

## **Chapter 4**

### **As I lay laughing: encountering global knowledge in Bali.**

Knowledge is a coffin we carry around looking for a decent place quietly to bury. The image might seem surprising. It is common to imagine knowledge as something immortal, which carries on growing remorselessly. There are other ways to think of knowledge however. Even were knowledge on the increase, what of those who are barred from enjoying it, although they are entwined in its snares? There is a darker side to knowledge: the fear of failing to master it, of being excluded from it, of becoming its object. How knowledge appears, indeed what it is, depends on how you are situated in respect to it. Here academics are in principle in a unique position to reflect upon their own practices. After all, is it not we who discover, advance, teach, disseminate, and even control the growth of, knowledge? Yet we rarely talk about knowledge as such, except to outsiders. And new ways of thinking about something as often destroy previous knowledge as add to it. In anthropology such thinking makes a mockery of its most cherished creations: society, culture, human nature, reason and, I suspect soon, anthropology and knowledge itself. Each intellectual generation owes its being to its forebears and repays the debt by burying them.

#### **The argument such as it is**

Every few years an idea which has usually been rumbling away for years somewhere else momentarily convulses the little world of anthropology and threatens to upset the calm progress of research, writing and teaching. The latest tremor is the discovery that we may have been living through a process of incipient globalization for some time. A problem with much globalization theory though is that it is an exercise in retrenchment in the aftermath of post-structuralism and postmodernism. How convenient it would be were the unsettling suggestion unfounded that the modern world and its paraphernalia of nation states and political economies did not exemplify the epitome of western rationality and was but a thing of shreds and patches. The fear that knowledge of that world might turn out more fragmented, closed and contingent than presumed in academic spin-doctors' accounts could

then be allayed by focusing on how effective that knowledge could be shown to be in the globality of its reach. The west, whatever that is, had won. (The malleability of the notion of ‘the west’ contributes to the apparent success of western, or global, knowledge, which I take not to be one single coherent essence, but the heterogeneous product of a long history of practices.) Globalization theories celebrate the spatialization of history, get on with the cartography of the new world order (aka. hypermodernity) or, with a nod to the pessimists, worry about how to alleviate the unfortunate side effects of the triumph of late capitalism. The argument looked more convincing in the mid-1980s with the collapse of the Soviet Union than it does a decade later. As a seismic event to mark the end of history, it is reminiscent of Cyril Connolly’s immemorial headline in *The Times*: ‘Small Earthquake in Chile, Not Many Dead’.

Although it is still badly needed, this is not the occasion for an extended critique of globalization theory (on which see, for instance, Archer 1990). I shall confine myself simply to a few remarks relevant to this chapter. Much of the apparent applicability of the notion of globalization relies on the play made of a fan of connotations (see Appadurai 1990; Featherstone 1990a; Robertson 1992). In particular, globalization suggests totality, which always gives academics a *frisson* of delight. A total problem suggests a total, indeed totalitarian, solution. The notion of globalization is hegemonic, because the globality is that of western civilization, variously imagined. Appeal to the self-evident phenomenon of globalization distracts attention from the contrary process of decivilization, by which the world is becoming in many ways a distinctly nastier, more polluted and dangerous place, not least the metropolitan centres that promulgate the utopia. Like its predecessor, world-systems theory, globalization theory’s descriptions of the world simplify complex and underdetermined events by imputing to it teleological and systemic properties, such that ‘the local’ becomes hypostatized as opposed dichotomously to the ‘global’. (Whatever happened to regions, attention to which would vitiate simplistic oppositions?) This leads in turn to an endless and vapid play on their ‘meanings’ in an attempt to escape the reified and spatialized intellectual *cul-de-sac* created.

