing to do with the plot other than setting the scene. Its function is quite different.

The Televised Version

Two close servants (*parekan tatadan*) of the prince, Gangsar and Gingsir, entered and began talking about the state of affairs in the kingdom of Daha (a section known as *Angucap-ucap*). They expatiated upon how well the king ruled the kingdom and recited his praises (*panyerita pangajum*). The scene was set, the audience knew where they were narratively. The servants then tried out various routines to establish what would make this particular audience laugh (*ngarereh sané kasenengin antuk panonton*). They started in low key with two jokes about there being many food-sellers around the theatre, which depended simply on saying the same thing but in different formulations.

This provided the springboard for their first routine. They moved to listing the kinds of cakes on sale in the stalls round about the open theatre stage, so laying the foundations of a patter which would lead them to a popular Javanese song on television via a pun on cake—*Ketuk Lèndri*—to the name of a different Javanese cake, which is also the title of a song, *Getuk Lèndri*. In the course of this, an interesting exchange took place.

Gingsir:

Bullet cakes. (*Jaja batun bedil*)

Gangsar:

What?

Gingsir:

Bullet cakes have been just been going like wild fire.

Gangsar:

Where's that?

Gingsir:

(*Delivering the punch line*) In Kuwait and in Iraq, bullets have been selling well!

Gangsar:

You've only seen the image (on the television screen) and you're saying they sell well. Huh!

The two servants were working up to introducing a song. The problem is how to do so seemingly smoothly and naturally, without having to fall back on some kind of the callow line like: 'Now I shall sing'. As the cake in question was largely unknown outside the provincial capital Denpasar, they listed its contents and told people it was *ngatop*, 'the

tops', a vogue word among the young at that time, at whom the song was primarily aimed.

The song made the spectators laugh, not because of the words, which were Javanese and they did not know, but at Gingsir's dancing a Javanese pop song and movements in the style of *Jogèd Bungbung*. This is a genre in which a female dancer invites and dances flirtatiously serially with male members of the audience. In the middle Gingsir wove idiosyncratic noises into the song: *Kaing! Kaing!* which is the Balinese verbalization of a dog barking (Woof! Woof!). Gangsar told him to shut up, *Cèk! Cèk!*, the rebuke used to silence a dog. They switched to a take-off of the sort of pop group that performs *Getuk Lèndri*. Gingsir swung his arms and hands out to his sides increasingly wildly in a take-off of disco dancing, until he finally grabbed Gangsar—who looked suitably mortified—by the genitals.

At several points what the spectators are to make of what happens is not clearly determined. For instance, is the goosing of Gangsar just clowning around, an 'accident' of Gingsir's exuberant performance? Or, in the context of a Javanese song, is it a rude comment on the loose, and ambivalent, sexuality Balinese stereotypically attribute to Javanese? Is Gingsir's barking dog in the middle of the song merely any incongruity which will make the audience laugh? Or are there potential resonances about the fact that dogs are known to be *haram* to Muslims, which most Javanese are? To what extent is the song about broadening Balinese horizons, or about domesticating the dominant Javanese popular culture?

The range of interpretive possibility at many points in the play is left open, as is the possibility of not bothering to think too much and just to enjoy what goes on. If interpretive closure of the text hinges in some way on the original intention of the playwright, then it is often impossible in practice to know what this might be and how we would decide upon it (Hirsch 1967). In what sense then is it useful even to try to determine validatable and unambiguous intentionality (as Ricoeur insists is possible, 1976) in these quick-silver, ad-libbed, unrepeatable exchanges which depend so much upon the moment? The response in media studies to the problems of interpretation has been to shift the emphasis from closure of the text to the audience and its 'preferred reading'. This still leaves awkward questions, because the audience is as problematically idealised entity as is the text. How do you determine exactly who, or what, the audience is (Ang 1991), let alone what they are thinking? In what sense, and under what circumstances, is it useful to talk of audiences 'reading'? How, and on what authority, do you extrapolate unitary, coherent preferences from this? And what underwrites the equivalence of what spectators experience or think and

academic 'readings' of these? In answer to the last two questions, I prefer to give significantly greater weight than do most media scholars and even anthropologists to what the performers, local experts and lay people had to say as part of the analysis.

So what did members of the audience make of this scene? (I did not have a chance to ask the two actors.) Rather than centering around a clear reading or interpretation, the commentators treated the scene as providing an occasion for talking about a whole range of issues. These ranged from how well the cast acted compared to other performances they had watched recently or remembered vividly; to discussing which bits they enjoyed, found funny, sad or moving; to expatiating upon cryptic sections of dialogue or remarks the actors made. Those who had themselves been actors tended to frame their remarks with comments on technique, timing and so on." Even my apparently straightforward description above of the scene relies on extrapolating from the criss-crossing opinions, judgements, divagations, misapprehensions and arguments, resolved or otherwise, between the commentators. The idea that you could uncritically impose hermeneutic practices honed upon the credo of the eternal unchanging text to elicit a hidden and transcendental truth (exemplified by the Bible) on such labile, occasional, immediate and unrepeatable performances is farcical.

At suitable junctures I asked the group of commentators direct questions. Did they find the exchange funny? Not particularly. Gangsar and Gingsir were often much better, but they had to be careful what they said in front of television cameras. More important, the audience (from Tohpati, near Denpasar) were 'raw' (*matah*). Why then did the television audience laugh? Because they were taken by surprise by the unexpectedly topical reference. Did anyone have an idea why they used that particular song? The group often gives live shows around Bali apart from their televised appearances. So they have begun to run out of fresh jokes and have chosen a song which they know is likely to appeal to the young, while the older spectators enjoyed watching the send-up of the song. The overriding aim in any event is to make the audience like them, appreciate their performance and want to pay to see them again.

