Bali is a Battlefield

Paper to Panel on

Bali: Representations of Culture

International Bali Studies Conference

Bali in Global Asia
Between Modernization and Heritage Formation

16-18 July 2012
Denpasar Bali

Bali dikenal luas karena keunikan budayanya, kekhasan yang tumbuh dari jiwa agama hindu yang tidak dapat terlepaskan dari adat, tradisi, dan keseniannya dalam masyarakat yang bercirikan sosial religius… Sejalan dengan bergulirnya sang kala, budaya Bali tidak menolak kemajuan teknologi sepanjang teknologi tersebut menguatkan budaya bali. Oleh karena visi Dinas Kebudayaan Provinsi Bali adalah Pelestarian, Pengembangan, dan Pemberdayaan Kebudayaan Bali, menuju Bali yang maju, aman, damai, dan sejahtera (Opening statement on the Dinas Kebudayaan Provinsi Bali website by its head, I Ketut Suastika SH.)[1]

> Culture…has always been an idea *post factum*, a notion oriented towards the past (to 'custom' and 'tradition'), descriptive of a state of affairs (and often of a status quo), a nostalgic idea at best (when it mixed the study of exotic societies with regret) and a reactionary ideologeme at worst (Fabian 1991: 192).

Somewhere Covarrubias tells a Just So story about Bali. After the Gods had relinquished the island to humans, belatedly they realized that it was perfect. To prevent Balinese enjoying flawless paradise, they sent them dogs. Not to be outdone Westerners subsequently inflicted far more devastating damage by bequeathing Culture to Bali. When politicians, government agencies, the tourist industry and the local and international arts' crowd vie to outdo one another in trumpeting Bali's unique culture,[2] you know that something has gone badly wrong. As a gift, Culture, together with a panoply of linked concepts, has proven a poisoned chalice. Pointing out that, predicated of Bali, culture is an empty signifier is unlikely to change much, because deeply entrenched interests are invested in preserving, developing and defending the fantasy.

This obsession with culture is linked to the state of scholarship on Bali. For so small a place, it is disproportionately awash with professed experts and students. How is this possible given the voluminous literature in Dutch and the linguistic difficulties of Balinese, quite apart from *kawi* and, obviously, Indonesian? While a limited knowledge of Balinese might be acceptable for researchers on the government sector, where Indonesian is the working language, for the study of daily life and custom, let alone religion and theatre where people are commenting to themselves on their own lives, command of Balinese would seem a *sine qua non*. Yet such expertise is the exception rather than the rule, presumably because mastering Balinese language and the literature takes years, if not decades. Faced with these demands on scholarship, despite the evident deep deficiencies, many scholars seem to conclude that Indonesian is adequate, so raising endless issues of translation and articulation by obliging Balinese to expatiate to foreigners on their own practices in the official

---

[1] 'Bali is widely known because of the uniqueness of its culture, its special characteristics which grow out of its Hindu religious spirit which cannot be separated from custom, tradition, and its art in a society which is characterized as social-religious… In accordance with the evolving times, Balinese culture does not reject technological progress provided that the technology mentioned strengthens Balinese culture. So the vision of the Balinese Provincial Culture Service is the Conservation, Development and Empowerment of Balinese Culture heading to a Bali which is progressive, safe, peaceful and prosperous.'

[2] As the opening quotation shows, so doing confers on culture at once the properties of an abstract noun, an organism, a transcendental agent and a collective subject, while simultaneously hypostatizing and reifying it.
The title of the panel is *Bali: representations of culture.* The aim is to problematize both culture and its representation, as well as to avoid the easy phrase 'Balinese culture', which by being made a grammatical subject, like the expression 'the Balinese', makes it also the subject of articulation.

national language rarely used for such purposes.[3] Enter culture. As James Clifford noted (1988: 30-31), to back their hegemonic claim to expertise, anthropologists had radically to simplify the complexity and diversity of people's social and linguistic practices. They did so by creating an imaginary, holistic, totalizable object, 'culture' which, conveniently, is unproblematically encompassable by the trained Western mind but not to the native informant, who veers between an object to be mined and an authority on particularities to be venerated. For Bali most talk of culture is simply a *reductio ad absurdam*. Especially for theatre and the arts, such invocation of culture is often uncritical.[4] So, in the name of respecting, celebrating or promoting Balinese culture, unwittingly or otherwise scholars who do so become deeply complicit in, if not public relations' advocates for, complex political, economic and personal agendas. Reflecting on Bali's popularity as an intellectual playground, it is hard to avoid concluding that a major reason is that the entry standards are so low.