The account of knowledge which underwrites ideas of globalization is, unsurprisingly, deeply conservative. It reverts to a representational idea of knowledge as more or less accurately and definitively reflecting the world as it is, independent of those doing the knowing and

describing. Its appearance of offering something *more* comes from the promiscuity by which ‘global’, and its shadow ‘the total’, refer to a process, an object, a universality and range of purported access, and a totality of scope. Accounts of knowledge are agentive. That is they define the objects, or subjects, of that knowledge, empower some people as being able to know but others as not and determine what counts as knowledge itself. In this chapter I wish therefore to consider critically the implications of ways in which Europeans and Americans, whose global knowledge is at issue here, have imagined knowledge and set out to constitute the world accordingly. This is emphatically not an exercise in epistemology in the sense of a search for timeless conditions of truth and privileged access to it. On the contrary, I take assertions about, and uses of, knowledge to be social actions with far-reaching consequences. The supposed neutrality of the knower in representational models underwrites a subtle hegemony. In a post-colonial, or global, world, epistemology has become the means to a new imperialism. For example, constituting much of the world as ‘underdeveloped’ defines those concerned as lacking, determines what they lack, the preordained goal which they have failed, but must struggle, to achieve and outside expert knowledge as the appropriate means. A consequence of apotheosizing western knowledge is the dismissal of existing knowledges. One person’s claim to knowledge is all too often another’s condemnation to ignorance. Whatever knowledge is it is not neutral.

Among the problems in discussing knowledge is the fact that it is arguably not a unitary phenomenon and, in most representations, it is abstract. So knowledge is talked about using widely diverging constitutive metaphors. These metaphors are not ‘dead’ insofar as they have consequences. I sketch out below several partly incommensurable, but often amalgamated, forms widespread in popular and academic usage. I then consider the consequences of constituting knowledge in particular ways, notably for both knowers and what, or who, is known. Knowledge, on these accounts, emerges as some kind of mental object, state, residue or commodity, usually anchored in the human subject as a fixed, ultimately private, disposition. The following survey of metaphors of knowledge verges at moments on the comical, but their presuppositions are far from innocent or their consequences innocuous.

Treating knowledge as some kind of mental entity has the effect of denying the historically and culturally specific situations in which it is invoked and reflection on the purposes, agents, subjects and objects imputed on particular occasions. For this reason I choose to consider

knowledge as a range of situated practices, an approach which I have developed elsewhere (1993b). Recourse to practice does not miraculously solve the problem of knowledge, whatever that might be, not least as we have, *pace* Bourdieu (1977, 1990), no satisfactory account of practice. Reconsidering knowledge as various kinds of practice has several advantages though. So doing situates different uses of knowledge, instead of postulating it as a timeless essence, and highlights the consequences of such uses and of claims to knowledge. Not least for my present purposes, treating knowledge as practice articulates well with how Balinese have publicly represented their own knowledge to themselves and how they deal with their increasingly frequent encounters with global knowledge and its purveyors, which is the theme of the second half of this chapter. For Balinese rarely speak of knowledge as a state, but of knowing and remembering as the acts of agents. Considering knowing as a situated public practice requires revising many of our presuppositions about knowledge. For a start laughing and dying seem to be implicated in knowing in ways I only partly understand at the moment. I intend the effect to be partly counter-hegemonic, in that it allows us within limits to reflect critically on our own ideas through the practices of people who are normally the objects of our knowledge. More immediately, treating knowledge as practice invites us to engage in a little ethnography on ourselves; to think about how, as anthropologists, we talk about and get on with our work. It suggests that what we actually do is engage in highly specific and diverse practices from talking to informants and writing publications to lecturing and marking essays, attending conferences and gossiping. Grand terms like ‘knowledge’ sit uneasily on such practices, which vary even between disciplines.

### **The disciplining of metaphor**

Despite, or perhaps because of, the lucubrations of epistemologists what western or global knowledge is sometimes seems fairly self-evident. Ideally it is potentially all encompassing, systematic and abstract. Because it is abstract, it must be depicted catachretically, that is it must be instantiated through metaphors, which are – awkwardly for a systematic vision – in part mutually contradictory. Three distinct, but overlapping, metaphors often surface in academic writing and casual talk about knowledge, which I designate as territorial, horticultural and capitalist. Two others occupy a more peripheral place: the revolutionary

and the dialogic. The publisher's word limit precludes my giving detailed examples. So I must leave it to readers to exercise their agency in drawing upon examples from their own experience.