A remark by Gangsar neatly exposes the fatuity of interpretive analysis which do not fully take into account the presuppositions of the actors and spectators. Why, I asked, in the middle of the exchange about cakes, did Gangsar suddenly cut in, breaking the flow, to remind Gingsir that he didn't know what had actually happened in the Gulf War, he only saw the *lawat*, image, impression, shadow. Without an appreciation of Balinese epistemological ideas about the relationship, and consequent practices of discriminating, between verifiable perceptions and

appearances, the reprimand makes little sense and appears just another example of the irrationality or superfluity of the native mind. However it is only if you reverse normal procedure and review the analytical presuppositions using those of the object of study that the shock occurs. The Balinese comedians, delightfully, find support in Baudrillard's infamous work, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, a neat and parallel critique of Euro-American habits of conflating what they see on television with reality.¹⁰

The Live Version

The play took place in front of the Pura Dalem Kauh in Tengahpadang during the temple festival there. The seating for several hundred was packed out and there was a further large crowd floating between the play, temple, stalls and gambling groups.

The play started conventionally, with a deep voice through the microphone offering an apology, *pangaksama*, for any mistakes or faults on the part of the actors, a request to Divinity that the audience enjoy the performance and to bring *prama santi*, peace of mind.

The same servants, Gangsar and Gingsir, were the first on stage. There happened to be two people of the same names in the village. So the servants started by joking about how I Gingsir (who worked for the Bintang beer company in Denpasar) had to get permission to come home for the festival. They then made a play of confusing the fact that I Gingsir and I Gangsar in Tengahpadang are in-laws with their own relationship. They proceeded to show an equal fluency with the names of the stall-owners round the stage. The aim was to surprise and please the audience by showing that they are *au fait* with the local scene.¹¹

After this preamble, Gangsar and Gingsir started complaining that they were poor servants, who just got left-overs (*lungsuran*) to eat and one chequered (*polèng*) sarong each to wear. How much better the audience was turned out than they! Obviously they appreciated what is fitting according to Hindu religion and were dressed suitably for a temple festival. While comic characters often comment on what is appropriate, dress and current affairs, I found this rather heavy-handed, although the commentators seemed less worried about it. It sounded like a sermon by organic intellectuals on state religious policy as refracted through local government.

Gingsir protested that he was ashamed (*kimud*) to go to court in old clothes. But how was he to get new ones? He had no money. They despaired, until they suddenly came up with the idea that they could get money if one of them pretended to be dead. Ni Wayan Suci (a stall-keeper) would give Rp. 1,000 (then about U.S.\$ 0.50) when she heard

her relative, I Gangsar, was dead (a further play on local knowledge). With some splendid mathematics, they worked out that, if they could manage to persuade two people to give Rp. 1,000 each, they would have *two million Rupiah* and be rich! After some persuasion Gangsar agreed to mimic being dead. Gingsir whipped out a length of white cloth and put it over Gangsar, who promptly leapt up and ran in fear off stage (because witches would think he really *was* a corpse and come and eat him). Gingsir has to go off and entice him back.¹²

No sooner had the white cloth been put over him again than Gangsar had to get up to have a very public pee in the shrubbery which made up the back of the set. The two then sat down for a moment and gloated over what they could buy with all the money they would get. They would buy a car! Gangsar lay down again and promptly got an enormous erection. Gingsir asked him 'what dead person stands up like that?' and detumesced Gangsar hard with his foot, to a bar from the orchestra. Gingsir then threw himself into a wild fit of mourning, lifting his sarong to expose a vast pair of red underpants (not the sort of thing you do in a televised performance) and hurled himself about the stage howling in grief. Gangsar ran off again in fear and had to be dragged back by Gingsir, who explained that he, Gingsir, had to cry realistically if they were to get people to believe them and so pay up.

Now Balinese are noted for their restraint in mourning. So, once again how the audience is to take this exchange is left open. There is no final interpretation. It could be a commentary on, or caricature of, the difficulties, at times impossibility, of ordinary people so rigorously repressing their feelings. It could be a play on what the actors have seen on television and so frames Balinese practice. Even if it is a play for laughs by inverting 'normal' behaviour, we are in the realm of a potentially complex commentary. By this stage, it should be evident that the task of theatre is not simply about attempting to represent the normal, or ideological, but at the least is about encompassing quite different points of view, a double-, or multiple-voiced commentary. It is a singular form of commentary, because the commentators do not set themselves above what they comment on. On the contrary, they exemplify and embody it. In other words, we are dealing with the coexistence of different points of view, even epistemologies, where the actors who are at once their own authors refuse to allow themselves that 'surplus of vision' which so distinguishes the authoritative author. The complex author of the play, the actors with the help of the audience, has no superior point of view, nor do they predetermine, except in the minimal terms set by the plot, how the role shall develop.¹³

To return to the scene, Gingsir then went into a sort of comic dance to show his misery. At this point the King of Kuripan entered and asked why he was crying. The following is an edited version of what happens then.¹⁴

Gingsir:

Because Gangsar is dead.

Prince:

But I was chatting to him only this morning.

Gingsir:

He died all of a sudden. He said his stomach hurt, he got hiccups and died.

Prince:

(Obviously moved) Remember the words of wise priests, you should not cry near to a corpse.

Gingsir:

Yes.

Prince:

It makes the passage harder for the soul of the deceased.

Gingsir:

That's why I'm crying over here!

Gingsir said that that costs money. The prince asked if he had any, to which Gingsir said no. The prince told Gingsir he had better go and try to raise the necessary sum, to which Gingsir retorted that Gangsar was his, the prince's, servant and that he should therefore contribute. (This is an evident reference to how often people renege on their social obligations these days.) The prince pulled out Rp. 3,000, which Gangsar threw down on the ground in pique, saying what could he do with just Rp. 3,000. Precisely how much money the prince handed over sets up the next scene when the two servants quarrel about dividing up their spoils.

Some Local Comments

The evening after the play I invited a group of people round and asked them what they thought of the play. The flower-seller said that he liked the version in Tengahpadang much better than the televised version (which I had showed them on video some weeks before). The farmer said that he did not really like either, because he did not like Derama on principle, but confessed that the live performance had made him laugh, while the broadcast had not. The old actor disagreed sharply with them, although he did admit the jokes were far funnier in the live version. He specified in detail the differences and his reasons for preferring the televised version: the dancing was better, their expressions (*semita*) were more developed, their movements (*ambek-ambekan*) were more appropriate to dance and they followed the plot, with the correct stages

of its introduction. These are *Panglembar*, the introductory dance which establishes the space for subsequent performance; *Angucap-ucap*, describing the state of affairs; *Mapaitungan*, deliberation, when servants talk over things before attending their masters; *Ngalèmèkin* when the elder of the two servants gives (moral) advice to the younger; *Panangkilan* when they go to the court.

