Of Popes and soaps
On argument, authority and audiences

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How Indonesians Argue

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> He thought he saw an Argument
> That proved he was the Pope:
> He looked again, and found it was
> A Bar of Mottled Soap.
> 'A fact so dread,' he faintly said,
> 'Extinguishes all hope!'
> The mad gardener's song from Lewis Carroll, *Sylvie and Bruno*.

Questions about how Indonesians argue invite us to examine what accounts have been proposed, what their strengths and weaknesses are, and which is most suitable for which purposes. There are two main broad schools of thought. The first, rationalism, treats argument as about the logical relationships between propositions. Such theories are neat, abstract, universally applicable, powerful and backed by formidable arguments. They are also ethnocentric, enunciative, context-free and riddled with quaint presuppositions. The alternative, hermeneutics, sets out to interpret more complex cultural products like texts, beliefs, religious sources and so on. It tries to embrace context and avoid imposing alien categories by seeking to engage with the people's understandings as subjects rather than just objects. Whether the latter succeeds in avoiding Eurocentrism and equally dubious presuppositions we shall consider shortly. As arguments about argument are well rehearsed, my review will be brief and will concentrate on unconsidered presuppositions that I suggest make most such arguments unfit for purpose. In particular, I reflect on the implications of under-estimating context, the role of abstract essences whether conceived as propositions or text, and the failure to consider communication. My approach is pragmatist.

Of propositions and perplexities

Why bother with argument? Just as Molière's bourgeois gentleman M. Jourdain learned that he had been speaking prose all his life, so willy-nilly we use argument. The trouble is that argument is not only protean, but is often used to persuade and mislead. The European genealogy that concerns us is long and tangled, but conventionally treats Aristotle as a key figure, for whom the problem was to extricate argument that is true from the wider domain of persuasive rhetoric.[1] On this account, valid argument is about the logical relationship between propositions.

As people spend much of their lives talking, discussing and arguing, it might seem commonsensical that we should study utterances or at least sentences. Propositions however are neither sentences nor statements, but abstractions that are true independent of language and context. 'Snow is white' is true regardless of the speaker's vernacular or of how dirty snow can become. As Quine noted however:

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[1] Consider the following from Aristotle's treatise on Rhetoric:

> Rhetorical study, in its strict sense, is concerned with the modes of persuasion. Persuasion is clearly a sort of demonstration, since we are most fully persuaded when we consider a thing to have been demonstrated. The orator's demonstration is an enthymeme, and this is, in general, the most effective of the modes of persuasion… Now the propositions of Rhetoric are Complete Proofs, Probabilities, and Signs. Every kind of syllogism is composed of propositions, and the enthymeme is a particular kind of syllogism composed of the aforesaid propositions (1954: 5-6, 14; an enthymeme is a deductive argument or syllogism involving propositions, some steps of which may be deliberately omitted).

What, on this account, is the relationship of propositions and arguments? Consider this proposition:

> The fact that Socrates was wise and just is a sign that the wise are just'. Here we certainly have a Sign; but even though the proposition be true, the argument is refutable, since it does not form a syllogism (1954: 11).

This genealogy excludes for instance Asian philosophical debates. So I leave them aside for the moment. However, they are vital for understanding Balinese styles of reasoning and argument, which diverge radically they involve much that European philosophers have argued eloquently are impossible (Hobart 1985).

meanings of sentences are exalted as abstract entities in their own right, under the name of *propositions*. These, not the sentences themselves are seen as the things that are true or false (1970: 2; all emphases and parentheses are in the original unless otherwise stated).

Argument involves establishing a body of propositions, the truth of which is underwritten by them referring accurately to the world. However, under what description?

> For my part I do, qua lay physicist, believe in physical objects and not in Homer's gods; and I consider it a scientific error to believe otherwise. But in point of epistemological footing the physical objects and the gods differ only in degree and not in kind. Both sorts of entities enter our conception only as cultural posits. The myth of physical objects is epistemologically superior to most in that it has proved more efficacious than other myths as a device for working a manageable structure into the flux of experience (Quine 1953: 44).

If, epistemologically, not only propositions but even the objects of the natural sciences are problematic, what about cultural utterances for which empirical referents are absent?

Logic—as the application of reason—presents greater difficulties. Unfortunately, proponents of universal rationality differ greatly among themselves over which version of reason should apply.[2] A disagreement between two leading scholars hints at the complexities. Answering his own question 'What is it for a belief or set of beliefs to be irrational?' Steven Lukes concludes

> that some criteria of rationality are universal, i.e. relevantly applicable to all beliefs, in any context, while others are context-dependent, i.e. are to be discovered by investigating the context and are only relevantly applicable to beliefs in that context (1970: 207-8)

Martin Hollis's response proved influential.

> some overlap in concepts and percepts is a necessary condition of successful translation. The *sine qua non* is a bridgehead of true assertions about a shared reality… If anthropology is to be possible, I have argued, the natives must share our concepts of truth, coherence and rational interdependence of beliefs. Otherwise we are confronted as theorists with vicious circles. In other words Western rational thought is not just one species of rational thought nor rational thought just one species of thought (1970: 216).

Why the singularly militaristic metaphor of the 'bridgehead? Hollis spells it out with characteristic candidness. Western epistemology—and so argument—is effectively true, universally applicable, justified and so justifiably hegemonic.[3] Claims about reason involve power: the power to command, to enunciate and to determine irrevocably the rules of the game.

Of meanings and muddles

While rationalism sets out to analyze what people say by reducing it to, or rephrasing it as, propositions and their logical relationship, the alternative is synthetic. Statements should be understood as part of more complex wholes or texts, where discursive elements are complex,

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[2] As I have discussed different approaches through rationality and interpretation at length elsewhere (1982, 1985, 1992), for simplicity I shall refer to rationalism and rationalists or hermeneutics and hermeneuts respectively. Evidently it is neither possible to cover every permutation of both schools nor is it my aim here. Broadly, I follow the sense of 'rationalists' and 'rationalism' as used in the two volumes of The Rationality Debate (Wilson 1970; Hollis & Lukes 1982) as well as by commentators (e.g. Scholte 1984). I hope I shall be permitted to borrow from Balinese who consider an argument successful if the intended addressees in question recognize themselves as targeted and respond accordingly.

[3] This seemingly commonsensical statement hides more than it reveals. It assumes language—and so translation—to be fundamentally about how context-free assertions designate (see Deleuze below). Such an account cannot even handle reference, which is context-dependent, let alone utterances, when the particular circumstances are so central to the act of communicating that the degree of translatability becomes questionable. My argument raises questions about what status context has in my own account, which I discuss in Hobart forthcoming.

My thanks to Richard Fox and Mischa Penn for many helpful suggestions on tightening this piece.

opaque or even seemingly counter-factual or nonsensical. What Western scholars cannot make sense of empirically or rationally they usually call symbolic, so calling for special means of deciphering.

An obvious problem with a reductive approach is that people virtually never speak in the implausibly simple, situation- and context-free statements that proponents of reason require. Ricoeur pointed out that there are three dimensions to human discourse (1976). The first is signs, the relationship between which is mechanical. The second is sentences, which are of a different logical order because they involve predication, namely modifying a grammatical subject through qualifying it through almost endless permutations. The third is text: much human discourse is part of a larger whole, the relationships of the parts being of a yet more complex order. This last is, of course, the domain of hermeneutics. Unsurprisingly, rationalists fight shy of the problems posed by interpretation.