My starting point is the representational model, which relies upon a visual metaphor of knowledge as mirroring nature (Rorty 1980). The world-to-be-known is spatially extensive and knowledge of it conceived as a landscape to be explored, conquered, mapped, controlled. As Anne Salmond has noted, spatial and visual metaphors elide in much anthropological usage. So 'understanding is essentially a way of *looking at things*', such that facts appear as objects, given, data (1982: 73). A recent variant is knowledge as flowing (see Appadurai 1990, who also uses the landscape metaphor exhaustively). Process here though is simply how a static model is made to cope with change and indeterminacy. In either case, the greater the superiority of the observer, the more objective and rational the surveilling gaze. By contrast, Maori, on Salmond's account, speak of knowledge as a scarce resource, which should not be squandered.

The play of metaphors is less merely decorative, a simple way of speaking, than constitutive of the argument, and of the world. 'Much of the richness and piquancy of theoretical talk, and many of its new departures seem to arise from the flexibility and ambiguity of such non-literal language' (Salmond 1982: 81). The result may be flexible, but it creates closure. The image is static, timeless, ahistorical. History is just an extra, pseudo-spatial dimension: the time taken to explore the landscape or chronicle phases of development. Consider how Robertson, a major proponent of globalization, defines the problem in a piece entitled 'Mapping the global condition'. The job is systematically to indicate and *explore* 'the major phases of globalization in recent world history' (1990: 15). History is reduced to the compilation of phases: what Collingwood described as the 'scissors-and-paste' method (1946: 33). It involves no critical questioning which requires re-evaluating our thinking about the past, and so changing our understanding. Most accounts of knowledge sideline understanding, which I take to be dialectical (Hobart 1991b) and incompatible with the prevailing models. As a landscape is something to be seen, it does not answer back. In fact no questions are asked of it. Perhaps geologists, say, can get away with this; but its implications for anthropologists, who work with people, are disturbing. Even where anthropologists recognize that the kinds of facts we deal with are fictions - in the sense of

‘something made’ (Geertz 1973c: 15) - it is something which *has been*, not *is being* made.

Questioning and answering are activities, which are the exclusive prerogative of the researcher. Things wait to be discovered. They are passive: the activity belongs to the explorers who discover, map and master them. It is the dream of globalization theory ‘in which the other culture is largely mastered’ (Featherstone 1990b: 9). The model spatializes and objectifies everything in sight, including discourse and meaning into determinable fields, structures, institutions. So ‘the general field of globalization must lay the grounds for...the structure of any viable discourse about the shape and "meaning" of the world-as-a-whole’ (Robertson 1990: 17-18). In anthropology the corollary of this objectification is that people are still often treated as passive subjects. They are to a degree aware of the collective representations and structures, which determine their actions. They depend on anthropologists to frame, comment on and analyze their actions for them. There is little recognition that people engage in critical thinking themselves and so change the conditions of their own existence, which would require a radical revision of the object (*sic*) of anthropological inquiry. People are still *informants*, from whom we extract *information*. That is knowledge in its most static, timeless, commodifiable form.<sup>1</sup>

The visual or territorial metaphor underwrites much of the idealized activities of the natural and social sciences. The landscape need not be outside, for instance societies to be ethnographed. You can explore inside: within the atom, the body or the psyche. There is a progression however, from the landscape, like nature, as female, there to be explored and represented to the masculine activity of intervening, to strip away and expose, under the *controlled* conditions of the laboratory and, prometheanly, to create. As Hacking has noted, there are fewer phenomena in nature than are created by human intervention (1983: 227). When the natives have been suitably (intellectually) pacified, anthropologists turn societies into field laboratories systematically to test hypotheses, as Bateson and Mead did in Bali (1942: xi-xvi, a work

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<sup>1</sup> I am, incidentally, neither advocating a return to subjectivism or ‘intersubjectivity’, the loyal opposition to objectivism, nor to constructivism. It is the anthropologist who all too often defines the terms for other peoples’ subjectivity. And the idea that humans invent, construct or constitute culture veers close to voluntarism. Nor am I proposing the fantasy of an access to true knowledge, unencumbered by metaphors and presuppositions. I am interested in how representations are *used* in practice and their consequences, a quite different concern.

significantly subtitled ‘a photographic analysis’). From this it is an easy transition through the hermeneutic theme park, where we wander at will and admire the differences (Geertz 1973e) to ethnographic museums (Baudrillard 1983a: 13-23) and tourist resorts, where the terminally tranquillized natives enact tableaux of their former selves.