The ex-headman arbitrated. Because he was a professional, the old actor realised all the faults. The scene of playing dead was very clever because it hit several targets at the same time. The development of the jokes was much better in the live performance because the audience helped the actors much more than the audience on television, who were stiff and unresponsive. That the storyline was less clearly defined from the beginning was because the troupe had come up planning to do another play and were still struggling to remember the details of the plot. (We had visited the troupe in Denpasar to agree the date, venue and payment. We had explained why we wanted Gusti Ayu Ratih. In the meantime however, they had decided that they would prefer to try out a different play, which somewhat defeated the object of the exercise.)

Setting a Trap on Stage

By this point it should be evident that a full comparison of two versions of the play would require a book in itself. The same would be required for the performances of *Keris Pusaka Sakti* (roughly: 'The Magical Heirloom Sword'). Instead I would like, using a scene from the live version of *Keris Pusaka Sakti*, to develop the point about the openness, what Bakhtin calls 'the unfinalisability', of dialogic interaction. The scene is significant for what Euro-American theatre people and scholars might call 'breaking frame'. The image presupposes that the structure of the plot and the actors' lines are sharply demarcated from the actors' and audience's lives. In other words, what we are pleased to call 'the dialogue', of the play is all-too-often effectively a fractured monologue, which would be threatened by the possibility of non-mock interaction (rather as most academics dislike students interrupting to ask questions when they are in the full flow of a lecture).

The scene takes place in the court of Jenggala, where a meeting (*paruman*) is in process between the Queen, played by a famous Arja actress, Ni Rébu, and her two servants, the Panasar and Wijil, and her Chief Minister, who is however marginal to the following exchange. From what transpired, it looks as if the actors playing the Panasar and Wijil must have plotted beforehand to try to embarrass Ni Rébu on stage. It is probably not coincidental that this happened while we were recording with several well known local actors, including the old actor

and the ex-headman, in the front of the audience. It is also fitting that the exchange occurred during a scene set in Jenggala, the kingdom of the Mad, where the otherwise unsayable is uttered publicly.¹⁵

It began innocently enough. Wijil started singing and begging the Queen's pardon. She, not realising what was afoot, told him not to abase himself too much, just to say what he wanted. He sang he wanted to ask for something, a gold ring. Up till now he had only worn silver, he would like to try gold. She asked him angrily if he has any idea how much gold is a gram? He replies:

Wijil: My Lady. I thought you were going around selling gold!
Queen: (Suddenly realising what all this preamble has been leading to)
 Useless creature! What a gob you've got on you! ¹⁶

Without understanding the associations and context, it might at first sight appear odd that Ni Rébu reacted by looking discomfited (*congah*). As the commentators explained to me later, her face indicated fleetingly that the remark had got through to her. As they put it, she *negakin debong*, literally she had sat on a banana stem: you suddenly realise the damp has got through to you. To understand the significance of Wijil's statement requires some prior knowledge, not least about the actors themselves. By way of background, the exchange relied upon the knowledge that Ni Rébu, who was old and had never married, was widely believed to have taken an oath that she would remain unmarried in return for the gift of becoming a superb actress.¹⁷

When Wijil began to sing, it marked a break from the previous theme of the dialogue. Was it merely a development of the plot or something else? Rather obviously, scripted theatre effectively excludes such possibilities, which keep Balinese actors on their toes at the best of times. To begin with it was not clear, why he was apologising: it could have been a development of the plot (since the narrative is almost entirely ad-libbed, much of the play is built up on such off-the-cuff digressions). Wijil referred to wanting to have a gold ring. He had never tried something like that. When Ni Rébu asked him how much he thought gold was worth, she stepped into the trap. She indicated how high a price gold had, but it could as well have been something else that she had of great value to offer, on which however she put an exorbitant price. Wijil's reference to a gold ring, which has of course a hole in it, pointed to the possibility that its referent was the fact that she valued her virginity, or her freedom from marriage (the words the commentators used was ambiguous here), as others do gold—in other words, very highly. That she grasped something was afoot was clear from her reply, followed by her kicking him. As far as I, and the Balinese I have spoken

to, know there is no fixed, or generally known, association of rings with women's genitalia. It relies upon a context internal to the performance in question.

She turned then to her other servant, the Panasar, who leapt up kicking his legs out behind him, snapping to attention and replying in Dutch. She told him off and then asked him to sing (everyone knows he has a lovely voice). But he had to smile and not show his teeth at the same time—an impossibility. She had started to exact her revenge. He too was useless, she said, and he would be reborn as a toad hopping about under banana palms looking for food. The Panasar made as if to pull himself together and started to sing. The audience was expecting it to be: '*Singgih Ratu Sri Bupati—my Noble Queen*'. Instead he sang '*Singgih Ratu Sri...Rébuwati*', her real name, Rébu, with the common suffix '-wati' for a woman. The queen promptly punched him on the chin and he made as if to stagger off, shaking his head like a boxer who has received a hard punch from his opponent. Boxing at the time was one of the favourite programmes on television. A complicated mixture of shock, merriment, sympathy and perhaps more was elicited when the victims were on the receiving end of hard blows, which were then often reenacted by the viewers.

The Panasar immediately retorted. The exchange hinges on a pun on *sarap*, which is both 'brain' and 'leapt upon by'. The exchange assumes the first sense until the punch line. This time the Panasar manoeuvred her into setting herself up, while Wijil was now telling him to lay off.

Panasar:

Ooh! My brain (Or 'I've been leapt upon'.)

Queen:

You'd be better off dead anyway.

Panasar:

Ow! My brain

Wijil:

Leave off.

Queen:

What brain? ('Leapt upon by what?')

Panasar:

Leapt upon by a tiger. (A remark aimed at Ni Rébu's character as just demonstrated.)