Curiously, Ricoeur stopped at three dimensions, perhaps because recognition of anything further would have undone his argument. Novels (the literary paradigm case), newspaper or journal articles, dialogues in films or television programmes, lectures speeches, debates, conversations, gossip or everyday exchanges only make sense in terms of what happened before and what the likely responses will be. In short, text presupposes intertext—the context in which utterances or inscriptions occur. The notion of text lends itself to essentializing, especially for English-speaking writers who tend to reify and confuse it with a particular work. As Barthes argued:

> the text is a methodological field [which] only exists in the movement of a discourse… *the Text is experienced only in an activity of production…* it cannot be contained in a hierarchy, even in a simple division of genres. What constitutes the Text is, on the contrary (or precisely), its subversive force in respect of the old classifications… the Text is that *social* space which leaves no language safe, outside, nor any subject of the enunciation in position as judge, master, analyst, confessor, decoder. The theory of the Text can coincide only with a practice of writing (1977: 157, 164; square parentheses mine).

If text is an assemblage of possibilities, given fleeting form through activity and practice, how much more encompassing would intertext be? To Barthes text is subversive—a point notably for its absence in most subsequent usage.[4]

Fortunately, Bakhtin and Vološinov have elaborated a thoroughgoing alternative account. Not only speech, but all human activity, is open and unfinalizable: that is dialogic.

> Dialogic relationships are a much broader phenomenon than mere rejoinders in a dialogue laid out compositionally in the text; they are an almost universal phenomenon, permeating all human speech and all relationships and manifestations of human life—in general, everything that has meaning and significance (Bakhtin 1984: 40).

Bakhtin distanced himself vigorously from the arid abstractions necessary to produce neat rational models.

> Take a dialogue and remove the voices, remove the intonations, carve out abstract concepts and judgements from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness—and that's how you get dialectics (1986: 147).

Much of what passes for rationalism consists of converting dialogic exchanges into monologues, which are then subject to a pathologist's dissection to extract essential nuggets of truth. In an elegant Parthian shot at much theorizing, Bakhtin noted what others preferred to ignore.

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[4] I think it is an example of what Baudrillard had in mind with his notion of seduction (see below).

To be means *to communicate*. Absolute death (non-being) is the state of being unheard, unrecognized, unremembered' (1984: 287)

Scholars of longer-established disciplines often sneer at Communication and Media Studies. Deeply satisfying as such a stance may be, it entails a perilous myopia.

How to understand statements that ostensibly defy the laws of thought[5] or appear nonsensical is a *raison d'être* of anthropology and has long posed a fascinating puzzle. Most solutions work by declaring these statements 'symbolic'. The result is some highly ingenious and sometimes hilarious interpretations.[6] However, the resulting analyses are problematic. First, debate is beset with confusion as to what a symbol is, which stems in part from ignorance of the history of different European theories of signs and symbols (Todorov 1982). Mostly, authors plump for some version of the Romantic idea of symbols as ineffable or inscrutable with a wide fan of possible meanings. Second, it is almost universally assumed that European ideas of symbolism (bolstered, if need be, by the laws of thought) are necessary and sufficient to make sense of the apparent nonsense. With a few distinguished exceptions, few have bothered carefully to examine the situations and contexts in which people utter such statements, or inquire how different categories of people comment on, understand, question, dismiss them or whatever. If anthropological inquiry involves double discursivity, an inescapable question is: how should we set about appreciating participants' utterances and acts in the diverse circumstances of everyday social life? Even anthropologists who claim to privilege 'the native point of view' almost always skew the analysis in some way. Far from such *trahison des clercs* inviting obloquy, the profession often hails these figures as exemplary. Consider the following assessment of perhaps the most celebrated such interpreter, Clifford Geertz, in one of his set pieces.

> Despite his phenomenological-hermeneutical pretensions, there is in fact in 'Deep Play' no understanding of the native from the native's point of view. There is only the constructed understanding of the constructed native's constructed point of view. Geertz offers no specifiable evidence for his attributions of intention, his assertions of subjectivity, his declarations of experience. His constructions of constructions of constructions appear to be little more than projections, or at least blurrings, of his point of view, his subjectivity, with that of the native, or, more accurately, of the constructed native (Crapanzano 1986: 74).

It is rare for anthropologized people to be treated as reflective, critical subjects. They need describing, interpreting, even explaining not in terms of their own practices, but by invoking someone else's intellectual frameworks. By making sense of others, we presuppose they live with or tolerate deficient sense or nonsense, cannot be bothered or do not even notice. In

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[5] These laws, which were formulated by the ancient Greeks, are: the law of identity, the law of non-contradiction and the law of excluded middle. So, the famous statement by the Nuer that 'twins are one person and that they are birds' (Evans-Pritchard 1956: 128ff.) breaches these in different possible ways.

[6] For example, Dan Sperber treated 'apparently irrational beliefs' as 'semi-propositional representations' (1982). Teleologically people who are unable to attain real propositional thought use such beliefs and symbols as a sort of intellectual halfway house. Sperber did not consider the possibility that people might be going the other way: from propositions to something more complex and nuanced. Burke pointed out that there are two contrary styles of realism: scientific and poetic. The former studies reality by reducing complex phenomena to their simplest components. So

> any attempt to deal with human relationships after the analogy of naturalistic correlations becomes necessarily the *reduction* of some higher or more complex realm of being to the terms of a lower or less complex realm of being (1969: 506, all emphases in the original unless otherwise indicated).

Poetic realism, by contrast, recognizes that there are different ways of imagining the same reality.

> It is customary to think that objective reality is dissolved by such relativity of terms as we get through the shifting of perspectives... But, on the contrary...we could say that characters possess *degrees of being* in proportion to the variety of perspectives from which they can with justice be perceived (1969: 504).

claiming to understand others in our terms, anthropologists are, however unwittingly, all too often complicit in hierarchizing and hegemonizing them.

As we might begin to expect by now, interpreting involves highly questionable presuppositions.

> If interpretation can never be brought to an end, it is simply because there is nothing to interpret. There is nothing absolutely primary to interpret because at bottom everything is already interpretation... Words themselves are nothing other than interpretations; throughout their history, they interpret before being signs… Interpretation finds itself before the obligation of interpreting itself endlessly, of always correcting itself... Two consequences follow... one does not interpret what there is in the signified, but one interprets, fundamentally, *who* has posed the interpretation... The second consequence is that interpretation always has to interpret itself (Foucault 1990: 64-6).[7]

Behind the ostensible object, one interprets who did the interpreting. Foucault pointed to how the knowing academic subject is neatly exnominated (to use Barthes' useful expression, 1973: 137-40), not only in explicitly hermeneutic inquiry, but also in supposedly objective philosophical and other analyses. Asserting neutrality and objectivity is a convenient façade behind which to conceal all manner of particular and partisan interests. As Fiske argued: 'objectivity is the "unauthored" voice of the bourgeoisie' (1987: 289). We would be wise critically to interrogate how authority and authoritativeness is engineered; how scholars finesse, ignore or obliterate the class, gender, ethnic and indeed religious and generational affiliations of the subjects and objects of investigation; and the undisclosed purposes and circumstances of inquiry.

What began as an elegant approach to argument, the demonstration of the power of reason, turns out on close examination to be highly problematic and to involve a host of ethnocentric presuppositions. As Quine noted, physical objects, propositions, logic—to which you can add symbols and meaning—are, in his terms, cultural posits that we impose on others.[8] The more empathetic approach through interpretation turned out to be equally hegemonic, as it also imposed foreign cultural criteria and obfuscated how effectively knowledge/power was vested in the scholar. Both the main approaches to argument seem highly problematic theoretically.

Of argument and practice

The acid test though is how adequately do such approaches elucidate ethnographic examples of argument, whether as argumentation or disagreement? Let me review case studies

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[7] Deleuze elaborated.