What, briefly, is so wrong with culture? After all, commonsensically it underpins a multi-billion dollar industry, which keeps Balinese and many others busy making money from tourists, quite apart from fueling the visual and performing arts' industry. As a long-term strategy, as Time Magazine's *Holidays in Hell*[5] noted, it risks killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. Does it really make any difference whether we call what is supposedly distinctive about Bali 'culture' or not? Much depends on what knowledge is for. If you are a politician or a businessman, then invoking culture and related terms, no matter how vacuously, is a free asset to be milked so long as you ignore the long-term consequences. If you are a scholar, understanding how Bali has been imagined, what is behind the rapid change and how popular and academic ideas are implicated may be of concern.

At issue here is the difference between commonsense and critical uses of culture. When Raymond Williams famously remarked that 'culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language' (1983: 87), his point was that, in Gramsci's terms, such commonsense usage is ideological (1971: 625). So casual use of such terms is far from innocent: rather they reinforce a particular political-economic order. The outcome of talking uncritically about culture and cognate terms such as tradition, religion, community, indeed Bali, is that Balinese and foreign commentators are unwittingly engaging in reiterating a singular hegemony. My purpose here is to examine this hegemony and its implications.

---

[3] The obvious comparison is with the neighbouring island of Java where a reasonable command of Javanese, which has more levels than Balinese, is expected. Unfortunately contemporary researchers are following in illustrious footsteps. Clifford Geertz, the father of interpretive anthropology, admitted eventually that he did not speak Balinese. It is not coincidental that Margaret Mead was a leading proponent of this simplistic concept of culture, which she imposed on Balinese.

[4] Writing about history, which he took to exemplify disciplines concerned with culture, the philosopher Collingwood made the point clearly, by reference to the history of critical inquiry.

> In scissors-and-paste history the historian takes up a pre-Baconian position. His attitude towards his authorities, as the very word shows, is one of respectful attentiveness. He waits to hear what they choose to tell him, and lets them tell it in their own way and at their own time. Even when he has invented historical criticism, and his authorities have become mere sources, this attitude is at bottom unchanged. There is a change, but it is only superficial. It consists merely in the adoption of a technique for dividing witnesses into sheep and goats. One class is disqualified from giving testimony; the other is treated exactly as authorities were treated under the old dispensation (Collingwood 1946: 269).

[5] Time World, 9th. April 2011.

The opening quotation from the Dinas Kebudayaan treats culture as the central figure of a set which includes custom, tradition, art, religion, spirit, which singly and together are uniquely identifiable with and predicated of twin subjects: Bali and 'the Balinese'. The terms are mutually defined, and so circular and tautological. Each term and the relationships between them, as generally used, are distinctive in connoting structure, coherence, integration, encompassment, non-contradiction and freedom from conflict.

> Most Western writers assume that the Balinese view of the cosmos is firmly ordered and harmonious, and that human beings must attempt to imitate and therefore bring about that order again in this world. For these writers, the main aim of temple ritual and much else in Balinese culture is to prevent a sinking chaos, which is the absence of order (Geertz 1994: 95).

In short we are offered a vision of an ideal exquisite harmony of perfectly synchronized interlocking parts. Difference, incoherence, misunderstanding, contradiction, antagonism, violence and conflict stem from alien forces; or else are external circumstances to be overcome – chaos to be worked upon. This worldview is articulated by the conventional translation of the phrase from the Sutasoma, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, as 'Unity in Diversity'.