I have no ground to think the unfolding sequence had been worked out beforehand. Being a good actor in Bali is knowing how to proceed in an open-ended dialogue. It is this skill, born of practice, which is what Balinese intertextuality, if you will, is about.¹⁸

Everyone greatly appreciated the evening. They agreed that it had a life which the televised version, performed in a recording studio with no audience, had not. The old actor was unstinting. The performers were excellent, he said, because they made the audience laugh constantly and gave no idea what was coming next. Ni Rébu in particular was a seasoned (*wayah*) performer, which came out in the way she turned the ambush back on her fellow actors. The commentators all much appreciated how 'dry' (*uh*) she was, a term used in the first instance because she did not burst out in a sweat, as a lesser actress would have. More generally though the term is used of a hardened professional, who avoids showing any feeling of discomfort or embarrassment on being trapped, taunted or caught out on stage.

The ambush was not a private joke among the actors. The point precisely was to try and catch Ni Rébu out in public. In other words, not only the actors had immediately to catch an oblique reference (selling gold) and follow the twists and turns of the exchange. In order for the ploy to work, so did a significant proportion of the audience. Tengahpadang is known in Balinese thespian circles as producing, on the whole, sophisticated audiences who are adept at obscure sexual innuendo. What works is specific to a given audience though and the actors had gently tested the waters earlier in the evening. Imagine the sensitivity to nuance, associative possibility and the familiarity with the use of a range of speech genres required of at least a part of an audience. The contrast with the stereotypical American or European 'couch potato', gawping mindlessly at the television set, could not be starker. Audiences however are not natural entities but, as this last exchange should make clear, are the continually changing outcome of particular viewing practices. The kind of practices required to produce the more sophisticated members of a Balinese Arja audience differ sharply from those which supposedly bring about the 'dumbing down' required of television audiences in the current capitalist era. That said, the vision of a global settee-full of viewers made idiotic by the vast machinery of media imperialism and endless bad Hollywood films is very much an elite representation, which itself requires critical examination. The argument is nostalgic. It yearns for a time when it was not thus, or looks to a utopia when the masses will be emancipated, whether they like it or not.

I hope it should be equally clear that the play is not a production which is finalised before its performance, even though the minimal parameters of the plot have, of course, to be set for there to be a play at all. There seems to be no comparable requirement to suspend disbelief as in European theatre. The interpretive version, of course, is the leap of

faith into the hermeneutic circle. From my inquiries of spectators, there seemed to be no frame to break in the ambush on Ni Rébu. Each performance, especially ones before live local audiences is unfinalisable, and unrepeatably as the ambush indicates. The whole event hinges upon different sets of relationships working well simultaneously, notably that between audience and actors, and between the actors themselves. Actors continually stressed to me that unless they feed each other phrases, lines, puns and possibilities for others to develop a scene (*saling enyuhin*), everything falls flat. Balinese theatre depends crucially on others to make it happen.

Live or Dead?

At the time of filming the plays, the contrasts between television and live local audiences were probably greater than they are at the time of writing. Local audiences increasingly expect plays to be as seen on TV and actors replicate favourite routines (in *Derama* to the point of tedium). Casts become more adept at coping without audiences and so on. Certain broad differences remain discernible in the two plays discussed. There is greater restraint and formality in the style of dancing, the structure of scenes and speech is more thought through for televised performances. And there is far less attempt to improvise whole sections, although the dialogue is still extemporised. The jokes are more restrained. The actors do not set out to surprise the audience or one another as they may do in live performances. Most people agree actors on television are *aken*, serious, and feel weighed down, *sawat*, by the occasion. Partly, of course, this was because of the draconian censorship imposed by the New Order regime (a topic badly in need of research) which took the edge off the social criticism expected of theatre.¹⁹ The actors themselves though stress that they suffer the constraints of broadcasting to a large, heterogeneous and unknown audience.

When actors complain of performances on television being dead [the word they often used was literally dead (*mati*)], they are pointing to the absence of dialogue with the audience. To the actors, the television studio makes their performances closer to monologue. In such a dialogic world, we start to see how Europeans and Americans fetishise texts and presume the hegemony of producer-centred models. A Balinese theatre play is the product of a complex agent comprising most notably the organisers of the occasion, the managers and actors of the troupe and the audience. An allure of television is that makes the denial of the complexity of agency easy, by reducing production to creators and stars and audiences to responses and ratings.²⁰ Because audiences are relatively silent compared to the actors does not entail that they are not

agents. We confuse activity with agency at our peril. There are many kinds of quiet, including reflection, judgement and waiting. Balinese actors know only too well they have to convince and seduce each new audience.

The older villagers whom I know often complain that television, in combination with other aspects of development in Indonesia, is having deleterious effects.²¹ They say they fear a generation is emerging which is largely ignorant of the vast repertoire of previous practices, from medicinal cures to command of rhetorical skills. It was ever thus. It may, or may not be the case, that fewer young people appreciate the subtleties of theatre than they did. There is no way to determine the issue. What is the case is that the 'best' troupes and new genres like *Séndratari* hog broadcasting time with the result that most of the local theatre troupes have died out and with them much of the regional and local variation in style, which was so striking a feature of Bali. The move to increasing standardisation and homogenisation is not just due to television, but a broader aspect of the New Order's vision of culture as a commodity and means of ideological domination. If the debate about political reform (*Reformasi*), taking place as I write, is to succeed, it will have centrally to address the issues of how the old regime articulated the relationship between the polity, economy and 'culture'. Unless the reformers come up with a radical counter-articulation, they are liable to discover that they have merely been re-arranging the furniture left by their predecessors.

Some Implications

Once we let go of the straightjacket of the inscribed and sacred text, the fantasies of transparent communication, the obsession with perduring essence, manifest as hidden or deeper meaning, the preferred reading or whatever, and the protectively elitist authority of the academic knowing subject, we can start critically to engage with what Balinese actor-dancers are doing.

