The Transformable Balinese Body

A lecture-performance

Mark Hobart and Ni Madé Pujawati

Bali is unusual. Long before Westerners knew it existed, Bali was fabled for its exotic culture and the beauty of its people. Long before six million tourists a year flocked to the island transforming it into a simulacrum of itself. Renaissance Europeans thought that Eden was not unearthly but a remote place awaiting discovery. So when the explorer Cornelius de Houtman returned from a voyage to the East Indies in 1597, he announced that the search was over: they had discovered Paradise.[1] So Bali's relationship with Europe 'began not with a shot, but a seduction' (Boon 1977: 10). Nearly four hundred years later, surprisingly little has changed. As one author on colonialism put it:

> The island had nothing to offer in the form of trade, but there were other attractions—a carefree way of life and comely women…Two young men found these charms irresistible, and the fleet sailed without them (Masselman 1963: 96).

Early books about Bali drew on images from all over Asia including Goa, another contender for Paradise. Such displacements were not uncommon. Conventionally Meyerbeer's opera *L'Africaine* has nothing to do with Africa, but deploys a backdrop from Angkor and dress styles from India and the Middle East. The intellectual life of Bali started in the murky recesses of European fantasy. Thanks to tourism, it is still struggling to extricate itself.

The aim of this piece is to reflect on the differences between the ways Europeans have imagined Bali and Balinese understand themselves. I shall concentrate on the body, its movements and potentialities and enliven the argument with a selection of videos.[2]

First however let us look at what is probably the most widely seen Balinese dance ever performed.

Dorothy Lamour in The Road to Bali **2.24.17"**

That was Hollywood's idea of Balinese dance as performed by Dorothy Lamour in high heels from the film *The Road to Bali,* with Bing Crosby and Bob Hope, released in 1952 and watched by millions of people since.

What do Balinese make of this characterization of their culture? When Ni Madé Pujawati saw the film she had no idea that it was supposed to be a Balinese dance. On closer inspection, some features have a vague bearing on Bali: the split temple gate, *Candi Bentar* and the loom used for weaving. And Dorothy Lamour makes one hand gesture, which Ni Madé on re-watching could identify as vaguely Balinese, but then it is

[1] Part of the excitement to the Dutch, who came from a waterlogged country, was that the Balinese had superb irrigation systems which they mistook for drainage!

[2] Originally this talk was devised primarily as a vehicle for a series of performances by the dancer-singer, Ni Madé Pujawati. As it is impossible to dance for an hour and a half non-stop, let alone change costume, we decided to intercut the dances with a background explanation and video. The piece entitled *The transformable body: exemplification and the senses in Bali* was given first in Italian in May 2000 as a *Lezione Dimostrazione* at the University of Pisa in a series *Il corpo e il gesto: modelli comportmentali del Sogetto in Scena tra arte e scienza* (*The body and its movements: behavioural models of the Subject on Stage between art and science*). We presented another version at the Palazzo Cini, Venice, then reworked it slightly for *inter alia* Dartmouth College NH, Yale University (2004) and Asia House, London (2009). These meanderings sparked off Nick Gray's thoughts about parallels in Balinese music, which led to the project, *Matemahan-Transformation* (2020) with seedcorn funding from SOAS, for which I have slightly reworked the present version, replacing the live dances with a variety of video sources. Otherwise I have kept the piece which was intended for a general audience such as it was. I address questions necessarily left unanswered in a sequel *The land where mountains melt: a Balinese metaphysics of change and uncertainty.*

also Indian. The headdress is generic mainland South East Asian, the clothes, shoes, make-up, the music and movements—in short everything else—is alien. The Palace Hotel St. Moritz famously used to serve a Dry Martini consisting of pure gin with Martini sprayed on from an aerosol can. Similarly the best-known Balinese dance turns out to be pure Americana with a whiff of the Orient. This is not a quibble. Balinese bodies are acceptable only once they have been transformed into something different.