What relationship though does this model have to what is going on in contemporary Balinese society, inextricably involved as it is in the nation state of Indonesia and global capitalism? Put another way: whose account is it? And what kind of interests does it serve? As Tom Hunter noted of the period when the Sutasoma was written, *kakawin* literature 'represents the interests of royal and priestly actors with a large stake in maintaining a fixed symbolic order' (2007: 27). If enunciations in Java historically served the élite's interests, why, mysteriously, should they not in contemporary Bali? Rather than accept the current account of culture as self-evident, incontrovertible fact, perhaps we should ask a few questions. Who has articulated this harmonious vision of Balinese culture? What relationship does it bear to other accounts? Under what conditions were such accounts produced? And what is at issue in such representations of so complicated an actuality as Bali as variously appreciated by different participants?[6]

Pythagoras in place

Richard Fox has linked the provenance of the Pythagorean vision of Bali to the New Order's State Ideology, Pancasila, and argues how this came to be implemented locally through the Balinese Hindu Dharma Council (2011: 55-58). While depicting Bali as an unspoiled harmonious paradise fits longstanding European fantasies about remote places (Vickers 2012) and predates the New Order's use of culture to depoliticize Indonesians,[7] another aspect of Fox's argument deserves

---

[6] A more interesting question is what are the circumstances under which the different kinds of representations of Java and Bali came about in the pre-colonial literature? Sadly I am not qualified to answer this.
Because Bali geographically is an island, it would be simplistic to assume that Bali refers exclusively and exhaustively to a definite place and all, or most, of its inhabitants. As Jim Boon noted (1977), Bali played an important role in European imagination before anyone knew anything about it – and has continued to do so.

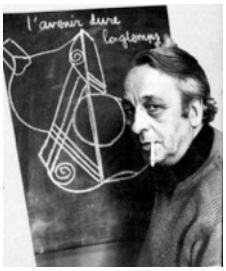
[7] Doubtless there is more to be said on the dissemination of ideas of balance and harmony, but this would involve not only a reading of Indonesian and European sources but, perhaps more important, an analysis of Balinese theatre performances, very few of which were recorded until recently.
The extent to which religion in Bali relies on mass mediation should be obvious from the programming of BaliTV. A study of the Balinese Television Project archives of recordings between 2000-2007 of programmes broadly to do with the arts, society and religion on TVRI Denpasar and national television, shows an interesting distribution of synonyms for harmony. The term *rukun* was used in 13 programmes, all religious; *harmoni(s)* occurred in 22 broadcasts, again overwhelmingly religious. Most widely found was *seimbang* (in 38 programmes), mostly again in religious programmes, but also those about government development. Aficionados of Bali as a harmonious culture will be cheered to learn that their view was espoused by the former Governor, Ida Bagus Oka, who managed to get both harmony and balance into his opening address to the 1991 Arts Festival. Broadcasting performing arts is, of course, a crucial means of disseminating the official, but increasingly hegemonic, representation of culture.



A delight of the algorithms used by Google Images is that they throw up odd results. In the images below some depict the characters intended, others do not.

attention. It is the crucial role of the mass media in articulating carefully engineered portrayals of Bali, which, like all such representations, are more significant for what they omit and disarticulate than for the necessarily reductive figures that they foreground. The use of synecdoche enables Bali to be conveniently summed up as 'culture'. What is quite remarkable is that both Balinese and foreign intellectuals mostly continue to pretend that it is adequate to talk about Bali as if the mass media were irrelevant or dismissible as simply one factor among many. To do so overlooks the extent to which, since the 1980s, Balinese (and others) have been bombarded with tightly crafted depictions of themselves and their society and have learned to recognize themselves in these accounts.





The massive simplification that broadcast media enable – and indeed require in order to work – is central to representations of Bali as some divinely ordained fit between a geographical place and a homogeneous culture, art and religion.[8] As Adrian Vickers found it necessary to remind readers: 'The physical boundaries of "Bali" have always been problematic' (2012: 301). From their slave raids of the eastern islands to their impact on the language of Batawi, Balinese have long been a presence across Indonesia, just as other societies have in Bali.[9] Indeed Balinese attempts to airbrush Javanese out of, say, their political history or the performing arts require remarkable selective amnesia. Just as Bali is not a neatly circumscribed place, nor are Balinese a natural entity or species. To the extent that they and their commentators have come to think of themselves as such involves what Althusser called interpellation: they have been assiduously addressed and trained to recognize themselves and respond accordingly, especially through television and radio. As a corrective, it may be helpful to think of Bali not as a place or a culture, but as a brand with the unique selling point of a harmonious synthesis of culture, art and religion (Hobart 2011).

[8] The great scholar of Balinese religion, Hooykaas, used to protest against the provincial government's tidying and sanitization of religion arguing instead that, in terms of texts and practice, Balinese could best be designated as Hindu-Buddhist. At every turn hybridity and admixture is dressed up as the unfolding of an authentic, unadulterated essence.