Uses of the territorial metaphor emphasize the object to be known, controlled and exploited rather than the nature of the knowledge involved. Attacking the idea that discovery and experimentation precede inductive generalizations, Popper argued:

on the contrary the theoretician must long before have done his work, or at least the most important part of his work: he must have formulated his questions as sharply as possible. Thus it is he *who shows the experimenter the way* (1934: 107, my emphases).

The shift from an inductive to a deductive view of knowledge parallels a switch of metaphor, neatly encapsulated in *Criticism and the growth of knowledge*, the critique by Popper’s successors of Kuhn’s revolutionary image of knowledge (of which more shortly). Knowledge is represented as a kind of organism, firmly rooted but continually growing.<sup>2</sup> With the landscape now domesticated, knowledge becomes a massive tree which grows to dominate the garden. The image is no longer of a static world of objects, but on the process of emergence of knowledge itself. There is an implicit entelechy in this image: the evolution of the organism is somehow preordained and inexorable. Knowledge, like a growing tree, is powerful. It can, and will, displace whatever stands in its way. It is not just ‘the *domination* of experiment by theory’ (Hacking 1983: 167, my emphasis), but that images of the power of knowledge come to dominate.

This evolution of knowledge is not entirely without human intervention. The philosophers’ job is to manure the tree and prune back adventitious branches, although they are not averse to a little intellectual topiary. They are in the end though glorified gardeners, servants of a force with its own direction and destiny. We must submit to injunctions: ‘don’t talk about things, talk about the way we talk about things’ (Hacking 1983: 167), in order to achieve the ‘semantic ascent’ (Quine 1990: 81) to an arboreal eyrie from which to gaze from a superior,

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<sup>2</sup> Popper’s sometime image was of leaping from one bobbing ice floe to another – a sardonic epitaph on the vision of territorial conquest.

rational viewpoint. Meanwhile mere scholars of the humanities and some social sciences are the botanists, painters and guides to the garden who describe and celebrate the tree's stages of growth and particularities. The shift, in anthropology, is exemplified in the work of writers like Clifford (1988a) and Boon (1990), who have renounced ethnography for meta-commentary on the nature of anthropological knowledge itself as the significant object of study. The wonder of knowledge calls for suitable paeans.

Knowledge on this account derives much of its power from its being systematic. Notions of system, like stages of growth, are central to globalization theory and its precursor, world-systems theory. 'As systems move towards their natural demise they find themselves in "transition" to uncertain futures' (Wallerstein 1990: 38). Such naturalization first conflates knowledge and its objects, then by a reverse colouration of metaphor turns knowledge as an organism into a knowing organism. The stated aim of Wallerstein's World-Systems analysis is 'with the degree to which this system became *conscious of itself* and began to *develop* intellectual and/or ideological frameworks which both justified it, and impelled its forward movement' (1990: 35, my emphases). Scholars emerge less as agents than as the instruments or immanent intelligence of knowledge itself as a transcendental agent endowed, in the more extreme versions, with its own consciousness.

According to the territorial metaphor, the discoverer or master of the world appears to be the proximate agent. However, as with the colonial conquest of the further expanses of the globe, this depends upon an image of knowledge, which gerundively posits the world as investigable, and so to be explored, and singles out the appropriate willing subjects of such discovery. Professionalizing knowledge distances the knowers from their agency. The texts in which this knowledge is inscribed 'are authorless, so that their truths seem bigger than the authors, transcendent and revelatory. In this way, it is not only agency which is diminished, but also causality, and hence responsibility' (Vitebsky 1993b: 109). As the tree of knowledge effloresces triumphantly and globalizes, it metamorphoses tropically into a banyan, overshadowing everything else.

Once knowledge has expanded so vastly, it becomes increasingly hard to describe as a unitary system or to decide who controls and owns it. As knowledge becomes progressively alienated from its erstwhile producers, it undergoes a further metaphorical transformation into symbolic and financial capital, a capital which itself has the capacity to