> As Mr. Foucault has shown us, Nietzsche invents a new conception and new methods of interpretation: first by changing the space in which signs are distributed, by discovering a new 'depth' in relation to which the old depth flattens out and is no longer anything; second, and most importantly, by replacing the simple relation of sign and sense with a complex of senses, such that every interpretation is already the interpretation of an interpretation *ad infinitum*. Not that every interpretation therefore has the same value and occupies the same plane—on the contrary, they are stacked or layered in the new depth. But they no longer have the true and the false as criteria. The noble and the vile, the high and the low, become the immanent principles of interpretations and evaluations. Logic is replaced by a topology and a typology: there are some interpretations that presuppose a base or vile way of thinking, feeling, and even existing, and there are others that exhibit nobility, generosity, creativity..., such that interpretations say something about the 'type' of interpreter, and renounce the question 'what is it?' in favor of 'who is it?' (2004: 118).

[8] Foucault famously remarked on the savagery disguised by elegant academic manners and lofty claims.

> we must not resolve discourse into a play of pre-existing significations; we must not imagine that the world turns towards us a legible face which we would have only to decipher; the world is not the accomplice of our knowledge; there is no prediscursive providence which disposes the world in our favour. We must conceive discourse as a violence which we do to things, or in any case as a practice which we impose on them; and it is in this practice that the events of discourse find the principle of their regularity (1981: 67).

from *Beyond words* (Hobart 2015), moving from those in which propositional argument was clearest to those that involved symbolism, finally to the more recalcitrant examples.

In the discussion about collective harvesting (*Beyond words* 20-21), each speaker in presenting their argument stressed their humility before the *banjar*[9] as the collective decision-making body and acquiescence to whatever it decided. It is easy to find parallels elsewhere, including academic meetings. There were however differences in how opponents and supporters of collective harvesting presented their cases. The former listed specific problems backed by demonstrable examples, further reinforced by the proposal to abandon collective work, which is onerous. By contrast the officials turned to hard-to-verify claims, then to vague generalizations like the *banjar* being a family and the value of unity. However, there were at least two other issues that were being fought out, but were never mentioned. The first was about class and corruption. A coterie of wealthy farmers was widely believed with the collusion of its officials to be using the *banjar* for their own convenience at the expense of the majority. The second was an airing of long-standing political differences within the *banjar* that went back years and even decades. Which of the three issues was to the forefront for which speaker or *banjar* member at which moment, or the implications this discussion had for future *banjar* politics is beyond easy calculation.

We may note several points. While the debate seems amenable to being glossed in academic English, this depends in significant part on readers being familiar with the kinds of issues involved or of using imagination to appreciate them. Differences of class, issues of corruption, appeals for unity and so on occur in some form in most societies. Academic readers are also familiar with playing with differences between vehicles and tenors (to adopt Richards's 1936 terminology) to kill several birds with one stone when speaking at meetings. This familiarity however is deceptive. It presupposes that the cultural circumstances, how language, idiom and communication work in practice, the complex subject positions (class, gender, ethnicity, generation and so on) of all the participants in different situations are sufficiently similar across societies as to make such an exercise well grounded. Presuming, let alone declaring, the complexities and differences to be irrelevant or easily surmountable as do rationalists, prior to detailed critical investigation just shows how naturally such epistemological closure comes. That such problems do not immediately loom large suggests how thoroughly, effectively and uncritically a certain Eurocentric imagination is deployed.[10]

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[9] Balinese *banjar* are local village wards, which undertake a wide range of activities.

[10] Pointing out how routinely and successfully 'we' engage in such acts of translation and imagination demonstrates little except how elegantly sealed our worlds are. Using European reason to demonstrate the validity of European reason runs the risk of begging the question. Also the semblance of understanding is no proof. Wallace pointed out that translation depends on equivalence structures, such that we can map what people say onto our frames of understanding (1961). Quine made a more general point when he noted that, under such circumstances, we work not through understanding others underwritten by correspondence to facts or shared ideas, but with 'translation manuals' (1960). We live in much more hermetic worlds than we like to think.

> The totality of our so-called knowledge or beliefs, from the most casual matters of geography and history to the profoundest of atomic physics or even of pure mathematics and logic, is a man-made fabric which impinges on experience only along the edges (1953: 42).

If this is still unconvincing, perhaps the following anecdote will help. I was discussing the fate of a young aristocratic young woman in a Derama Gong theatre play (Gusti Ayu Ratih) with a group of Balinese. I asked whether they could identify with the girl, only to be met with blank expressions. After much discussion, they finally understood what I was asking. One of those present, a young actress, replied simply: 'How could I know what it is like to be her? I am a peasant. She is a princess.' So I tried the route through empathy. 'As you are both young women, do you not think there is some similarity in your feelings if you were a similar situation?' 'How could I possibly know what she felt? Our circumstances are not comparable.' The actress, incidentally, touched on a problem in Quine's analysis. Our knowledge and beliefs do not comprise a totality, however man-made. Such

The crematory arrangements for the local branch of the aristocratic family went awry because when the prince informed the *banjar* that they were expected to carry the bier, he treated '*Inggih*' for 'Yes' rather than 'We have heard' (*Beyond words* 6). The issue seems straightforward. The request was clear; the meeting's response was ambiguous. In Jakobson's terms, the meta-lingual function was unclear; there were problems with the code (1960). The example succumbs easily to rational explication. Matters were, however, not quite so straightforward. Did the prince make a request or give an order? How distinguishable is the phatic from the referential aspects of the response? What did different *banjar* members think about the invitation? And when did they decide not to cooperate? Who were the key figures involved in this decision? What were the social implications of aristocrats shouldering a corpse? What were the repercussions, if any? To reduce the issue to ambiguity is to miss almost everything of significance.

Even so simple an event requires understanding the history of relations between the court and villagers; the prince's personal reputation, his style of presenting himself, even the (squeaky and rasping) timbre of his voice; pan-Balinese discussion over the nature of caste difference (see Picard 2015, 2016); national and local political party allegiance at the time; when and between whom discussion took place as to whether the *banjar* should participate; what the various aristocratic guests and different groups of villagers made of the débâcle; what sort of importance is attached to spectacle of this kind in general and on this occasion; and what the consequences were. Neither a conventional rationalist nor a hermeneutic expatiation is of much help, because even a fairly superficial inquiry involves considering a plethora of different circumstances and contexts, personalities and contingencies. Nor can we necessarily presume agreement either among the aristocrats or the villagers about what the affair was about. We start to see what is so appealing about a neat explanation or interpretation: it keeps the complexities, uncertainties and questions about what was actually going on at bay. A problem of scholarly exegesis is that it has difficulty expressing the sheer singularities of the occasion and their significance, not least as different people appreciated what happened quite differently.[11]

In the *Sendratari* Pandawa Asrama (*Beyond words* 18-19), Begawan Byasa's speech might appear similar to the issue of collective harvesting in that, apart from the ostensible interlocutors, it had three possible, but distinct, different addressees: The President of Indonesia, the governor of Bali and the Rector of STSI. Two points are worth stressing though. The first is that saying was doing, in that the speech warned these latter that they were judgeable by criteria beyond their choosing and manipulation. The speech was also perlocutionary in that it aimed to achieve something. Assuming that the implied addressees were largely inured to criticism, it was a highly public performance. It brought to the attention of a very wide audience how venal those in power were; it helped to air such matters publicly; and it invited scrutiny of those who presented themselves as beyond questioning. The second is the role of mediation and of audiences, which the *dalang* handled very adeptly. Rationalists and hermeneuts ignore both issues, because recognizing either would undercut their analyses. Déwa Madé Sayang avoided plumping for a naïve transmission model of communication in which the sender encodes a message to be mechanically decoded by the listeners. He scrupulously avoided enunciating, lecturing or telling the audience what to think. Like most Balinese, he showed appreciation of how diverse the spectators at the live event and television viewers were and

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difficulties, however, do not offer succour to Quine's critics. Quine and his interlocutors share the presupposition that knowledge forms a coherent totality, a position neatly undermined by Laclau (1990).