What was Dorothy Lamour's dance supposed to be about? It is *Pèndèt*, a dance to accompany the arrival of deities, that was popularized to greet distinguished guests, until Balinese objected that it was trivializing a religious rite. So the composer and choreographer, I Wayan Beratha, created a suitable alternative: *Panyembrama. Sambrahma* is Sanskrit and Old Javanese for 'activity, eagerness…respect', 'bustling about (especially in receiving a guest)' (Zoetmulder 1982: 1638). The dance depicts servant girls rushing around to welcome honoured guests. It has now been extended to become a metonym of Balinese hospitality and is used to greet visitors on almost any occasion, from arrivals at airports to the opening of an evening of tourist dances.

Panyembrama **7.04.16"**

The body in Bali

Europeans'—and increasingly other Asians'—fascination with Bali turns on the idea of the spectacular charms of the island and its people. In its twentieth-century incarnation, this romantic image owes not a little to the German-Russian painter and musician Walter Spies and his coterie, which included, besides the anthropologists Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, the Bloomsbury figure, Beryl de Zoete, from whose *Dance and Drama in Bali* the following depictions are taken:

> Bali has long been famous as an earthly paradise in which a favoured race of men live in Utopian harmony with their own kind, with nature and their gods… Something in the atmosphere, which is extraordinarily clear and light, seems to have turned all the processes of man's thought into beauty. . . They have fashioned Bali out of its original jungle into this incomparable harmony of rice-fields, temples, villages, so different each from the other, yet so characteristically Balinese.
>
> Their movement, even more than their physical beauty, is the first thing that strikes one about Balinese people. . . Wherever he may be . . . squatting naked on a rock in the river in the act of making offerings to the stream, the Balinese is so perfectly in harmony with his surroundings and so graceful in his poise that we almost have the impression of a dance. . . Certainly the Balinese child has from infancy its limbs trained and persuaded to become perfectly pliant (de Zoete and Spies 1938: 2-3, 5).

Balinese embody a unique synthesis of unspoilt naturalness and exquisitely calibrated discipline.

> Little girls who appear like small golden idols in the Lègong dance, and render with astonishing refinement and skill its complicated evolutions, will a moment before have been sitting half-naked on the ground de-lousing each other (de Zoete and Spies 1938: 5).

Had the de-lousing and dancing been presented in reverse order would the portrayal have quite as effective?

The European contradictions between the discipline necessary for civilization and the ambiguous nostalgia for the freedom of nature are neatly sutured in dance. For

> dancing is to them something quite different, another mode of being. . . It is natural that such a genius for movement as that of the Balinese should find expression in the art of which movement is the only body—in music. Music permeates their life to a degree which we can hardly imagine; a music of incomparable subtlety and intricacy, yet as simple as breathing. . . dancing accompanies every stage of a man's life from infancy to the grave (de Zoete and Spies 1938: 6-7).

To paraphrase Voltaire, if dance did not exist in Bali, it would have been necessary to invent it. In effect Europeans did.[3]

When Ni Madé taught *Panyembrama* to classes of European ballet students, they gave up after a few lessons, complaining that the movements were too difficult and unnatural for the human body, which is remarkable considering how stylized ballet is. In order to understand their reaction, we need to step back to consider the body in Bali.

Fragmenting bodies

A striking features of the human physique as Balinese conceive it is how fragile and downright idiosyncratic it is. The body always runs the risk of parts going their own way. Balinese paintings often feature arms, legs and heads deciding to 'do their own thing'. *Kala Rau*—a vast bodiless head with open devouring mouth—is often replicated above the main gate in temples. The theme of the wayward and disintegrating body is taken up in stories about *pangiwa*, 'left-hand magic', what Westerners term black magic,[4] where severed limbs, intestines and other body organs develop a life of their own. In the village where I have worked for thirty years, villagers regularly reported intestines at night writhing snakelike down the road at great speed—a serious hazard for the unwary. The body is recalcitrant to the will. You have to teach it to behave itself: it is not 'naturally' co-ordinated.