transform. Capitalism itself often comes to be treated as a transcendental organism and the market as its mind. Organicity moves from knowledge to the object of that knowledge. This leaves the question of whether capitalism is still in its spotty adolescence, strapping adulthood or in its dotage? In any event, growth becomes transformation and division. ‘What is occurring now is, in all likelihood bigger, deeper, and more important than the industrial revolution...the present moment represents nothing less than the second great divide in human history’ (Toffler 1975: 21). Toffler’s future was a world ‘where science and technology were utterly synonymous with knowledge and knowledge was completely conflated with the structure of the new Information Society’ (Archer 1990: 107). However, in late capitalism, as the emphasis has shifted from production to consumption (Baudrillard 1975) so knowledge has become a commodity, which may be bought and sold democratically. Its most packageable form is as information, which in much globalization theory forms the vital commodity, generated by the new information technologies. This commoditized knowledge-as-information heralds apocalyptically the advent of a homogenized global culture at precisely the point that culture itself has been commoditized (as experience) and trivialized for mass consumption as tourism.<sup>3</sup>

In late, disorganized capitalism, so much information is generated that it is not possible to speak of particular groups of individuals as ‘owning’ knowledge any more. As knowledges proliferate and, like trans-national companies, diversify, they need to be managed and marketed. (Significantly, in struggling to find a suitable term to talk about knowledge for the title of the original conference section, *Counterwork: managing diverse knowledges*, my colleague Richard Fardon found himself forced for lack of alternatives into using this image.) Unreflective governments have even taken the metaphor literally. For instance, British universities have been told, in the words of successive prime ministers and secretaries of state for education, that they ‘must enter the marketplace’. In the business of marketing a knowledge which nobody owns any more, it should come as no surprise that universities, including my own, have started to dispense with academics as vice-chancellors in favour of businessmen and bankers,

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<sup>3</sup> The trumpeted convergence of previous differences as part of global compression (Robertson 1992: 8) is hardly original. Similar arguments were touted in the 1960s with the thesis of industrial convergence, but hardly achieved their millenarian expectations.

who exhort us to think of students as consumers, to maximize turnover and increase efficiency and productivity.

Where does that leave the people we fondly thought of as in charge of knowledge? The academic as discoverer or producer, like the tree and its surgeon, are endangered species. If professionalizing knowledge distanced its creators from their agency, deprofessionalizing them ushers in the era of Weber's intellectual proletariat. As the market takes over the function of deciding what it is important to know about, academics become its instruments. And, as images of knowledge have changed, so have the ideas and practices of self-discipline which qualified knowers to become expert in their academic 'discipline'. What, in the territorial metaphor, was once the discipline required of the (typically male) explorer in order to survive the harsh conditions of the wild (honed in England by the privations of public school) became in its later forms the discipline of the controlled, white-coated figure in the laboratory. According to the horticultural metaphor, the world of knowledge reveals itself to the disciplined mind of the scholar, who is no longer the lichen-festooned ethnographer, but the commentator, teacher and professor: the disciplinarians at once of the subject and its disciples. What happens as the capitalist image of knowledge transforms? I suggest that discipline changes from the determination and frugality of the entrepreneur or the skill and industry of the craftsman to surveilling and disciplining the new proletariat through endless reviews of productivity, excellence and customer satisfaction. There is less need for self-discipline: the increasingly impersonal subject must respond to the dictates of the market.

As the supermarket emerges as the exemplary form of late capitalism, the superstore manager becomes the instrument of the new knowledge. As universities ape supermarkets, degrees increasingly resemble shopping expeditions among the competing delights of conveniently modularized, enticingly advertised courses. Teaching is consequently being transformed. For instance, my job over the last two years has changed to become largely about planning courses and organizing packaged course materials (including recording lectures for clients' convenience), managing teaching assistants (who, like checkout assistants, actually deal with the customers), handling complaints and, of course, filling in forms and submitting to surveys.<sup>4</sup> The role of

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<sup>4</sup> As electronic technology develops, presumably the Open University will soon have close to a U.K. monopoly as producer of courses based on videos, computerized

academics as critical thinkers becomes not just irrelevant, but actually subversive of efficient marketing and management. (It is helpful to distinguish management from administration. I take administration to be the kinds of activity, for instance, in which colonial rulers engaged in a past imperial form of government.) The post-structuralist cliché of ‘the death of the author’ may be not just a conceit of the textualization of the world, but the product of the new imperatives. Maybe I have grown disabused, but my impression is that academia is rapidly replicating commerce, as output geared to instant ideas or easily assimilable thought-bytes, with short shelf-lives and sell-by dates, supersedes the less marketable critical scholarship. How much work published in the last decade (including this chapter) has actually contributed anything to human understanding, or will be worth reading in a few years? If knowledge is market-driven, will the books that sell in supermarkets and airport kiosks become the sources of knowledge?