[11] This last underwrites Burke's point about poetic realism. Sperber's reductive approach bypasses such issues entirely.

deferred to them over how they chose to engage with what he said. No small part of his success lay in respecting, valuing, and attributing a degree of agency to, his audiences. How he said it was in many ways as important as what he said, because both are part of what makes a convincing performance.

The *Balian Tapakan*'s diagnosis merits an article to itself. And I have already outlined some pertinent themes (*Beyond words* 13-18). To attempt a symbolic interpretation is undercut by the *balian* herself turning frequently to her clients to rephrase ostensibly opaque expressions with remarkable clarity. The conventional anthropological argument falls flat: namely that mediums use ambiguity to force patients to extend relevant context until their pronouncements can be made to make sense. What is more, the *balian* used what Jakobson called the aesthetic function of language to comment on and explicate possible ambiguities in her own pronouncements. Almost as if she were addressing a sceptical philosopher, she went to some lengths on the one hand to make statements that were independently verifiable, on the other to link and explicate seemingly disconnected statements or allusions. As with the *dalang*, the *balian* made explicit the role of her audience, here her clients. Although she laid out a coherent case, responsibility for how they chose to understand it and then to act upon it or not, was a quite separate issue that would take place elsewhere under other circumstances. Were someone to say that I am overstating how complex this example is—after all I have managed to lay it out it more or less coherently in English—I would reply that it took me a week working with different Balinese who are familiar with *balian* to come up with this exegesis.

Of laughter and seduction

The remaining three case studies pose interesting problems because speech or symbols were peripheral or non-existent, but humour was never far from centre stage. While the *banjar* publicly debated the desirability of erecting a shrine in the main square (*Beyond words* 22), the ostensible topic was a means to achieving a second, quite separate and unspoken, goal. The injury of the cost of rebuilding the widow's stall was capped by the insult of placing a pond less than a metre from her door. Day and night she and her lover had to negotiate their way carefully to avoid falling in the pond. The *banjar* meeting place and several other food stalls where villagers congregated especially in the evenings offered an excellent view of the widow's stall. The rest of the village derived much merriment from a long-running spectacle. The members of the *banjar* were showing their displeasure visibly and eloquently, yet wordlessly.

The case of the orator's underpants (*Beyond words* 23-24) indicates how it is possible to achieve a significant and lasting effect without speech or symbols. The only words uttered were when Ketut Mara bought the cloth eight kilometres away and ordered a coffee in a stall in the village square, which were peripheral to the point. The choice of red, white and blue cloth was a straightforward sign standing for *triwarna*, three colours, the term for high castes.[12] Recourse to propositions, reason or symbols seems quite inadequate to explain the sheer impact of the gesture. While something of the ridiculousness of an army officer having publicly to tiptoe into his mistress's home comes across verbally, much of the performance depends on knowing the people involved. The prince at the time was evidently a weak man, full of a sense of his self-importance, and the headman a sycophant. However, to appreciate the story, you really had to know Ketut Mara, a tall, erect man with a presence and an air of authority relatively rare in a low caste villager. Imagining him chafing in bark cloth underpants foreshadowed trouble and

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[12] I suggested that this might also refer to the colours of the Dutch flag, which was met with blank faces, as the village was far too remote for people to have ever seen it.

added a singular charge to the whole episode in a way that would have made sense for no one else in the village. Shorn of its particularities, the story loses much. More important, the court's favouritism had been conducted discreetly out of sight. Through his act, Ketut Mara brought it dramatically and unforgettably into the public gaze.

The abduction of the bride-to-be (*Beyond words* 23) touches on rather different issues. Too much time had elapsed and too many political ructions had intervened to be able precisely to gauge all the considerations at play. While a commoner family would have been unlikely to take on a Cokorda court had it not been for the PKI's challenge to inherited position and power, those close to the key figures thought that more domestic issues loomed large. Ni Kelepon would have been effectively lost to her natal family by marrying out; the marriage would have gone against her mother's plans for her; and Ni Kripit was a formidable character, not lightly to be crossed, nor in awe of the pretensions of local nobility. So it seems likely at one level that seizing and carrying off her daughter was instrumental: the parents wanted to prevent the marriage. Doubtless this also happened to serve the interests of the strongly political members of the extended family, but central figures like I Geningan were rich farmers who did not share their political agenda. So we should consider the possibility that, in part at least, the abduction was about doing something, not saying or showing something. To the extent to which power in Bali is judged pragmatically—that is in succeeding in doing something whatever the opposition—the subsequent loss of the Cokordas' authority may partly hinge on their being outwitted and their claims to position and power shown no longer to be enforceable.

If arguments in Balinese village life are as much about making visible, showing or doing as about saying, another aspect emerges that is markedly absent from most academic analyses. It is humour. From villagers watching while aristocrats hefted a corpse, through an army officer having to tiptoe into his mistress's home, to a mock grand entrance trailing hard-to-come-by cloth in the dust, to a burly peasant haring off with a bride-to-be in his arms, these acts all were—and villagers duly appreciated them as—comical.

Humour presents scholars with problems. Attempts to define it, break it down into logical terms or interpret it often look trite or even absurd. The reason, Baudrillard argued, is that humour belongs to the order of seduction, which

> never belongs to the order of nature, but that of artifice—never to the order of energy, but that of signs and rituals. This is why all the great systems of production and interpretation have not ceased to exclude seduction—to its good fortune—from their conceptual field. For seduction continues to haunt them from without (1990: 2).

The skillful use of humour can expose the apparatuses of power and position often more effectively than speeches or force. A carton can puncture pomposity, just as clever mimicry can expose pretension (which is why cartoonists and comedians often pose such a threat to political leaders). In Baudrillard's terms, both rationalism and interpretation are part of the order of production, so they cannot grasp or easily elucidate—but can be undermined by—humour.[13] Humour as seductive undermines the established order of class and authority. It lends itself to being one of 'the weapons of the weak' (Scott 1985).

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[13] It is worth quoting Baudrillard at length, provided that we recall that his sense of seduction is not about sexuality, but the subversion of the entire order of production.

> Seduction is stronger than power because it is reversible and mortal, while power, like value, seeks to be irreversible, cumulative and immortal. Power partakes of all the illusions of production, and of the real; it wants to be real, and so tends to become its own imaginary, its own superstition (with the help of theories that analyze it, be they to contest it). Seduction, on the other hand, is not of the order of the real—and is never of the order of force, nor relations of force. But precisely for this reason, it enmeshes all power's real actions, as well as the entire reality of production, in this unremitting reversibility and dis-accumulation—without which there would be neither power nor accumulation... For we grant meaning only to what is irreversible: accumulation, progress, growth, production… In seduction, by contrast,

The implications for the study of argument in Bali are significant. An obvious example is theatre.[14] Humour has a crucial, indeed constitutive, role in genres as diverse as Wayang, Topèng, Arja, Bondrès and Derama Gong. Besides entertaining and so attracting audiences, theatre has long been a public medium for social commentary and criticism. To the extent that rationalists and hermeneuts fail to deal with humour in use—and the roll call of the great and good suggests they are strikingly deficient—their claims to understand argument are limited, weak, posturing and potentially spurious. Stressing only what their epistemologies admit, they unwittingly lobotomize themselves. Skilled actors and *dalang*s not only comment on political events, but reflect on the nature of power, position, society, customs, the use of language, human foibles, fashion and much else.[15] Until we immerse ourselves in how Balinese use humour, our accounts of argument will remain grossly lacking and, in Rowan Atkinson's picturesque phrase, 'about as useful as a one-legged man in an arse-kicking contest'.