Balinese Body Parts **1.03.19"**

This is not the only difficulty. Bodies are easily occupied by forces outside themselves. They are liable to be *karangsukang*, entered or taken over by the wills of others. When Westerners wax lyric trance in Bali, this is what they mean, although there are other kinds of altered modes of being. While bodies may be vulnerable to being taken over, they have the potential of completely reshaping themselves, adopting new movements and assuming quite different desires. They become, *nadi*, someone quite different. Such transformation is the product of knowledge and training. Let us look first at some representations of the fragmenting body and then at an example of bodies—here those of young children—being moulded and manipulated by forces beyond themselves.

[3] For a critique of conventional views that present-day Balinese dances are of great antiquity, see Hobart (2007), Picard (1996: 134-163) and Vickers (2009). For a contrary account, see Davies (2008).

[4] The use of *pangiwa* is summarized neatly by Hooykaas. Most writers and commentators however overlook his final clause, which casts the entire endeavour in a quite different light from popular accounts.

> In Bali there are quite a lot of people accomplished in the art of disease-producing magic, an ability obtained from Durga and her train of bad demons, who once upon a time brought the illnesses into the world, i.e. into Bali. In order to become an accomplished magician one should study the magic formulas of the *pangiwa* doctrines (the doctrines of the so-called 'left' i.e. black magic) and devote oneself to Durga, in the hope that she may bestow upon one the gift of being able to use these formulas effectively. After having obtained one's end by means of offerings and prayers spoken during mystic dances in the middle of the night in the graveyard, one becomes a *dèsti*, able to *ndèsti*, to work charms, on this condition, however, that the witchcraft is only effective in the case of sinners (1980: 13).

Sang Hyang Dedari 5.20.13"

From the moment they are born Balinese bodies are dangerously uncoordinated. Their beings are very vulnerable. To ensure that they survive and become mature socialized beings involves an elaborate technology of the subject, *manusayadnya*.[5] Even so they are liable to fly apart without warning or become occupied by alien forces. Against this, they have a capacity to transform themselves at will, including assuming the terrifying guise of *léyak* (witches)[6]. Under these circumstances, mastery or command over the body becomes singularly important. So it becomes necessary to distinguish cultural régimes that stress command as against control. Westerners are familiar with conceptions of the body as a mechanism that requires training, moulding to orders, constraint and surveillance to ensure that it works according to predetermined parameters. Bureaucracies and modern armies exemplify control as the mode of articulation in which the wills of human subjects are subordinated or even eradicated.[7]

By contrast, Balinese usually imagine themselves in quite other ways. Different parts of the body have different inclinations, which it is the job of the disciplined human to command by weaving mental and physical dispositions into an elegantly working complex whole at least momentarily. Similar principles underlie many aspects of Balinese society from the village to the state. Locally Balinese work through corporate groups with equal representation of every member. So no little rhetoric, diplomacy and understanding of human proclivities[8] is needed to achieve agreement and effective action. Pre-conquest Balinese polities depended on the ruler being able to obtain the agreement of other lords, and they in turn of their subjects, to pursue any common venture. Given the many conflicting interests, this was no easy matter. Behind the spectacle of the 'theatre state' (Geertz 1980) lay a quite different agenda: to show publicly that you could pull off such prodigious logistical and organizational feats. Crucially, paradigms of control instrumentalize and strip people of will and autonomy, whereas command assumes partly autonomous agents.[9]

5 *Manusayadnya* (from Sanskrit *mānuṣayajña* 'an offering to human beings' Zoetmulder 1982: 1109) is often glossed as something like 'ceremonies for the person', *yajña* being an 'act of worship or devotion' (Zoetmulder 1982: 2354) or, more prosaically as rites of passage/transition. This translation reiterates a European dichotomy between material and technical rationality and religious belief or practice which is absent from Balinese thinking. It is more perspicacious to think of such rites as part of the techniques of engineering fully functioning adults. Balinese used to say that without the complete *manusayadnya*, humans were not fully formed and lacked *caya* (Old Javanese, *cāya*, radiance). Villagers maintained that they could estimate how far any particular person had been through the full series. The flipside is that Westerners who have never been subject to this technology of forging mature social beings are to Balinese thinking not only lacking in radiance, but ill-formed. This is not information that they volunteer easily.