[9] They have also had a global presence as an imaginary since Hollywood film. Both *The Big Sleep* and *Some Like It Hot* include gratuitous references to Balinese dancers.

Bali as a battlefield

Something of the sheer power of the mass media may be gleaned from how pervasive at least one alternative account is and how effectively it has been marginalized. This advances the argument that society and even the cosmos is in continuous flux and hallmarked by conflict and violence. So, whether about historical or present day Bali, the kindest reading of the Pythagorean vision exemplifies Samuel Johnson's dictum about second marriages: 'The triumph of hope over experience'. The conventional translation of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* needs to be set against other *kakawin*. For instance, writing about the background to the *Śiwarātrikalpa*, the authors note that

> another compulsory feature of almost all *kakawin* (poems) is the elaborate, and to our taste exaggerated, descriptions of wars and battles between armies of heroes and demons... The fantastic weapons and gruesome methods of warfare which the poet's imagination conjures up are almost equal to what our modern society has actually achieved' (Teeuw *et al*. 1969: 31-32).

Studies of the *kidung* literature (e.g. Vickers 2005) or Balinese *babad* (Worsley 1972) show the pervasiveness of conflict and the virtual omnipresence, even celebration, of violence.[10] Analyses of painting (e.g. Geertz 1994) and theatre (e.g. Fox 2011: 218-300) reveal a preoccupation with disruption, conflict, violence and a Balinese response to this that is notably absent from the Pythagorean account, namely fear. For much of Balinese history the extent of political violence, hardship and brutality for all classes was breathtaking (Hanna 2004; Vickers 2005). And to avoid seeing the scale of institutionalized conflict and violence in Bali over the last seventy years (e.g. Robinson 1995, Schulte Nordholt 2007) requires the dedicated myopia of a single-minded ostrich.

So what status do such kinds of account have that portray Bali as less resembling paradise than a battlefield? My aim is not to replace one hegemonic articulation with another. First, introducing an alternative image or paradigm to the dominant one calls into question the self-evident verisimilitude of the dominant image, a ploy Foucault used to effect with his deliberately jarring use of metaphor. Second, it raises questions about who is enunciating and the circumstances under which they do so. Third, it draws attention to the diverse registers that Balinese and commentators use to describe, interpret or explain what is going on. Fourth, it sets historical and contemporary accounts by different groups of Balinese against the dominant government, corporate and mass media representations.[11] Finally it opens the way to inquiry into the conflicts and antagonisms that are suppressed, ignored or denied in most approaches to culture.

The discipline that explores culture not as the creation of unity out of diversity, but as a site of struggle is of course Cultural Studies.[12] Cultural Studies brings to the discussion recognition of the

---

[10] Cycles such as Malat are at least as much Javanese as Balinese. We should not however fall into the trap of hypostatizing social practices into essentially different substances, *aka* cultures. For symmetry, it would be fun to complete Johnson's quotation by stating that such a literary account, like first marriage 'is the triumph of imagination over intelligence'. However presumably intelligence would have advised Javanese and Balinese authors to err on the side of caution if they wished to continue writing or even living.

[11] That is not to suggest that these élite accounts are necessarily univocal or that some Balinese are not co-opted to, embrace or at least reiterate official representations some or much of the time. However what people say tends to depend on whom they are speaking to and the context.

[12] The phrase culture as a 'site of struggle' is widely attributed to Stuart Hall (e.g. Grossberg 1996: 158). What Hall actually wrote was: 'Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged' (1994: 466). A key figure here is Vološinov: 'Class does not coincide with the sign community, i.e., with the community which is the totality of users of the same set of signs for ideological communication. Thus various different classes will use one and the same language. As a result, differently oriented accents intersect in every ideological sign. Sign becomes an arena of the class struggle' 1973: 23).

multiple antagonisms that permeate Balinese society, but which are hidden or finessed by the Pythagorean vision. That, of course, is one of its main functions. What is less obvious is how great mass spectacles such as the International Arts Festival on the one hand and the modern mass media on the other underpin a manufactured semblance of integration and harmony. The point about spectacles is that, like all representations which prioritize the visual, they minimize the central role of dialogue, discussion and argument by presenting *tableaux vivants*, which are then articulated by members of the élite through speeches, television commentary or, for *Sendratari*, by a single *dalang*.[13] The importance of dance as the brand image of Bali is not accidental. Here dialogue and the possibility of articulating anything untoward have been completely excised. Television famously positions viewers in tightly controlled roles, having surrendered effective agency to privileged enunciators and commentators.[14] Even the Cultural Studies' formulation of sites of struggle involves spatializing and visualizing actions on particular occasions. It is more helpful then to think of culture as emerging out of the moments when it is articulated and contested.