Of telepathy and zombies

If the foregoing did not give pause for thought, Cultural Studies approaches to media highlights how most accounts of how people argue involve two spectacularly implausible and untenable presuppositions. Put simply, speakers communicate telepathically with listeners or spectators, who are zombies. First, communicating or mediating is imagined as a transparent process. Speakers encode a message, which is transmitted to receivers who decode it. Errors or distortion is due to disruptions to the perfect working of the medium or code. It is a mechanical explanation derived from the original and paradigm example: Morse code. What is quite remarkable about use of this transmission model, which is grounded in a mathematical theory of communication, is that its authors explicitly stated that it would not work for social communication (Shannon & Weaver 1949: 4-5). Why scholars in the human sciences persist with a default account that is fundamentally flawed and unsuitable is an intriguing question. Two reasons suggest themselves. The first is that the account is simple, commonsensical and obviates the need to question either the model or the circumstances under which it works.[16] The second is that the claims of scientific, nay mathematical, rigour are irresistible in conveying a sense of authority, however phony.

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it is the manifest discourse—discourse at its most superficial—that turns back on the deeper order (whether conscious or unconscious) in order to invalidate it, substituting the charm and illusion of appearances. These appearances are not in the least frivolous, but occasions for a game and its stakes, and a passion for deviation—the seduction of the signs themselves being more important than the emergence of any truth—which interpretation neglects and destroys in its search for hidden meanings. This is why interpretation is what, par excellence, is opposed to seduction, and why it is the least seductive of discourses. Not only does it subject the domain of appearances to incalculable damage, but this privileged search for hidden meanings may well be profoundly in error (1990: 46-47).

[14] Theatre in Bali is popular in two senses. For most of the twentieth century at least, it has been by the people and for the people; and it was the most widely enjoyed medium, at least until the general availability of commercial television in the twenty-first century. Even then Balinese theatre has remained one of the most watched genres.

[15] Experienced performers use *raos wayah*, mature speech, which has more senses than the ostensible one. Some are analogous to Jakobson's aesthetic function of language because they are reflexive not only about their referents, but also about the possible senses and the cultural conditions under which they happen. Such senses are not explicitly stated propositions, nor are they, in Hall's terms, the 'preferred reading' (1980: 134). They are presented for the thoughtful to discern and reflect upon, and for the less so not to notice. I address the issue of sense below.

[16] That otherwise erudite scholars should uncritically fall back on common sense suggests how deep-rooted Eurocentrism is. Gramsci outlined the problems.

Common sense is a chaotic aggregate of disparate conceptions, and one can find there anything that one likes (1999a: 773).

From what has the certainty of common sense originated? Essentially from religion (at least from Christianity in the West); but religion is an ideology, the best-rooted and most widespread ideology, not a proof or a demonstration. One may maintain it is an error to ask of science as such the proof of the objectivity of reality, since this objectivity is a conception of the world, a philosophy and thus cannot be a scientific datum (1999b: 432).

The second presupposition is even more remarkable. Listeners, spectators or viewers are presumed to be passive, inert, with mental capacities limited at best to grasping what producers want them to. Once again the image is mechanical, not human or social. People resemble electronic radio or television receivers, which are measured by the precision with which they accurately capture and decode the original message. Again, why such an account should be appealing is fairly obvious: it saves the trouble of thinking. Also it is a recension of Donoghue's tenet: 'The single, true interpretation is an autocrat's dream of power' (1981: 199). It would not be entirely surprising were those in power to wish to imagine that audiences swallow their words, ideas and dissimulations whole and uncritically. That media producers cling to some version of this vision of audiences poses questions about their sense of their authority.[17]

What is so wrong with the transmission model or with treating audiences as passive? A mechanical model is ill-suited to the complexities of social communication. As Stuart Hall argued in one of the founding works of media studies:

> A 'raw' historical event cannot, *in that form,* be transmitted by, say, a television newscast. Events can only be signified within the aural-visual forms of the televisual discourse. In the moment when a historical event passes under the sign of discourse, it is subject to all the complex formal 'rules' by which language signifies. To put it paradoxically, the event must become a 'story' before it can become a *communicative event* (1980: 129).

Complex relations of production and frameworks of knowledge underlie how producers encode programmes as 'meaningful discourse'. Viewers must then decode such discourse using their own frameworks of knowledge and social circumstances, which may well not be isomorphic with those of the producers. Although Hall exposed the crippling inadequacy of mechanical transmission models, he retained many elements of the model (Hobart 2005). Crucially he retained the idea of code, which presupposes a structural theory of speech and signs, which ignores how open, contestable and contingent language in context is.

> A context is potentially unfinalized; a code must be finalized. A code is only a technical means of transmitting information; it does not have cognitive, creative significance. A code is a deliberately established, killed context (Bakhtin 1986: 147).

Both transmission and encoding/decoding models presuppose a rigid account of code, which is as convenient as it is questionable.

Hall's work was important in challenging *a priori* accounts of audiences and potentially in enabling their empirical study. However, such a study faces two obstacles. Hall's own account retained *a priori* aspects in fixing on three hypothetical positions that audiences could adopt.[18] Also, is the television (or any other) audience, an empirical object?

> Audiences are not just constructs; they are the invisible fictions that are produced institutionally in order for various institutions to take charge of the mechanisms of their own survival. Audiences may be imagined empirically, theoretically or politically, but in all cases the product is a fiction that serves the need of the imagining institution. In no case is the audience 'real' or external to its discursive construction (Hartley 1992: 105).[19]

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[17] A less kind explanation is that politicians or producers think that their audiences are stupid and accept unquestioningly what they pump out. During ten years of ethnographic study of Balinese television viewers only once did I encounter such a viewer.

[18] In the dominant-hegemonic position, they accepted the 'preferred reading' that producers gave. In the negotiated position, they negotiated and modified such readings to fit their social circumstances. Only in the oppositional reading did viewers question the code altogether (1980: 136-8).

[19] Hartley's quote is worth citing it full. It continues:

> There is no 'actual' audience that lies beyond its production as a category, which is merely to say that audiences are only ever encountered *per se* as *representations.* Furthermore they are so rarely *self*-represented that they are almost always absent, making TV audiences perhaps the largest 'community' in the world that is subject to what Edward Said

Why then should 'the audience' as generally imagined be so different from a critical analytical account?

> Institutional knowledge is not interested in the social world of actual audiences; it is in 'television audience', which it constructs as an objectified category of others to be controlled. This construction has both political and epistemological underpinnings. Politically, it enables television institutions to develop strategies to conquer the audience so as to reproduce their own mechanisms of survival; epistemologically, it manages to perform this function through its conceptualization of 'television audience' as a distinct taxonomic collective, consisting of audience members with neatly describable and categorizable attributes (Ang 1991: 156).[20]

Is the problem however simply realism, which more theoretically nuanced approaches like Cultural Studies avoid?

> In general, the cultural studies audience research dealt with the audience-text relation as accumulation—a textual account of the audience added to a qualitative assessment of the views of the audience... Instead of placing themselves in the problematic, as is possible with relational research, and being able to act with their research participants, the researchers imagined the participants phenomenologically as 'others'—the researchers were unwittingly co-opted to the administrative ends of programme producers and government agencies (Nightingale 1996, 146-7).

As in Lewis Carroll's poem *The hunting of the Snark*, the more you search, the more elusive the object becomes, then finally it turns out to have been something quite different all along.