Let us start with the idea, sufficiently commonplace as mostly to go unchallenged, that theatre is a vehicle for the communication of culture. Other than in the tautological sense that everything is cultural, so any cultural activity by definition reproduces culture, this idea is uninformative. It replicates the mummified ontology I complained about, based here on a mechanical relationship between a fixed form (the vehicle) and a substantialised content (the reality). Such transmission models of communication are so familiar as to seem naturalised. But if we stop and ask what actually is the 'content' of the 'message' in, say, the lengthy exchanges about kinds of cakes, it is minimal. Except

trivially, this part of the scene is not referential. If we consider the other possibilities of the transmission model as laid out clearly by Jakobson (1960), they prove of equally marginal relevance. There is little emotive or conative thrust in the patter. The old fallback of this being phatic communication helps little. The medium is not in question, unless the loudspeakers are not working properly, which is a separate issue. Nor is it metalingual, a matter of the code. Everyone understood what was being talked about, whether the studio audience or domestic viewers. Nor is this exchange, aesthetically, commenting on the conditions of its own production.

The scenes discussed make little sense until they are treated as an engagement with the circumstances and the context of that particular performance. (This is something good troupes do well and partly what makes a troupe good.) Significantly then the quality of the play is dependent upon, and so defined by, what is outside it. In other words, you cannot extract the essence of a performance from the contingent circumstances of the occasion. That is what Bakhtin called 'theoretism', insisting on understanding events in terms of rules or structures and failing to appreciate how particular, open and unfinished they are.

A related argument has been advanced by Mark Poster, one of the more thoughtful critics in media studies. Poster criticised transmission models of communication for reifying and fetishising information at the expense of appreciating mediation as involving different kinds of social practice, which necessarily constitute knowledge, language and its subjects or objects differently (1990). Television itself, he argued, belonged to a broadcast model of communication, a media age which is increasingly superseded by a new age of interactive media (1995), which requires us radically to rethink of our presuppositions about communication, its subjects and objects. Poster takes interactivity to be a function of new technologies. As the scene outlined above shows, it has presumably always been around, but has been sidelined by the dominant epistemological fashion.

To take an example, which at first sight could not be more different, Poster argues informational models of television advertisements make no sense. Advertisements are not about scientific and representational logic. So it is inane to ask if people 'believe' them, any more than to claim they are a means of irrational manipulation. Rather

the ad shapes a new language, a new set of meanings...which everyone speaks or better which speaks everyone (1990, 58) ...

As a language/practice the TV ad undermines the type of subject previously associated with the capitalist mode of production and with the associated forms of patriarchy and ethnocentrism. Though it substitutes

the subject as spectator/consumer it also deconstructs the subject as a centred, original agent....The receiver of the message thus plays two roles, one as manipulated, passive, consumerist *object* of the discourse, another as judge, validator, referent *subject* of the discourse. Constituted as both object and subject, thing and god, the viewer is presented with the impossibility of the position of the subject, the basic insubstantiality of the subject (1990, 67)

Advertisements create their own context and show the inadequacy of representational models. They destabilise the relationship of referent, object and subject. Advertisements are 'the extreme tendency of the media region of the mode of information...a monologic, self-referential communication' (1990, 67), and so threaten the ontology of communication they supposedly exemplify. From this it seems that developing an analytical frame for the open-ended, situation-specific interactions of Balinese theatre and its appreciation will prove quite a complex undertaking. My aim here is simply to introduce some possibilities.

Poster retains the language of message, referent, sender/receiver, which a more radical version of Baudrillard would undermine. The object-subject duality also remains, with the audience being at once subject, object and referent. A strength of the analysis however is that it recognises the extent to which the objects of analysis are not static, but are produced and changed by social practices. This process includes notably the act of inquiry itself. A good example is the important controversy surrounding the nature of the audience. Is it the product of sociologically identifiable processes (Ang 1991; Morley 1992)? Or is it inevitably a textual construction (Hartley 1987)? The debate is haunted by the vestiges of representationism: how best to treat the relationship of text and fact?

Poster points to the problem. 'When an individual watches a TV ad he or she is watched by a discourse calling itself science but in fact disciplining the consuming subject to the ends of rationality and profit' (1990, 49). Theoretical formulations of audiences are underdetermined by biomass, whether distributed on theatre seats, couches watching a cathode ray tube or in statistical columns. Insofar as we can talk about them audiences are the product of social practices which include both textualising and naturalising them, and much more beside. For the commentators, the audience in Tohpati was a moment of response, or rather lack of it, which they contrasted with other occasions. For actors performing on stage, it is closer to something disparate and unformed which you reach out to and try to seduce into a malleable interlocutor. For actors in television studios it seems to be closer to something they

have to imagine in its absence. Audiences are indeterminate. They are neither subjects, objects, textual constructs, ineffable nor definite. As audiences are the constitutive outside of the play, the congeries of practices which make up the media event are in turn the audiences' constitutive outside."

Some Broader Considerations

Even from these briefly examined extracts a number of more general issues emerge. I wish to develop two of these. These are the light Balinese theatre sheds on dialogic analyses and upon received ideas about communication. The rediscovery of the work of Bakhtin and Volosinov, especially in American anthropology and cultural studies, has led to what was a critical approach to language and texts, paradoxically, being cited in support of what it set out to repudiate (see some of the contributions to Clifford and Marcus 1986). Balinese theatre and critical dialogism however inform one another in interesting ways, which argue for rethinking our models of communication.

Dialogue is on almost any reading central to the work of Bakhtin, who used the term in at least three rather different senses in different contexts. Dialogue emerges as the mode of all utterance, in the sense that it is an extralinguistic element opposed to logic. In dialogue there is always an addressee, that is the persons to whom the speech as a whole is addressed." In Bali this is the theatre audience. Television inhibits this dialogue, but does not eradicate it: the addressee is still there, but under different discursive conditions. There is also a superaddressee: the audience in yet another form. That is the imagined, but immediate, interlocutors whom, in the last resort, the speaker is most concerned should understand him or her, be they Divinity, an ideal colleague, the truly informed and appreciative spectator. Then there is dialogue in the sense of complex utterances that contain within themselves the recognition of polyphony. Lastly there is dialogue as a global notion, with truth itself as dialogic. Dialogue shatters the monolithic nature of ideology, by pointing out that it is an articulation made by agents to which there always can, and in due course will, be a counter-articulation.