6 Naïve binaries of good/lovable *versus* evil/terrifying fit ill. A favourite figure in dangerous plays like *Calonarang* and *Basur* is the *Celuluk*, a large, hirsute and bald witch with a grotesque mask, which prances around the stage, playing with the children, cavorting and causing general merriment not unlike a Pantomime Dame. (For an example, see the last section of the video below: *Sisya transform in Calonarang* 5.44.09-7.15.15". You know when the *Celuluk* appears because of roars from the crowd).

7 Foucault's *Discipline and punish* (1977) is an extended history of how Europeans mechanized human subjects, a process which Deleuze extended even further in his notion of societies of control (1995).

8 Interestingly my Balinese informants used an Indonesian word, *perikemanusiaan*, which they glossed as a feeling for humanity.

9 When things go wrong it is instructive. In the research village, a member of the royal family died, which required rapid cremation. The prince came and addressed the village meeting, stating that he expected the whole village to be ready to carry the corpse to the cemetery on a certain day and time. The collective reply was *Inggih* (see below). That morning, instead of a hundred or so men stripped to the waist and wearing

Labile bodies and polities are part and parcel of a wider vision of everything always changing. For Bali you could invert the old epigram: '*Plus c'est la même chose, plus ça change*' (The more things stay the same, the more they change).[10]

> One afternoon in early 1989, several villagers were chatting in a coffee stall about how thigs changed. It suddenly occurred to me to ask what they thought of Heraclitus's adage: 'No man ever steps in the same river twice'. Their response was short, sharp and unanimous: 'No! The same person cannot step in the same river twice'. Not only the river, but the person has changed.

It is easy to overlook how thoroughly European thinking has been prioritized identity, continuity and necessity as against difference, disruption and chance. Coming across Balinese for whom the latter are axiomatic makes misinterpreting them horribly easy.

Bali sits at a crossroads between several different *Weltanschauungen*. Besides ideas found widely across Austronesian societies, the writings of several South Asian philosophies are refracted in daily life, most obviously *Sāṃkhya*, which villagers contextualize deftly.[11] On this account, everything is tripartite process (*triguṇa*), the three constituents of all matter, which have objective and subjective aspects. Materially there is energy which engenders activity (*rajas*); rational ordering (*sattwa*); and objectification (*tamas*), structure or inertia. Subjectively *triguṇa* manifest as impulsive desiring (*rajas*), reflective discriminating (*sattwa*), and recognizing the world as unfathomable (*tamas*). Bodies (with their thoughts, feelings and predispositions) and the surrounding world are entangled; whereas in European thinking they are dualistically separate—hence the idea of the atomistic 'individual'. Constant attention and discipline are needed to deal with ruptures, usually resulting from a surfeit of *rajas* and *tamas*. Bali has a formidable technical, medical and ritual repertoire conceived to address such accidents and threats to beings and the world. Dance, which exemplifies momentary mastery through *sattwa*, brings order and coherence to the world, just as material process always threatens to impact on the dancer and the dance.

It is worth reflecting for a moment on the implications of such a way of envisaging the world. In place of fixed and stable states of nature or identifiable drives, appetites and proclivities, you have the endless play of three antagonistic and irreconcilable tendencies. Everything, be it animate or inanimate, is always in the process of becoming and so changing in different ways. You are the ever-shifting consequence of your thoughts and actions: that is what *karma p(h)ala* (the fruits of action) entails. It is a relational (ecological, if you wish) vision in which a being's surroundings affect it—as it does its

the correct garb, a number of people were lounging about the village square in ordinary clothes. The royal family had no alternative but to swallow the humiliation and carry the corpse to the graveyard themselves. The prince, in his arrogance, had failed to persuade the villagers. He mistook their response *Inggih* for yes. Strictly it means 'we have heard'. They had heard him, but been unmoved.