Why are audiences so important? Industrially why are such vast sums spent on surveying them? In a mass consumer society, they have become a valuable commodity to be exchanged. Using various supposedly scientific methods, audiences are transformed into unquestioned facts, no matter how ridiculous, riddled with error, implausible and incoherent they are. Behind such strange-seeming endeavours lie a fear and a fantasy. In mass societies those with political or economic power have long had scant idea what people were up to. Faced with such intolerable uncertainty, the imperatives were to imagine, surveil and discipline them; and now, arguably, to control them.[21] However, when, to what degree and under what circumstances do surveillance and control work for the mass media? Or how much are they simulations? Even if one could establish what people really think about what they watch on television, this may well have precious little bearing on what they subsequently do.[22]

> The only people who believe in the polls are the members of the political class (just as the only people who really believe in publicity are publicists and advertisers)… But who else really does? The people get a taste of the burlesque spectacle of the political sphere, hyper-representative of nothing at all, through polls and the media. They consent to this spectacle and they vote? Certainly. Just as they think and say they will buy a particular soap based on

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has dubbed the discourse of 'orientalism', whereby disorganized communities which have never developed or won adequate means of self-representation, and which exist almost wholly within the imagination or rhetoric of those who speak on their behalf, become the 'other' of powerful, imperial discourses.

[20] Ien Ang uses the phrase 'actual audiences' throughout, so siding with David Morley (1992) in his critique of Fiske and Hartley on the audience as a discursive construct. Much depends on what you mean by 'actual' and 'discursive'. For some ten years I ran a Master's course on audiences, which included a fieldwork project. Many students leapt at the chance to do an ethnographic study of friends, flatmates etc. only to discover that it is surprisingly difficult.

[21] There is a parallel with the use of 'big data' by intelligence agencies and corporations, which rely on models that declare error impossible (Aradau 2015; Wolf 2015), as neatly as do Zande oracles (Evans-Pritchard 1937; Winch 1970). Deleuze has argued that we are moving from disciplinary to control societies, where 'the corporation replaces the factory' (1992: 5) and search engines use algorithms to control what news we access and what consumer goods we are offered.

[22] The idea that what you watch determines what you think, let alone what you do, presupposes humans have neither unconsciouses nor capacity for deliberation and reflection.

their faith in advertising. But thus far no one has proven that this is the final word (Baudrillard 2007: 238)

Baudrillard no longer seems guilty of grand Gallic gestures in depicting production as a closed epistemological order. Models of audiences rely on charmingly naïve accounts of human subjects, shorn of the cultural contexts of viewing, evaluating, commenting and acting. And just try to study audiences ethnographically. A function of the industrialization of audiences is to ward off the seductive realization that they are not there in a strict sense. So rationalist-inclined accounts of argument need to close down categorically around the fantasy that all that really matters is the essence of some imagined pure moment of transmission, unadulterated by any actuality.

Of sense and nonsense

The term argument in English covers both argumentation and disagreement. How thoroughly should I disambiguate the two? Much depends not only on whether processes of reasoning can be distinguished unequivocally from dissenting or quarrelling, but also on whether declaring such differences to be primary, essential, immutable and context-free is always helpful, regardless of the myriad different circumstances in which people use and evaluate arguments. In other words, to what extent are such judgements necessarily independent of the purposes of inquiry and the inquirers? As I am interested less with the formal features, logical coherence or entailments of propositions or statements than with the implications of how Balinese speak, act, engage with and understand one another in practice, there may be a case for being agnostic.

While some philosophers might throw up their hands in horror at such a cavalier attitude to well-established distinctions over which I appear to ride roughshod, let me clarify. My immediate concern is to investigate how people actually argued, agreed or disagreed on different occasions and how the participants judged such actions, not with how they should have judged them. The distinction is important because an intellectually honest study of other peoples is confronted *inter alia* by the issue of double discursivity. The conventional way around the issue is for rationalists to declare that 'Western' reason is so superior and powerful that it can translate what others say perfectly or at least adequately for purposes of analysis. To do so requires invoking a battery of questionable, precarious, indeed droll, presuppositions. If we pay those whom we study the minimal courtesy of striving in the first instance to understand what they say and do, a critical analysis would seem to have to comprise three phases. The first is to appreciate what people said and did drawing heavily upon the participants' terms. The second is to evaluate the results by deploying current academic argumentation including, where relevant, canons of reason. The third is to reflect critically on the possibilities that emerges in the play between these two without the customary move of using the latter to hegemonize the former. The unadorned name for such a step is epistemological imperialism. When scholars fail to appreciate—or choose to ignore—the first and third phases, they condemn themselves to replace a search for sense under conditions of likely uncertainty with alien understandings or nonsense. [23]

If the actual circumstances of acts, utterances and how they are received, and if audiences' engagement, are open, uncertain and unfinalizable, the futility of fixing meaning around either

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[23] Asad debunked some myths about the neutrality of translation to highlight the multiple workings of power (1986). Matters become more complicated if, following Deleuze's review of Foucault's ideas of discourse (1988: 47-69), we appreciate that the visible is not reducible to the articulable. It is little surprise that rationalists have to stick grimly to statements analyzable in propositional, or quasi-propositional, terms (e.g. Sperber 1982), and so ignore much of what humans do.

the moment of production or of scholars' *soi-disant* privileged understanding should be evident. What often lurks behind such attempts is a desire for totality, which conceives

> of society as an intelligible totality... Against this essentialist vision we tend nowadays to accept the *infinitude of the social,* that is, the fact that any structural system is limited, that it is always surrounded by an 'excess of meaning' which it is unable to master and that, consequently, 'society' as a unitary and intelligible object which grounds its own partial processes is an impossibility (Laclau 1990, 89-90).

Examining a range of arguments in social context shows that neat totalities independent of someone articulating them that way are rare, which does little to impede their enduring charm to armchair theorists.

We face a simple problem. Existing accounts of meaning, and so how we analyze argument, seek to fix something essential which survives the occasion and can be carried off for subsequent study, enjoyment and parading for the admiration of peers—not entirely unlike the fate of looted colonial artifacts. We require an approach to meaning that recognizes that it is an event, which happens under particular circumstances. There is what I think is such an approach, but it is in two of Deleuze's most philosophically dense works: *Difference and repetition* and *The logic of sense*. I do not claim to extract the true meaning, because Deleuze went to some lengths to undermine such an essentializing ploy. Instead I extrapolate from his writings what I hope is as coherent an account as most others. To reduce the risk of unnecessarily misreading Deleuze, I use quotations.

In The *Logic of sense*, Deleuze identifies three kinds of relationship within propositions: denotation or designation, manifestation and signification. These are inadequate because they are caught in a circle.[24] Tellingly Deleuze singles out the kind of propositional statements beloved of rationalists as the exception.

> there is only a single case where the designated stands alone and remains external to sense: precisely the case of those singular propositions arbitrarily detached from their context and employed as examples (1994: 154).

Accordingly, Deleuze develops another aspect: sense. Sense has a complex ontological status, being neither physical nor mental.[25] It is the product of a pure, or ideal, event.

> 'What is an ideal event? It is a singularity... Singularities are turning points and points of inflection; bottlenecks, knots, foyers, and centers; points of fusion, condensation, and boiling; points of tears and joy, sickness and health, hope and anxiety, 'sensitive' points (1990: 52).

For present purposes, I take it that sense indicates specific and singular events when matters change, change course, come together, precipitate actions, cathect feelings and so on.

Sense does not emerge *ex nihilo*. It arises with the recognition that there is a problem.

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[24] Each condition of the proposition is conditioned by what it is supposed to condition.

> One is perpetually referred from the conditioned to the condition, and also from the condition to the conditioned. For the condition of truth to avoid this defect, it ought to have an element of its own, distinct from the form of the conditioned. It ought to have *something unconditioned* capable of assuring a real genesis of designation and of the other dimensions of the proposition. Thus the condition of truth would then be defined no longer as the form of conceptual possibility, but as an ideational material or 'stratum', that is to say, no longer as signification, but rather as sense (1990: 19).