The missing link – mechanical solidarity

A paradox about Bali is that the more its unique culture is celebrated, the less there is, whether imagined anthropologically as the variety of local customs or as an evolving self-sustaining contribution to civilization – unless that is reducible to branded shopping malls and *Son et Lumière* such as *Bali Agung* complete with elephants. Driven by the multiple demands of government, the

tourist industry and mass media for increasingly standardized, recognizable, marketable products, Balinese have eagerly learned the art of mechanical reproduction central to the culture industry

---

[13] Conflict is inherent in theatre plots but, in Barthes's terms, it is neatly inoculated either by being projected onto the distant past, safe mythical figures like the Pandawa and Korawa or resolved narratively (1973: 150). If the point about the visual tending to minimize argument is unclear, consider recent coverage of the misnamed 'Arab Spring'. Television footage of Egypt's Tahrir Square shows a multitude of people subject to the voiceover of a single commentator who provides a unified summation of the presumed thoughts of tens of thousands of people. Were you to attach a microphone to each person, the resulting diversity would be beyond summation and, probably, comprehension. It is therefore to be avoided.

[14] Just think of the authority vested in figures like BaliTV's Ida Pedanda Madé Gunung.

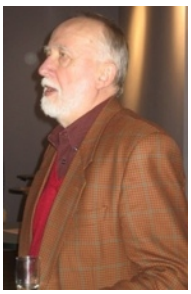
> The whole domestic arrangement of broadcast TV and the aesthetic forms it has evolved to come to terms with this domestic arrangement provides broadcast TV with the capability to do this and no more. The citizenship that it provides as the position for its viewers is a position of impotence: TV viewers are able to see 'life's parade at their fingertips', but at the cost of exempting themselves from that parade for the duration of their TV viewing (Ellis 1992: 169-70).

(Adorno & Horkheimer 1972; Benjamin 1977). Close examination of claims about Balinese putatively extraordinary creativity reveals innumerable art shops selling identical factory-produced lines. And every morning how many Barong Dances are performed to charabancs of tourists and every evening a stock repertoire of dances? With a few exceptions, claims to creativity mask its startling absence. So what is at issue?

Granted its relevance, it is surprising how rarely the sociologist Émile Durkheim's theory of kinds of social solidarity is invoked to illuminate striking features of Balinese society. Java, where personal networks are important, groups have relatively limited functions and there is a complex division of labour, exemplifies what Durkheim called organic solidarity. The opposite is mechanical solidarity. Here groups (in Bali *banjar*, *désa*, *subak*, *sekaha* etc.) are central to social life and organize much of their members' activities, backed by formidable sanctions. Social integration comes through individual conformity, notably in religion and the arts. Balinese society instantiates mechanical solidarity to a remarkable degree.[15] The result is the famous social cohesion and organization, but at the price of treating originality and deviation from the norm as potential threats. So creativity becomes confined to endlessly elaborating accepted frameworks rather than potentially revolutionary exploration of the new: what Goldenweiser called 'involution' (1936; cf. Clifford Geertz's extension to agriculture, 1968). That is not enough. To prevent the palpable inadequacies of mechanical solidarity being evident also requires a model of representation that fits and confirms this world narrative. What is it?

After representation

Such a model must treat representation as about using signs, images, laws and classifications faithfully to reflect a pre-existing reality that adequately encapsulates knowledge, yet remains unaffected by the act of representing.



> Knowledge can be known, our dominant tradition seems to feel, only through *re*-presentation and *re*-production, through sign-systems, models, law-relations, or at least taxonomies whose common mission is to create order... Culture gained its currency as a cover-all concept and its historical function as a *point de repère*...by serving as a short term for a theory of knowledge and not...for a theory of conduct (Fabian 1991: 191)

More important still, the purposes of who does the representing and under what circumstances must be expunged by appeal to what is carefully placed beyond question: the authority of the past, culture, religion or, failing that, of the speaker.