10 Jean-Baptiste Karr's famous *fin de siècle* original is '*Plus c'est la meme chose, plus ça change*'. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

11 I am not suggesting that *Sāṃkhya* thinking is a rigid template that determines thinking. Rather it offers a range of potential ways of articulating how the world is in the context of other possibilities. In addition, the more rhetorically skilled speakers would draw on *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* when arguing. Furthermore, the part of Bali where I worked in North Gianyar was a Buddhist stronghold with a striking anti-Brahmanical streak. It is worth noting that these trends were evident fifty years ago when I began fieldwork, long before the drive to introduce government-sanctioned Hindu orthodoxy through the Parisada Hindu Dharma. It is worth noting that 'Hinduism' as an embracing term for South Asian religion was articulated in its present form under British colonialism in the nineteenth century. The Balinese version is an articulation of an articulation.

surroundings. So the other aspect of *karma* as action is that you are the protean product not only of your actions, but also of what is done to you. Surviving, let alone thriving, involves strategizing and discriminating how you engage with others and the world. You cannot control the insuperable fluidity of antagonistic processes. By going with and trying to direct the flow, you can however seek to command it briefly, as in dance.

If a model of perfect control involves pushing the machine to its limits, a command one consists of interlacing effectively what is heterogeneous and conflicting. Balinese I have talked to find opera and ballet rather uninteresting exercises in pushing the body to extremes. Elegant mastery of antagonistic potentialities is prized, as in *Arja* which requires singing, dancing and acting simultaneously.

If you ask Balinese actors or audiences what makes a performance work, the answers are carefully modulated. Everything, of course, hinges on the endowments of the actors. The actor must fit the rôle in bodily build, with which usually goes style of voice and character. Three qualities must all be fitting. The dancing must be skilful. The singing must be well pitched, enunciated and beautiful, which is hard to pull off when dancing. And the dress and make-up must be fitting. If anything falls short, the performance as a whole fails.

Arja – Katemu ring Tampaksiring **7.43.19”**

Even if all these are good, you just have competence. For a performance to ‘take-off’, to enable you to suspend disbelief, you require more. That something is *taksu*. The term derives from the Sanskrit *cakṣu*, the faculty of sight, here divine witnessing, for which actors pray at a special shrine before each performance. By contrast to much European thinking which treats witnessing as passive, in Bali witnessing—*a fortiori* if it concerns Divinity—is not passive, but a constitutive act without which the event is incomplete (*gabeng*, empty). So performing in a television studio is dead (*mati*) because there is no audience (Hobart 2000). *Taksu* is a constant theme among actors. When I asked her, Madé Pujawati’s reply was amusing:

> ‘Actors blame *taksu* when they are no good. *Taksu* is half technique, half losing yourself so deeply in the part that you become whatever you are acting.’

No actor or singer can *taksu* to a pre-recorded tape or disk. A great performance—in Bakhtinian fashion—depends crucially upon two dialogue: between actor/singers and between them and the musicians. Balinese exuberance for marketing their culture to gullible Westerners means you can now take courses in *taksu*—for a hefty fee. One recently advertised guaranteed success within a week: the price included flights in US$.

Different regions, even different villages, pride themselves on having developed idiosyncratic styles and *tata cara*, [12] ways of doing things including dance. *Tamas*, however, is a constant danger. Nowadays objectification manifests itself as standardizing and codifying canons of excellence through national academies, which stifle originality. Bureaucratization is the epitome of control—and *tamas*.

We can now begin to understand why Balinese have placed so much stress on dancing and regard dancers as exemplifying a pinnacle of human self-discipline, not just of the

[12] *Tata* is arrangement; *cara* is way, style or custom. Deleuze and Guattari’s over-used expression *assemblage* (1988) is probably better translated as arrangement.

body, but of the will, thought and feelings. (This is why warriors were supposedly trained in dance in the past.) It may also elucidate why ballet dancers complained that the movements defied the body's propensities. In one sense, Balinese dance hinges on the movements being *unnatural*. It is the capacity to make the apparently impossible and counter-intuitive appear effortless and artless that exemplifies mastery.