[25] Deleuze formulates sense in several different ways to clarify its relationship to different theories of reference and meaning. For example

> It is exactly the boundary between propositions and things... It is this sense that it is an 'event': on the condition that the event is not confused with its spatio-temporal realization in a state of affairs... Although sense does not exist outside of the proposition which expresses it, it is nevertheless the attribute of states of affairs and not the attribute of the proposition. The event subsists in language, but it happens to things' (1990: 22, 24).

> Sense is located in the problem itself. Sense is constituted in the complex theme, but the complex theme is that set of problems and questions in relation to which the propositions serve as elements of response and cases of solution… Problems are of the order of events— not only because cases of solution emerge like real events, but because the conditions of a problem themselves imply events such as sections, ablations, adjunctions (1994: 157, 188).[26]

The instances of Balinese argument outlined above each involved several of Deleuze's 'points'. Each arose because, reviewing a state of affairs, someone decided that there was a problem which required addressing. On this account, when arguments involve sense, it follows that an understanding of circumstances and the circumstances themselves transform in greater or lesser degree. Unless something is perceived as an issue or a problem, doing something about it is unlikely to be a powerful motive for action. And routine exchanges and disagreements, whether in a Balinese village or academic life, leave little changed. Balinese say about speech and other acts that they have no sense unless there is some new outcome. If not, they are *gabeng*, empty. To make someone feel, appreciate and reflect on themselves and their actions needs more than homilies: it needs to touch on sensitivities, the risk of ridicule and the realization that there are turning points. Rationalist approaches to argument remind me of a sports day at my school. In the high jump event, one boy sailed through leaving the bar undisturbed. He had passed clean underneath it.

Two implications of Deleuze's approach are worth noting. Freed from the chains of reference, sense allows all sorts of unfamiliar possibilities. Among these are long-ignored antitheses, which serve as commentaries on sense, such as nonsense, be they Lewis Carroll's elegant games or the shattering possibilities envisaged by Artaud (in which Bali played a key role). [27] What might seem idle word play in my opening quotation alludes to the incoherencies that underlie everyday speech that we rarely pause to question, but which Carroll, like Balinese actors, play with (e.g. Hobart n.d.). Can you *see* an argument? Can you *prove* by argument that

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[26] Here there are intriguing parallels between Deleuze and Collingwood. The latter insisted that 'every statement that anybody ever makes is made in answer to a question' (1940: 23). So the conditions under which someone or some agent asked the question becomes crucial. Deleuze's formulation was:

> We are led to believe that problems are given ready-made, and that they disappear in the responses or the solution. Already, under this double aspect, they can be no more than phantoms. We are led to believe that the activity of thinking, along with truth and falsehood in relation to that activity, begins only with the search for solutions, that both of these concern only solutions. This belief probably has the same origin as the other postulates of the dogmatic image: puerile examples taken out of context and arbitrarily erected into models. According to this infantile prejudice, the master sets a problem, our task is to solve it, and the result is accredited true or false by a powerful authority. It is also a social prejudice with the visible interest of maintaining us in an infantile state, which calls upon us to solve problems that come from elsewhere (1994: 158).

Deleuze points to something rarely acknowledged, namely how mastery of enunciation or production may be used to naturalize a hierarchy, which reduces others to infantilized subjects. It is not coincidental that television arguably aims at a similar outcome.

> The institutional needs and purposes of the television industry are survival and profitability, to be achieved (hopefully) by audience maximization and by minimizing risks and uncertainties. Audiences are *paedocratized* to serve these needs. For the industry, television is a *paedocratic regime.* The audience is imagined as having childlike qualities and attributes. Television discourse addresses its viewers as children (Hartley 1992: 108).

[27] For instance, compare two quite different analyses of the nature of order and its representation in Balinese society.

> In a spectacle like that of Balinese theater there is something that has nothing to do with entertainment, the notion of useless, artificial amusement, of an evening's pastime which is the characteristic of our theater. The Balinese productions take shape at the very heart of matter, life, reality. There is in them something of the ceremonial quality of a religious rite, in the sense that they extirpate from the mind of the onlooker all idea of pretense, of cheap imitations of reality... And there is a philosophical sense, so to speak, of the power which nature has of suddenly hurling everything into chaos (Artaud 1958: 60, 62).

> War, in this view, not serene order, is the normal state of the cosmos, and the human world. Conflict is not evidence of chaotic breakdown of the cosmos, but the fundamental characteristic of life. The Balinese world is one in which the many elements are never harmoniously united, in which there is no single encompassing principle, no way of comprehending the whole (H. Geertz 1994: 95)

someone is the Pope?[28] How reliable are sense data? What do words really do? For Bali, the warning is not to apply our own common sense, which is shot through with all sorts of unacknowledged presuppositions. In spite of the proclaimed rigour of academic concepts, much writing is permeated with common sense usage, metaphors that are far from dead and unthought through presuppositions which we impose on others. Carroll used nonsense to highlight aporia in the philosophy of language and mathematics. For Indonesia, presumably we need to inquire for each society what comprises the limits of sense, nonsense and the unthinkable. As with humour, it seems we have hardly begun.

A further implication of Deleuze's work is that we have been working with—and consequently imposing—a dubious and hegemonic metaphysics which is not fit for purpose, unless the aim was to subdue, to render other peoples passive and ripe for processing through the European intellectual mill. What is striking about the broadly conservative ethos of the Rationality Debate is how much it depends on what Fiske and Hartley termed 'clawback', which

> is the process by which potentially disruptive events are mediated into the dominant value system without losing their authenticity. This authenticity guarantees the 'truth' of the interpretation that this mediating involves and thus allows, paradoxically, that which has been interpreted to present itself as objective (Fiske 1987: 289).

Deleuze offers a stark analysis of what such an intellectual stance entails.

> Instead of the critic of established values, instead of the creator of new values and new evaluations, there emerges the preserver of accepted values. The philosopher ceases to be a physiologist or doctor and becomes a metaphysician. He ceases to be a poet and becomes a 'public professor:' He claims to be beholden to the requirements of truth and reason; but beneath these requirements of reason are forces that aren't so reasonable at all: the state, religion, all the current values. Philosophy becomes nothing more than taking the census of all the reasons man gives himself to obey (Deleuze 2001: 69).

Certainly, insisting on obedience to rules and criteria laid down in European academe looms large in discussion about how others argue.

Proponents of rationalism and interpretation rarely address head on the question of the authority with which they write. The former tend to use reason as a means to claim their

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[28] Deleuze was at his most remarkable in elucidating Carroll's plays with logic. Here he unravels the scene with Humpty Dumpty in Alice in Wonderland.

> Humpty Dumpty forcefully distinguished between two sorts of words: 'They've a temper, some of them—particularly verbs: they're the proudest—adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs—however, *I* can manage the whole lot of them! Impenetrability! That's what I say.' And when Humpty Dumpty explains the use of the odd word 'impenetrability,' he provides a much too modest explanation ('I meant...that we've had enough of that subject'). In fact, impenetrability does mean something else. Humpty Dumpty opposes the impassibility of events to the actions and passions of bodies, the non-consumable nature of sense to the edible nature of things, the impenetrability of incorporeal entities without thickness to the mixtures and reciprocal penetrations of substances, and the resistance of the surface to the softness of depths—in short, the 'pride' of verbs to the complacency of substantives and adjectives. Impenetrability also means the frontier between the two—and that the person situated on the frontier, precisely as Humpty Dumpty is seated on his narrow wall, has both at his disposal, being the impenetrable master of the articulation at their difference (1990: 24-25).

Then he explicates the structure of the Mad Gardener's Song.