Bakhtin gave various sketches of what he had in mind by polyphony and they seem to link closely in some respects to what Balinese actors are engaged in. Polyphony is distinct from heteroglossia, that is the use of heterogeneous utterances that combine different styles of speaking or speakers' subject positions into a multi-vocal or multi-generic complex. Polyphony suggests the coexistence of different historical consciousnesses. It presupposes beings who are situated, partly autonomous and irreducible to any single summative consciousness,

usually that of the author or academic analyst. This stands in contrast to the surplus of vision which authors of monologic works (whether novels, plays or ethnographies) have over their characters and by means of which they finalise and close the narrative.

Balinese theatre exemplifies a significant degree of polyphony insofar as the actors develop their characters as beings in their own right and do not just go through the motions of patching together bits and pieces from past performances. When Bakhtin wrote about polyphony, he had in mind the singularly complex works of Dostoevsky where characters take on a life and a destiny of their own, such that the author is no longer in charge of the novel. With the circumscription of roles available to characters I have yet to see a Balinese play in which polyphony in this sense has been explored in depth. It seems however a distinct possibility awaiting a suitable group of Balinese actors. It would be ethnocentric to judge Balinese by criteria worked out for a Russian novelist and find them wanting. The singular nature of extemporised multi-authored theatre in Bali invites us to reconsider and develop the notion of polyphony to see where it leads.

The discussion has implications for a more critical understanding of communication. Unless you are prepared to commit yourself to a fairly trenchant form of *a priori* idealism (in which case there is not much point in ethnographic inquiry because what is possible and recognisable is already predetermined), it is evident that ideas and relationships are mediated in different ways. The mediation can be through actions, utterances and acts of representation in different situations by different kinds of agents (these situations and agents being themselves the outcome of previous mediations). In the world of the pure unmediated object you would have no means of speaking, or even thinking, about what you knew.

Theatre cannot therefore represent cultural values or ideology, because they do not exist other than as transcendental possibilities, except through acts of mediation. This throws the emphasis upon the quality, occasion and circumstances of those acts. The commentators chose the plays they did because they remembered them. The performances did something for and to them. Without the superiority of an academic knowledge guaranteed to be independent of any possible experience, we become much more dependent upon the knowledge of our subjects of study. In other words, the gulf between the interpreting expert and the experiencing local is a false dichotomy created by transcendentalising the object of study. It is not that there are not differences in intellectual practices and interests. It is that the worlds of the two intersect less than the expert often likes to imagine.

The result is to swing attention towards the circumstances under which different representations are made, how assertions about structures, knowledge and truth came to be articulated in the first place. Articulation then emerges as a crucial notion.²⁴ The point of articulation is that it brings together how ideas are related with the social and political practices through which they are mediated on specific occasions. So the linkages are not determined or absolute, but inevitably open to challenge. Because articulation is a notion mostly developed in post-Marxist and cultural studies, its implications for theories of communication have gone largely unnoticed. The dominant mechanical models are also remarkably idealist. There is some ideal state of affairs which it is the task of communication technology to transmit or represent as perfectly as possible. The medium is something that gets in the way of the replication of transcendental perfection. Socially, the ideal is the state of communion, the utopian condition of a community.

A stress upon articulation by contrast places attention firmly on the circumstances, purposes and consequences of mediation. Instead of imaginary states of communion, the sort of theory of communication appropriate here is one which has some bearing on interaction considered as dialogic. Dousing the academic wet dream of 'imagined communities', Srinivas once remarked that villages are back-to-back communities. Rather than being structured according to some single homogenising principle, people relate to others in all sorts of different ways, including cajoling, seducing, deceiving, bullying, avoiding and ignoring one another. It is this that at once divides and unites them. The dream of escape, the moment of communion or whatever are commentaries on, and incomprehensible apart from, the conditions of antagonism in which people live. A study of communication should start then with what communities do.

One of the strengths of the work of Gusti Ngurah Bagus has been his determination to ground his work in Balinese practice. This concern stems from a subtle appreciation of the presuppositions about human interaction and communication, which underlie the different theoretical approaches at issue. It is not simply a matter of picking whichever theory happens to suit your immediate needs, as in some intellectual supermarket. The approaches are part of complexes of world-ordering historical practices, each with its implications and entailments. Even the imagery of comparability or commensurability is part of the theoreticised model: there are essential attributes independent of contingent practice which can be measured. To the extent that Balinese use it to study themselves, theoretism becomes hegemonic. The fact that the sorts of societies which anthropologists conventionally studied have

appeared primitive, irrational, disinclined to abstract propositional thought is partly because the social practices in question have been articulated according to an architectonic logic which cannot appreciate, but only transnogrify and hierarchise itself relative to them. Theatre is one of a number of recognised and powerful modes of articulation by which Balinese set about understanding and commenting on the world into which they find themselves thrown, using distinctive intellectual practices.

My aim here has been to show that a dialogic analysis is better suited to appreciating the subtleties of theatre. Such a dialogic account of social life cannot be achieved by theoretical introspection or speculation, but requires a new kind of engagement with the practices of Balinese theatre and its audiences. I would however go further and question any uncritical acquiescence to the prevailing hegemony. The efficacy of the dominant Euro-American theoretical models is well known. As Foucault noted however, in the human sciences it leads to a vicious circularity (1970), by which the object of inquiry is also its subject. The legal parallel would be a court where the accused, counsel and the judge are the same. Perhaps the time has come for counter-articulation, to submit theoretical practices to dialogic analysis.

Notes

¹ The strictly appropriate term is 'actor-dancers', because dancing is as much a part of many forms of theatre as is acting. I abbreviate it to 'actors' for convenience.

² For example Clifford Geertz (1991) and Frederik Barth (1993), both admit to having virtually no knowledge of Balinese.

³ The people I asked were from the ward of Pisangkaja in the village of Tengahpadang (both pseudonyms) in the mountainous part of South Bali where I have worked since 1970. A number of people turned up in the course of the discussion. The most important were the priest of the local Pura Dalem, the *adat* (customary village) head of Pisangkaja, an old actor and two other villagers noted for their oratorical skills. Below I refer to the comments of a group of villagers on theatre. Only the *adat* head and the actor were common to both groups.