The body's potentiality is evidently not circumscribed by what is 'normal' in human gesture and movement. The greater the dancer's mastery, the greater her capacity to emulate various styles of life, even to exemplify other life forms, real or imagined. So many of the virtuoso dances developed over the last fifty years turn activities from weaving (*Tari Tenun*) to fishing (*Tari Nelayan*) into choreographed dance. Dances draw on the movements of animals, birds (e.g. *Cendrawasih,* the bird of paradise) and even insects, as captured in the oscillating motion of the dancer in *Olèg Tamulilingan* (imitating the distinctive swaying movements, *olèg*, of the Balinese bumblebee, *tamulilingan*). Likewise imaginary beasts, or animals that Balinese have never seen in the wild, become the object of attention. The cross-gender (*bebancihan*) dance *Mrgapati* exemplifies the fabulous, but dangerous, Lord of the Forest. The possibilities are many.

One widespread response to Balinese dance seems compulsive: 'What does it mean?' The question presupposes that dance must symbolize, have meaning and be interpretable. If you ask a Balinese what a particular dance or movement means, they are likely to laugh at you. I was told: 'Dance does not mean anything. Words mean. Dance emulates (*nulad*) or exemplifies (*nyontohin*).'[13] We might better ask: 'What does dance do?' It depicts, instantiates, exemplifies, plays with possibilities and potentialities, demonstrates and celebrates mastery.

Matters are not quite so straightforward though. Did Balinese always live up to the philosophical elegance of ideas about dancers and their bodies? And what happened when Balinese encountered Westerners? Other faces of Bali are illustrated through the vicissitudes of Bali's most famous dance, *Lègong*, of which you will see clips shortly.

Lègong is conventionally attributed to an eighteenth-century Balinese prince, Cokorda Madé Karna (1775-1825) who dreamed of heavenly nymphs dancing, while residing in Kètèwèl, the source of the Sang Hyang dance you saw earlier. Unable to find any girls beautiful enough to perform the dance, Cokorda Madé ordered two exquisite masks to be made, to which the origin of the ritual dance, Sanghyang Lègong. Subsequently this was danced by pre-pubescent girls who are still 'pure'. It is a great story: and a fine twentieth-century invention of tradition. It appears the historical reference was added to the *Babad Dalem Sukawati* in the 1960s in furtherance of Ubud's claim to be the cultural centre of Bali. The current best guess is that *Lègong* emerged from classical theatre, *Gambuh*, in the late 1880s as foreign theatre forms and new fashions swept through Bali and was danced by boys wearing female masks. The genre was moribund until it was resuscitated as tourism took off in the 1920s and 1930s

13 It is no accident that teachers of the great Javanese court dances, *Srimpi* and *Bedoyo,* gave my former student Felicia Hughes-Freeland exactly the same reply.
Imposing European theories of symbolization and semantics is a cultural category mistake. For a start, there are as many incompatible theories of symbols (Todorov 1982) as there are of hermeneutic interpretation (Palmer 1969). Common sense questions about meaning are mostly unwittingly ideological (Gramsci) or plain confused. They ignore Balinese understandings which are sophisticated and highly pragmatist (Hobart 2015; cf. Goodman 1968).

(Rethinking Dance). Since then *Lègong* has become iconic of Bali and part of Brand Indonesia. In keeping with the earlier theme of how Balinese play with the movements of living things about them, here is *Lègong Kuntul*, a dance of uncertain provenance that depicts the life of white herons.