> On the side of the thing, there are physical qualities and real relations which constitute the state of affairs; there are also ideational logical attributes which indicate incorporeal events. And on the side of the proposition, there are names and adjectives which *denote* the state of affairs; and also there are verbs which *express* events or logical attributes… Thus the ensemble of stanzas develops two heterogeneous series. One composed of animals, of beings or objects which either consume or are consumed; they are described by physical qualities, either sensible or sonorous; the other is composed of objects or of eminently symbolic characters (1990: 24, 26).

impartiality and objectivity; or else to belittle and intimidate their opponents.[29] The latter claim a special method, which gives them unique access and empathy.

> Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning... in the study of culture, analysis penetrates into the very body of the object—that is, *we begin with our own interpretations of what our informants are up to, or think they are up to, and then systematize those* (Geertz 1973a: 5, 15).[30]

The drawback of Clifford Geertz's approach is that

> at a descriptive level, he blurs his own subjectivity—his experience of himself in those early Balinese days—with the subjectivity and the intentionality of the villagers (Crapanzano 1986: 70).

Evidently we need to *scrutinize* our representations of others with some caution and scepticism.

Whatever the abstract form into which rationalists extrapolate argument, people in daily life do not give vent to a series of monologic propositions, but talk dialogically under circumstances where styles of speaking, facial expressions, gestures and awareness of the particular audience are constitutive of the occasion. It would be unwise to assume that how people speak, discuss or narrate is mere contingent embellishment that can be stripped away to reveal the essential underlying argument. To do so is to ignore that people articulate what they say and do, and others appreciate this more or less accordingly, using culturally recognized styles (provided that we treat the notion of style as open and not a fixed code). The point is made nicely by considering television genres, which have become so taken-for-granted that we rarely reflect upon them.

> For events seem to be part of nature, whereas the telling of stories and the selection of the *key* events are clearly cultural activities. The first struggle of news is to impose the order of culture upon the polymorphous nature of 'the real'. The news text is engaged in a constant struggle to contain the multifarious events and their polysemic potential within its own conventions. For news is as conventional as any other form of television; its conventions are so powerful and so uninspected because the tyranny of the deadline requires the speed and efficiency that only conventions make possible. The type of stories, the forms that they will and the program structure into which they will be inserted are all determined long before any events of the of the day occur (Fiske 1987: 283).

The distinction between claims to authority based on objectivity as against proximity or engagement, which latter may offer a complex sense of subject positions notably lacking in the former, is significant. It runs parallel to the difference between authority and subjectivity in television genres, most notably news broadcasts as against soap operas.

> The 'impersonal' authority of the words of the studio news reader constructs a framework of objectivity within which the words and images which constitute other levels of reporting are situated… Objectivity is an empiricist concept that has been under attack for most of the twentieth century, especially from structuralism, post-Einsteinian physics, and psychoanalysis, to name only some of its major theoretical challenges. Yet news professionals still cling to it as both an achievable goal and a central justification of their role in western democracies. It thus plays an important role in the ideology of news and the reading relations that news attempts to set up with its audiences. The impossibility of objectivity and the

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[29] Hollis (1970) exemplifies the first and Gellner (1970, 1973), the second.

[30] Elsewhere Geertz stressed how close the interpreter aims to be, incidentally highlighting the centrality of 'text' to an interpretive method.

> The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of the natives to whom they properly belong (1973b: 452).

consequent irrelevance of notions of bias (based as they are upon an assumption that non-bias is possible) should be clear (Fiske 1987: 290, 288).

The most self-evident questions about how people speak, structure arguments or narratives, present themselves or others as subjects and so on invite critical reflection.

By contrast to news, other television genres represent social reality in quite different ways. For example, soap operas have plots which resist narrative closure, where multiple plots and personalities co-exist, where problem-solving is a central concern and where hegemonic articulations are always subject to alternative accounts. So

the viewer of soap opera is never allowed a stable reading position: no sooner has she understood and empathized with one character's reaction to an event than the focus changes and she is required to shift her experiential knowledge to that embodied by another. All sides of an issue can be explored and evaluated from a variety of social points of view, and, in contrast to the masculine narrative... no point of view, no evaluative norm, is given clear hierarchical precedence over any other (Fiske 1987: 194).

If we are only able to represent the world using some frame of reference, style or genre, it would seem germane to a discussion about how we argue.[31]

Of Popes and soaps

Analyzing how other people argue involves double discursivity in a broad sense. Studying others always runs the risk of hegemonic Eurocentrism, which is addressed or covered up in different ways. Briefly, the interpretive route runs into Foucault's criticism of interpretation: interpretation ultimately both interprets and who posed the interpretation. Similarly, rationalism involves the risk of circularity.[32] If both logical and interpretive arguments are potentially circular in their own way, on what does their claim to authority depend? How do they differ in degree or in kind from, say, Papal pronouncements?

Since Machiavelli politicians have perhaps always known that the mastery of a simulated space is at the source of their power, that politics is not a real activity, but a simulation model, whose manifest acts are but actualized impressions… the Pope, the Grand Inquisitor, the great

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[31] For example

if I ask about the world, you can offer to tell me how it is under one or more frames of reference; but if I insist that you tell me how it is apart from all frames, what can you say? We are confined to ways of describing whatever is described. Our universe, so to speak, consists of these ways rather than of a world or of worlds (Goodman 1978: 2-3).

The inclination of rationalists in particular to deal in terms of timeless propositions should serve as a warning, because so doing carefully eliminates the circumstances and contexts of utterance.

[32] Quine & Ullian spell the problem out neatly.

Logic and mathematics seem to be the only domains where self-evidence manages to rise above triviality; and this it does, in those domains, by a linking of self-evidence on to self-evidence in the chain reaction known as proof. And even mathematics lends itself only partially to such treatment; this was brought home to us by Russell's paradox, Euclid's postulate of parallels, and Godel's incompleteness theorem (Quine & Ullian 1978: 30).

Logic involves infinite regress.

In the adoption of the very conventions . . . whereby logic itself is set up, however, a difficulty remains to be faced. Each of these conventions is general, announcing the truth of every one of an infinity of statements conforming to a certain description; derivation of the truth of any specific statement from the general convention thus requires a logical inference, and this involves us in an infinite regress (Quine 1949: 270).

Philosophers might respond that what I am talking about, in Toulmin's words, 'really has no bearing at all on the things that mathematical logicians like Quine are concerned with. Their business is with logical theory; you are concerned with logical practice; and there need be no real disagreement between you' (2003: 171). Dismissing any special pleading for mathematics as any longer 'the theoretical part of logic', his response was that 'By now, mathematical logic has become a frozen calculus, having no functional connection with the canons for assessing the strength and cogency of arguments' (2003:172).

> Jesuits and theologians all knew that God did not exist; this was their secret, and the secret of their strength (Baudrillard 1990: 65-66).

If we read Baudrillard as saying that power inherently involves performance, do we need to reconsider academic writing as performance? Now performance is a tricky notion, because there are three different uses of 'performance', that in most circumstances are effectively irreducible. In everyday English, it has theatrical overtones with the implication of play, simulation, indeed dissimulation. How people elsewhere imagine and talk about it is as rarely considered as it is crucial to understanding how others evaluate and engage with what they do. Third, it has an analytical usage, exemplified for instance in Judith Butler's writings, as being constitutive of social life (Hobart 2013: 519-21). The theatrical overtones of academic performance are more obvious in lecturing and presenting papers than in published pieces. However, they also constitute the subject matter and what is the case when they write because it is invested with authority. If scholars fail to take account of how others appreciate performance—or, worse still, fail even to consider that others might not think the way that they do—however skilled and sensitive their interventions, they speak for, authorize and effective silence other people. They become 'masters of a simulated space' from which the original subjects have been so elegantly excluded as largely to escape notice. Whereas something so humdrum as soap operas allows recognition of multiple and contradictory subject positions, rationalists and hermeneuts excel at actualizing impressions as authoritative. Perhaps the gardener was not so mad after all when he spoke of Popes and soap.

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