⁴ A short account of the Balinese Television Project can be found in Hobart 1999a. The recordings discussed below are part of an archive of over 1,500 hours of cultural materials broadcast by state television since September 1990, a selection of 150 hours of which have been encoded in MPEG and are available on CD for the use of scholars. One of the plays discussed below, *Keris Pusaka Sakti*, is in the course of being translated into English.

⁵ The camera-woman for the live performances was Dr Felicia Hughes-Freeland, who had extensive experience in ethnographic film and who collaborated on the television project during its first three years (see Hughes-Freeland 1992).

⁶ The absence of genres that address the problems of ordinary people in contemporary Indonesia is a striking feature of Balinese theatre. This has not always

been for lack of trying. The few attempts I know of to mount plays with social realistic themes were met with severe warnings by the authorities. A review of the television project's holdings show that local television has been more experimental. Before events in May 1998 however, these too remained conservative, not least for fear of censorship. This does not mean that theatre is incapable of social criticism and commentary. On the contrary, Balinese are skilled at developing analogy and extrapolating contemporary implications. However this gives a decided advantage to the well-crafted plots of the more classic genres (see Hobart 1991).

⁷ In *Arja* the task falls again to a servant, the demanding female rôle of *Condong*. The word for her male counterpart, *Panasar*, nicely suggests what is involved. The root is *dasar*, basis, foundation: it is the anchor rôle.

⁸ *Gingsir*:

Bih! Jaja batun bedil. 'Sar

Gangsar:

Uwuh.

Gingsir:

Mara, mara eni lais pesan batun bedilé.

Gangsar:

Dija? Dija ento?

Gingsir:

Di Kuwat ajak di Irak, lais batun bedilé.

Gangsar:

Cai batak nepukin lawai dogén, cai suba orahang cai lais. Ais!

⁹ Elsewhere I have argued (1999b) that, in theatre, Balinese elaborate rather than translate. Both intention and preferred reading models presuppose some version of the copy, or correspondence, theory, the task of interpretation being a more accurate, valid or full re-presentation of something. Theory and practice are then both bent to the demand of this perfectible repetition (Rorty 1980; cf. Deleuze 1994). My concern, by contrast, is to focus on the intellectual practices by which people engage in commentary and criticism. Dev Sood, a research student of Ron Inden, is currently working upon ideas about translation and commentary in Indian grammatical texts. A research student of mine, Richard Fox, is completing his thesis on Buddhist theories of commentary and their applicability to the analysis of reading texts and appreciation of television.

¹⁰ Balinese distinguish carefully between the reliability of different kinds of ways of knowing about something (Hobart 1985; Matilal 1986). Some scholars have apparently used Baudrillard's book to argue that he is committed to idealism or relativism or both (e.g. Sokal & Bricmont 1998). This requires such a naïve realist reading that it would seem more likely to be a postmodernist ploy to discredit their opponents, were it not for the fact that postmodernism is effectively an imaginary. The process of imagining itself is a fine example of the displacement, fracture of desire, fragmentation of identity and failure of representation conventionally attributed to postmodernism by self-confessed experts. Those who champion or deride this empty category are hard pressed to name anyone who will admit to being a postmodernist, as opposed to being labelled as such by their admirers or detractors. As far as I know, the only person who claims to be postmodernist is Gayatri Spivak, which rather makes the point. Baudrillard, quite reasonably says he does not know what it would be were it to exist (sec 1993).

¹¹ On a small matter of ethnography, Clifford Geertz argued that Balinese 'anonymise' personal identity, by ensuring that the personal names of adults are never used in public and are not even known to most people (1973). If Geertz were correct, then the joke would have fallen flat, which it did not. Nor does it square with quite elderly peoples' names being belloved across the stage to a mixed audience of 500 people or more.

¹² Once again, it is central to much of Geertz's view of Bali that public life is a sort of stage, in which being embarrassed, *lek*, is really 'stage-fright', a fear that one will not perform adequately. Yet there is little sense here that Gingsir suffers from stage-fright at the idea of appearing at court in rags. Geertz's analysis, if anything, draws attention away from considering the range and circumstances of publicly recognized emotion. Gangsar's pretended fear at playing dead has echoes. The play is taking place, after all, next to the graveyard and a temple closely associated with witchcraft. Live corpses (*bangké matah*) are used in *Caton Arang* plays, where there is a very real danger, as happened in Tengahpadang some years after, of several people dying very shortly afterwards.

¹³ This, I think, is what Alton Becker was trying to get at in his intriguing argument to the effect that Javanese shadow theatre involves multiple epistemologies (1979). He never fully carried through his remarkable insight, but slipped into equating epistemology with Geertzian worldviews (see Hobart 1982).

¹⁴ *Gingsir*:

Bongké, mataib macengeng. (*Menangis*) Aduh. Aduh. Aduh. Aduh 'Sar. Aduh.

Raja Manis:

'Sir. Cara anak cenik pusuh gelur-gelur, ngudiang bena kéné gebyag-gebyug kanu eni, jeg?

Gingsir:

Indayang aksi. (*Menangis*)

Raja Manis:

Ajak ngaraos jeg jalema apa?

Gingsir:

I Gangsar padem. Déwagung!

Raja Manis:

Ngah?

Gingsir:

I Gangsar padem, parekané

Raja Manis:

Nyaman cainé, I Gangsar?

Gingsir:

Inggih.

Raja Manis:

Yih! Tunu semengan asané iya maan ngorta

Gingsir:

Nadak ipun padem

Raja Manis:

Nadak?

Gingsir:

Inggih

Raja Manis:

Anak kénken ladné unduké?

Gingsir:

Majarang basang ipuné saké maclekutan, padem mris ipun

Raja Manis:

Bah! Basangne sakiti acepok sing dadi tulungin lantas mati?

Gingsir:

Inggih, clekuan 'tu, raris padem

Raja Manis:

Ngeh Ratu, Gangsar!