Lègong Kuntul **16.33.09”**

Gesture, knowledge and the senses

Contrary to market-driven fantasies about the island of the Gods where everyone is an innocent artist in a state of nature, all was not sweetness and light. *Gandrung*, the boys who danced Lègong, were catamites of the princes, just as many female dancers in pre-colonial Bali provided income to their masters through prostitution. And the Western love affair with Bali was not unrelated to the profusion of photographs and paintings of bare breasted women, the acme of eroticism to the puritan West. The role of Balinese in the over-heated fantasizing about them is a topic yet fully to be explored. As for virtuoso dance, it seems to have been virtually unknown in Bali before the 1920s, when it burgeoned to sate the emerging tourist market. Balinese had to extrapolate ‘dance’ from its theatrical context, although subsequently they came to choreograph and perform such dances for themselves, not least as a badge of sophistication and passport to international recognition. What Balinese themselves mostly watched at least until the late 1980s were different kinds of theatre. There is no word in Balinese to distinguish dance from theatre, *sesolahan*, which always involves dancing, speech and often singing.

To understand how theatre works, it helps to appreciate Balinese ideas about the senses. There are five organs, the *panca budi indriya* (Sanskrit *pañcabuddhīndriya*), which provide the material for the senses for the mind: eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin. The sixth sense is mind, *manas*, the organ that reflects on these materials. A salient feature of Balinese life is the alternation between periods of quiet, rest, if not boredom and the explosion into sense-stimulating activity. Festivals and public events aim to create a sense of *ramé*, busyness—furnishing abundant material for all the senses at once. If you attend a temple ceremony (*piodalan*), you are likely to be struck by the multitude of sights, sounds and smells that impact on you. During the main rite, high priests and temple priests are invoking Divinity in some of Its many forms; a shadow puppeteer is presenting a play; a *gamelan* will be playing; temple dances are going on; hundreds of people all in their best clothes will be praying with incense, receiving perfumed holy water, chatting, calling to one another, laughing and gossiping, with food stalls and gambling going on outside—all at the same time. The success of events from temple festivals to cremations to the annual International Arts Festival are judged by how *ramé* they are.

To give a sense of what Balinese enjoy, here is a short series of clips from a three-hour parade. After musicians and women carrying offerings, there are two giant figures, *ogoh-ogoh*. The first is *Kumbangkarna*, the younger brother of *Rahwana*, from the Ramayana. The second is a pairing of two well-known figures: the witch *Rangda* and the Lord of the Forest, *Barong Kèkèt*. What is most unusual is that *Rangda* rides *Barong* as if it were a horse. I leave it to you whether it is the play of possibility, postmodern pastiche or kitsch.

Pesta Kesenian Bali 1995 **3.03.00”**

You may have noted how visual the whole parade is. We need to delve a little further. The five sense organs are ranked in order of the reliability of the evidence they provide. The two most important are particularly useful for evaluating complex events, namely hearing and sight. Whereas Europeans tend to stress the power of the word—and so hearing—Balinese are more cautious. If your eyes are closed, hearing does not tell you very much by itself. And speech is so powerful that it can lie and misrepresent as easily as to tell the truth. To ascertain what was actually the case, you are pretty much at a loss without sight to evaluate visual evidence. So sight emerges as the most important sense, the others only attaining their full potentiality under the direction of mind, *manas*.

What bearing does this have on theatre? Theatre is where events of significance from politics to public affairs are re-enacted, including those parts from which the general populace is normally excluded. Especially under Suharto's New Order régime when direct criticism was perilous, classical literature was used as the allegorical means for commenting on what was happening. Such re-enactment is, in a way, realler than the original events because everything relevant is made visible and subject to the critical evaluation of *manas* which synthesizes all the senses.

Doing and changing

What follows if beings and the world being inseparably part of incessant transformative process? What Europeans tend to classify as objects or instruments have life because everything partakes of process. If Balinese treat letters, *aksara*, as alive and are 'directly oriented to bringing about change in the world' (Fox 2016: 33), then why not movement and music?[14] If you 'do things with words', words do things to you. Also, if what you do, or is done to you, changes you and the world about you, it is misplaced to treat 'theatre' or 'dance' necessarily as basically expressive, aesthetic and entertaining, no matter how recently rewardingly embraced by Balinese. Short of dismissing out of hand Balinese ideas about their own society, Western scholars need to rethink their basic presuppositions.