By contrast any approach that recognizes conflict between divergent accounts of what is going on has to question unquestionables. The term re-present indicates the problem. It presupposes a prior state of presence to which what follows is subordinate. In response to this Platonist vision, we need one which allows for divergent and contrary accounts and, in so doing, modifies and changes both what is represented and the participants' various understandings. Put simply: representing does something. It is a social practice that intervenes in and changes the world it describes. So there can be no single, all-encompassing, true framework for Bali. Different people or interest groups represent Bali *as* something (paradise, hell, whatever) to someone on some occasion for some purpose under particular circumstances. You cannot represent something as it is in its fullness in all contexts as understood by all possible participants. Representing is necessarily rather like a cartoon: it picks out and emphasizes certain features and naturalizes them at the expense of others. So we come to see the representation as authentic insofar as it reiterates previous representations.

---

[15] One instance is the rigidity of rules surrounding *banjar* membership, which anthropologists of development have argued prevents poor families migrating to find work.

Representing then, by definition, is an elegant but deceptive act of betrayal, which transforms what it purports to depict faithfully. The enunciations of politicians and officeholders, like the twitterings of Bali's many commentators cannot be judged by how accurately they reflect some prior reality because in significant part they constitute and change it through their practices. Representing is a way of acting on the world, not reflecting it, because 'representation is already mediation' (Deleuze 1994: 8).

Conventional accounts of representation lead to a static world of measuring copy against the authenticity and primacy of the original and away from appreciating how we help to make things what they are through our practices of talking, depicting and so on.

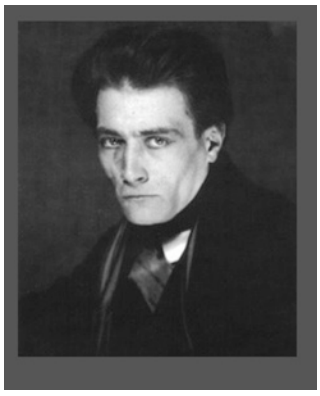
> The theatre of repetition is opposed to the theatre of representation, just as movement is opposed to the concept and to representation which refers it back to the concept. In the theatre of repetition, we experience pure forces, dynamic lines in space which act without intermediary upon the spirit, and link it directly with nature and history, with a language which speaks before words, with gestures which develop before organised bodies, with masks before faces, with spectres and phantoms before characters – the whole apparatus of repetition as a 'terrible power' (Deleuze 1994: 10).[16]

Apart from making sense of that proclivity of Balinese, puzzling to foreigners, for watching well known stories over and over again, it also enables us to appreciate why those in office are so wedded to the impoverishment that, conveniently, the mass media impose. There is a 'necessary destruction' by

> the politician, who is above all concerned to deny that which 'differs', so as to conserve or prolong an established historical order, or to establish a historical order which already calls forth in the world the forms of its representation (Deleuze 1994: 53).

Where to now?

Bali faces rapid social change, driven predominantly by the forces of national and transnational corporate capitalism. Unfortunately the concepts, theories and even the modes of representing the issues are part of precisely this frame of reference. A vicious circularity entails that criticism is caught up in or neutered by what it criticizes. As a former English politician Denis Healey put it in his First Law of Holes: 'When you find yourself in a hole, stop digging'. There are however radically alternative ways of thinking about Balinese society. Coincidentally these approaches happen to draw in part on Bali's singular contribution to the broader understanding of society and the human subject from Artaud on the implications of Balinese theatre, to Bateson's rethinking of society as cybernetic and as patterns of relations not structures.[17] By an extraordinary curvature two key themes originating somehow in the study of Bali



[16] Deleuze manages here neatly to link representation to Artaud's writing on Balinese theatre (1978).

[17] The study of Bali splits fairly neatly into two: there are those who are concerned primarily with the intricacies of Balinese society, Little Bali if I may, and those concerned about the wider implications of research on Bali, Broader Bali, which is what has attracted distinguished scholars from Bateson and Mead, to Geertz and Barth *inter alia*.

came together in the work of Deleuze with Guattari: Artaud on the Body without Organs and Bateson on plateaus.[18] These scholars have been concerned above all to think of alternative ways of imagining representation, society and structure and the human subject. My concern here is with the relevance of Deleuze in particular to addressing that most thorny of ideas: capitalism. Whatever is happening to Bali, it is now inescapable from national and global capitalism. But how are we to understand the changes to Bali; and what we mean by capitalism?