Gingsir:

(Menangis)

Raja Manis:

Luwung rasané panes enu kéto

Gingsir:

Wawu pesan pegat angkhang pun, 'ten anget kantun bangkénipuné Inggih.

Raja Manis:

Bih! Inget gelah tekin pawacanan Ida Sang Maraga Praunyan, Bagawanta Sing dadi sing kono anak pangelingan anak makiré mati

Gingsir:

Inggih.

Raja Manis:

Anak mati ngamasin keto apang sing ngandeg lampah Sang Hyang Aira.

Gingsir:

Titiang edoh titiang ngeling apang 'ten kena iyéh inau iya.

Gingsir engages in a play on textual authority, by taking the terms of the text quite literally. It is also therefore rather a nice play on the conditions of referentiality. The full text in Balinese is in an endnote below. The actor playing the prince makes a slip in fact by saying you should not cry near a body which is nearly dead. It is a corpse you must not cry near.

¹¹ It is important to remember that both plays were performed at the height of the New Order repression of free speech, when theatre becomes a privileged, if dangerous, occasion to articulate, albeit indirectly, otherwise unairable views. The present exchange however has a different purpose.

¹² Wijil:

(Magending) Nanging, geng pangampura

Putri Mataum:

Bih, nah! Edaja buin sanget misi geng pangampura para, apa lakar uningang cai?

Wijil:

(Magending) Nanging, Ratu sampunang sengu

Putri Mataum:

Sing ento, Nguda gelah cai parekan gelah nguda gelah pedih?

Wijil:

(Magending) Wénten pacang lungsur titiang.

P. Mataum:

Uh! Ada bakal lunas cai men apa?

Wijil:

(Magending) Ali-ali duwanin Ratu ngadol emas

Putri Mataum:

Kakin jalema, kakin jalema sing ngelah gaé, bungutné jalema toronan.

Panasar:

Béh!

Putri Mataum:

Tegakang ibaé!

Wijil:

Kenehé sing keni bunglung péra eni, apang taén mabungkung emas kéto kenehé

Putri Mataum:

Bangun tegakang ihan cai!

Wijil:

Béh! Sing kanggo aturé ento, kono sing duka kéto

Putri Mataum:

Kaden anak apa? Ngaléklék? Dong cai jeg nagih nunas emas tekin gelah. Apa sekayan cai gedéjag jang cai di Putri, aji kuda kadén cai agcim?

Wijil:

'Atu 'ten keliling terus maadolan emas kénen manah tiliang!

Putri Mataum:

Jalema sing ngelah gae, jalema bungutné nénéngang Panasar! .

The Queen invites the Panasar ta sing. After various twists and turns he does so.

Панасар:

(Magending) Singgih, Ratu Sn. .Rébuwati!

Wijil:

Aduh! Jeg apa atur Belié ento, Rasaang.

Putri Mataum:

Melahang ihan caire maiur Kenén tawang cai, eni mara tangan kiri, Yan eni maan mukul tendas caie bélék péléngan caie

Panasar:

Nah! Sarap titiang!

Putri Mataum:

Depang suba apang cai bangka

Panasar:

Nah! Sarap!

Wijil:

Depang.

Putri Mataum:

Sarap apa?

Panasar:

Sarap macan!

Putri Mataum:

Melahang ibaé. 'Singgih Ratu Sn Bupati'

¹² The same was said of a fellow actress, which may tell us something about the constraints on able women in what remains in some ways a pretty patriarchal society.

¹³ I am not happy though with the expression, because it tends to suggest some pre-existing space or set of categories within which people operate. A nice critique of the spatial metaphors of knowledge implicit in much post-structuralist writing and the residual idealism that accompanies them is to be found in Lefebvre (1991), who, significantly, was Baudrillard's teacher.

¹⁴ As a famous actor put it, because newspapers, schools, universities and the other social institutions (of what is often called 'civil society') which are involved in shaping public attitudes are under such tight government control, it is left to actors to be the effective social commentators and critics. Such comment and criticism on television is potentially risky. That is not to say that it is not done, but it is usually indirect: one speech, two objects (*raos asiki tetuyon kakalih*). It is up to the audience as active participants to reflect on what is said, they must decide for themselves whether there is more to what is said than appears at first and what, using the clues provided, they wish to make of it.

In the project's archives, one of the finest plays is of the actor in question excoriating corruption in government and its effects, in the course of a *Sendratari*

around the plot from the *Mahabharata*, where the Pandawa are condemned by their enemies, the Korawa, to exile in the forest. The actions of the leading Korawa provided the basis for a neat analogy. Significantly, this play was televised from the annual provincial Arts Festival and was performed before a large audience. Once again the audience seems crucial.

Obviously though actors have a far freer rein to engage in criticism before a live audience, when they are not being recorded. Johannes Fabian has made the point that such socially critical theatre is quite common and that, when academics capture such live moments of intellectual guerilla warfare, as it were, in writing, they may imperil the people they work with (1991). Academic study in such situations is never comfortable or neutral, but part of the broader argument and so raises inevitable dilemmas.

²⁰ On the notion of complex agents, see Collingwood 1942; Hobart 1990b; Inden 1990. The image of agents as being complex helps to counter the Euro-American obsession with condensing agency in a hero figure, the author, playwright, film or stage star, which has to deny the complicated processes of production themselves are.

²¹ Much of this is the criticism each senior generation seems to reserve for its successor. If you ask, or people are feeling more reflective, it is the power of television over viewers, for good as well as bad, which emerges as a theme.

²² Ernesto Laclau makes much use of the notion of 'the constitutive outside' (e.g. 1990, 1996), which he derives from Stauder's (1986) reformulation of Derrida's work. At its best it is a sophisticated device for revealing and undermining pervasive essentialism, by pointing out the degree to which supposedly autonomous entities depend for their identity and existence upon external accidents.

²³ Bakhtin's senses of dialogue are not therefore to be confused with the commonsense English usage, which is often not dialogic, as when an author farms out a single idea to different speaker-functions.

²⁴ For some of the more important recent works developing Gramsci's original notion, see Hall 1996; Laclau 1990; Slack 1996.

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