We do not have to look far. Steering round the dances devised with tourists in mind, including such salmagundi as the *Rangda* and *Barong* dance, other performances did, and still do, something. Children born in the week of *Tumpek Wayang* are thought to be at risk of illness or injury. So a special shadow play, *Sudamala*, needs to be held to avert danger (A. Hobart 1979: 19). In the past, when communities felt under threat from disease or misfortune, they would hold performances of *Basur* (Hooykaas 1978) or *Calonarang* (Belo 1949) to summon up with the aim of vanquishing any lurking destructive forces.[15] Both require a *bangké matah*, a living corpse: an actor who agrees to be carried like a cadaver covered in white cloth to the graveyard where dark forces are invited to attack. Such doing requires changing form. A living human becomes a corpse. More dramatically still, in *Calonarang*, the widow Walu Natèng Dirah calls upon her young female followers, *sisya*, to transform, *ngalekas*, into witches, *léyak*. While nowadays, many Balinese are blasé about such performances, in the past when a

[14] Much depends on what alive means here. For present purposes I take it to signal what has certain potentialities of its own.

[15] The actors playing the corpse, like *Basur* or the witch *Rangda* require carefully protecting beforehand. These are exercises in potentiality: laying oneself open to attack and inviting other agencies to manifest themselves.

performance was happening, people would rush to the safety of a temple. The contrast with tourist performances in literally night and day. The former take place in daylight so visitors can photograph: the latter take place at dead of night.

Sisya transform in Calonarang **7.15.20”**

How Balinese imagine matter and mind is always changing, as doing things changes both the doer and the done. Everything is in the course of becoming. This vision contrasts starkly with the general European dichotomy between mind and matter, subjects and objects, in which being traces out its trajectory according to different narratives of development or entropy (Rorty 1976). Balinese ideas of transformation are very flexible. Most of the time, Balinese are represented through European visions and stereotypes. So it is amusing to see what a counter-articulation might look like, by re-imagining Artaud’s famous encounter with Balinese theatre at the Paris Exposition of 1931 (*Sur le théâtre Balinais*, 1978; 1958).

Artaud **12.39.00”**

Appendix

In 2011, the photographer and video artist Jeremy Millar approached Ni Madé Pujawati and me with the idea of reviewing how far Bali was a product of Western imagination. To give initial focus, we decided to take a key event: the impact of Balinese theatre on Artaud. Our problem was Bali has been exhaustively interpreted in Western terms, but rarely in their own. How to avoid the subtle hegemony of the forms of representation themselves, when styles of writing, filming and so on are so shot through with cultural presuppositions? Ni Madé Pujawati suggested theatre, which is a recognized medium through which Balinese comment on themselves and the world around them. We had the programme of at least one performance that Artaud had seen. Ni Madé Pujawati conceived of a series of transformations between four of these dances in the order they were performed. The theme was Artaud moving from a spectator watching *Jangèr* to becoming actively involved with *Lègong* to the point that he started to intervene and transfigure the dances to become puppet master in the dance with the bird *Garuda* as in his increasingly schizophrenic mind took over. Finally Artaud and the witch *Rangda* confront one another, after which he returns to his rational self.

Evidently the piece is not ‘purely’ Balinese as two Europeans were involved. However, in a sense, modern Bali is a Balinese-Western co-production, which may not be an insuperable problem if you start by recognizing it. Also the piece was designed as a pilot for a larger project in which we invited eight celebrated Balinese actors and a composer to reimagine the history of colonial conquest and Independence in their own terms. Our timing was unfortunate, as it coincided with massive cutbacks on UK arts’ funding. So it never came to pass.

On a different score, Artaud's use of Balinese theatre has been heavily criticized as lacking any understanding of what was going on (Savarese 2001) and merely a convenient stick to thrash prevailing theatrical norms. After reading *On the Balinese theatre* carefully, Ni Madé Pujawati's comment was that she found it more insightful than most interpretations of Balinese theatre.

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