Subject to the criticisms of colleagues at the conference, perhaps I may very broadly characterize Balinese society prior to colonialism and in gradually decreasing degree afterwards as organized around two principles – or modes of encoding value – which sometimes converged, sometimes diverged: ties to land and ties to political patrons.[19] On Deleuze and Guattari's various accounts, treating capitalism as simply a new mode of political economy is inadequate. What makes capitalism different from previous modes of organization is that is based on the dissolution of all previously existing boundaries, such that in principle anything becomes exchangeable with anything else. Its genius lies in decoding what has previously been kept separate – whether culture, religion, *niṣkala*, art, land, relationships, meanings – and making them transactable.[20] When Balinese run courses in spirituality or *taksu*, tourist guides organize tours to see tooth-filings, cremations or trance dances, or the Bali Safari & Marine Park organizes spectacles, they are dissolving the differences between, or decoding, what was previously kept distinct. Indeed Balinese enthusiasm for decoding that which is notionally separate – cash for competitive employment or educational opportunities, legal judgements or official documents[21] – suggests that some have embraced capitalism with an imaginative vengeance. The consequence of such exchangeability is that no belief, meaning, message, code or morality can withstand such capitalism because its

---

[18] As Deleuze and Guattari put it:

> Gregory Bateson uses the term *plateau* for continuous regions of intensity constituted in such a way that they do not allow themselves to be interrupted by any external termination, any more than they allow themselves to build toward a climax; examples are certain sexual, or aggressive, processes in Balinese culture. A plateau is a piece of immanence. Every BwO [Body without Organs] is made up of plateaus. Every BwO is itself a plateau in communication with other plateaus on the plane of consistency. The BwO is a component of passage (1988: 158; my parentheses)

I am still tracing the steps, sometimes intricate, between Artaud's work on Balinese theatre and the Body without Organs and Bateson's on the Steady State and cybernetics, let alone the complexities of the writings of Deleuze. So what follow are my provisional thoughts, which will undoubtedly change significantly.

For present purposes, one sense of the Body without Organs is those assemblages of practices upon which social organizations depend, but which they effectively deny. Whereas structures and organizations are what Lévi-Strauss designated as *en clé de mort* (in the (musical) key of death) because they tend towards fixity and rigidity, the Body without Organs is *en clé de vie* (in the key of life), because practices are ceaselessly changing. The more Balinese are bent on standardizing, institutionalizing, prescribing and fixing – be it religion, music, dance or whatever – the more they move away from the Body without Organs towards hypostatized, dead substances, which is why the increasingly desperate appeals to art, religion and culture are flogging a very dead horse.

[19] In a sense the emergence of *pecaling* and political *préman* (Schulte Nordholt 2007) may be considered as new encodings by these two plateaus.

[20] The strip development at the side of roads which destroys subak irrigation and the sale of land for villas are two obvious examples of decoding land from its previous reasonably stable plateau.

[21] My favourite is perhaps the wonderful reversal by which instead of local television companies paying artists to perform, the artists pay the television companies.

principle is that all codes dissolve into and flow as capital.[22]

Without becoming too lost in abstruse theory, this account may well have implications for understanding how capitalism is working in Bali. Insofar as Balinese remain determined to turn whatever aspect of their society into capital, there is little point in being nostalgic or bemoaning the loss. It follows inexorably from the determined decoding that continues apace. Appeal to religion, tradition and culture is in vain because these are part of a representational régime which produces hypostatized entities out of living practices. The next step has been to market these – for which reason, however noble their intentions, both Balinese and foreigners who participate directly or indirectly in this commodification and dissemination of Balinese culture are collusive with a capitalism, the effects of which are increasingly obvious. The alternatives would take us into the world of the Body without Organs and other ideas, which is for another occasion.

---

[22] Colebrook put it clearly:

> Capitalism is also the conclusion of the logic of the signifier. Prior to capitalism we can imagine social regimes of interacting and competing codes and flows—flows of goods, bodies, women and the codes of life in general. But with the idea of the signifier comes the idea of the subject and capitalism. There is one system—language, signification, the signifier—which stands in for and represents an otherwise uniform, undifferentiated and meaningless life. The very idea of the signifier is tied to decoding; all life can be referred to the system of signification. The signifier creates a separation between one regime of signs (language/code) and the world that exists there to be coded. All other codes—genetics, marked bodies, gestures—can be reduced or translated to the system of signification.
>
> But the despotism of the signifier lies also in its emptiness; it does not represent some quantity or quality but is that which allows for the translation and relation of all other quantities (2002: 131).

Bibliography

Adorno, T. & Horkheimer, M. [1972] 1993. The culture industry: enlightenment as mass deception. In *The cultural studies reader*. ed. S. During, London: Routledge.

Artaud, A. 1978 Sur le théâtre Balinais. In *Œvres completes*, Tome IV. Paris; Gallimard.

Barthes, R. 1973. Myth today. In *Mythologies*. trans. A. Lavers, London: Paladin.

Benjamin, W. 1977. The work of art in an age of mechanical reproduction. In *Mass communication and society*, eds. J. Curran et. al. London: Edward Arnold.

Boon, J.A. 1977. *The anthropological romance of Bali 1597-1972: dynamic perspectives in marriage and caste, politics and religion.* Cambridge: Univ. Press.

Clifford, J. 1988b. On ethnographic authority. In *The predicament of culture: twentieth-century ethnography, literature, and art*. London: Harvard Univ. Press.

Colebrook, C. 2002. *Understanding Deleuze*. Crows Nest NSW: Allen & Unwin.

Collingwood, R.G. 1946. *The idea of history*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Deleuze, G. 1994. *Difference and repetition*. trans. P. Patton, New York: Columbia Univ. Press.

— & Guatari, F. 1988. *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia.* trans. B. Massumi, London: Athlone.

Ellis, J. 1992. *Visible fictions*. *Revised edn*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Fabian, J. 1991. Culture, time and the object of anthropology. In *Time and the work of anthropology*. New York: Harwood.

Fox, R. 2011. *Critical reflections on religion and media in contemporary Bali*. Leiden: Brill.

Geertz, C. 1968. *Agricultural involution: the process of ecological change in Indonesia*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.

Geertz, H. 1994. *Images of power: Balinese paintings made for Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead*. Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press.

Goldenweiser, A. 1936. Loose ends of a theory on the individual pattern and involution in primitive society. In *Essays in anthropology presented to A.L Kroeber*. ed. R. Lowie, Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.

Gramsci, A. 1971. *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. eds. & trans. Q. Hoare & G. Nowell Smith, London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Grossberg, L. ed. 1996. On postmodernism and articulation: an interview with Stuart Hall. In *Stuart Hall: critical dialogues in cultural studies.* eds. D. Morley & K-H. Chen, London: Routledge.

Hall, S. 1994. Notes on deconstructing 'the popular'. In *Cultural theory and popular culture.* ed. J. Storey, London: Harvester.

Hanna, W.A. 2004. *Bali chronicles: fascinating people and events in Balinese history*. With Introduction by A. Vickers, Singapore: Periplus.

Hobart, M. 2011. Bali is a brand: a critical approach. *Jurnal kajian Bali* 1, 1: 1-26.

Hunter, T.M. 2007. The body of the king: reappraising Singhasari period syncretism. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 38, 1: 27-53.

Robinson, G. 1995. *The dark side of paradise: political violence in Bali.* London: Cornell Univ. Press.

Schulte-Nordholt, H. 2007. *Bali: an open fortress 1995-2005*. Singapore: NUS Press.

Teeuw, A. et al. 1969. *Śiwarātrikalpa of Mpu Tanakuṅ*. The Hague: Nijhoff.

Vickers, A. 2005. *Journeys of desire: a study of the Balinese text Malat*. Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 217, Leiden: KITLV Press.

— 2012. *Bali: a paradise created*. 2nd. Edition. North Clarendon VT: Tuttle Publishing.

Vološinov, V.N. 1973. *Marxism and the philosophy of language*. trans. L. Matejka & I.R. Titunik, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press.

Williams, R. 1983. *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society*. London: Flamingo.

Worsley, P.J. 1972. *Babad Bulèlèŋ: a Balinese dynastic genealogy*. The Hague: Nijhoff.