How convincing this sketch is I leave to the reader to judge. I am not arguing that there is anything inherent in such metaphors that determine human thinking, nor that people in any particular situation are necessarily constrained by such images. The test of the relevance of my argument is if it helps to explain practices to do with knowing and if it makes sense of the consequences. Sometimes, indeed, the metaphors appear to be adopted quite literally. For instance, the idea that the kind of knowledge needed to run a supermarket is directly applicable far more broadly is instantiated in Mrs Thatcher’s decision to delegate key aspects of government policy-making to the executive heads of two foodstore chains. Selling baked beans qualifies you to decide how to determine the fate of patients in mental hospitals. If it were not so terrifying, it would be funny.

### **Towards a revolutionary dialogue?**

There are two other metaphors of knowledge, which fit less easily in the progression outlined above. The first is Kuhn’s explicit image of knowledge as a revolution (1962) and Feyerabend’s endorsement of nihilism, or Dadaism, as its method (1975), which are too well known to

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coursework and examination in a market dominated by the United States and no doubt in due course the Far East. I would like to thank Margaret Wiener and Ron Inden for their comments on the draft of this chapter and Ron Inden for first suggesting the supermarket as the paradigm of late capitalism.

need belabouring. The revolutionary metaphor, perhaps inevitably in the social sciences - which are far more hidebound than its practitioners care to admit - becomes watered down and sanitized ('argument is war', Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 4-5). In anthropology there is supposed to have been an equivalent revolution, from the armchair disciplinarians of collated facts (now in vogue again) to participant-observation, a visual image which overlooks how much fieldwork depends upon talking and questioning. Were we to take the image of revolution seriously, it would imply that, far from being heirs to a glorious tradition, most existing knowledge is obsolete, if not downright dangerous. If knowledge is not something you accumulate, a great deal of what has been written about, say, Bali is not so much dated as useless or at best seriously misleading.<sup>5</sup> Such an insight threatens to put too many people out of business. So revolutionary fervour, which may burst out in the sporadic warfare of seminars or articles, but rarely conferences, is headed off into the set-piece battles fought out in journals and monographs, and is dissipated by the morass of committees which decide who gets to be hired, research grants, tenure and promotion.

The obverse face of the revolutionary image is knowledge as dialogue.<sup>6</sup> There is an important difference though. The previous metaphors are all great intellectual undertakings 'in the key of death' (to gloss Lévi-Strauss's phrase *en clé de mort*, 1966: 194). To view knowledge as a landscape requires objectifying it first: turning people into specimens to be pinned to boards. Organisms die: and their growth requires others to. Commoditizing critical thinking as anodyne information leaves it murred and moribund. Revolutions are rarely bloodless. Dialogue, by contrast, is 'in the key of life' (*en clé de vie*): it

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<sup>5</sup> Except, that is, for retrospective intellectual histories. It is interesting to see how authors cope with the rival demands of constructing genealogies to authorize their work and denying their antecedents. Much innocent fun is to be had watching, for instance, how Malinowski lecturers search around for some acceptable link between their argument and the thoughts of the master.

<sup>6</sup> As Collingwood noted, the difference between these last two metaphors depends whether one is prepared to recognize the need for divergence in argument. 'In a dialectical system it is essential that the representatives of each opposing view should understand why the other view must be represented. If one fails to understand this...[one's interlocutor] becomes...a combatant in an eristical process instead of a partner in a dialectical process' (1942: 211). The relationship of dialogue and dialectic is complex. Bakhtin argued against a Hegelianism which would monopolize dialogue by locating it in a 'unique abstract consciousness' (Pechey 1990: 24). Instead he suggested 'dialectics was born of dialogue so as to return again to dialogue on a higher level' (1986a: 162).

points to a future, however uncertain. It presupposes someone else with a mind of their own who is likely not to agree with you. Dialogue as an image also has the virtue of specifying some of the different kinds of practice in which we actually engage, like teaching classes, discussing in seminars, talking with colleagues and people during fieldwork. It treats knowing as a diverse set of situated practices. Kuhn's latter formulation of his paradigm (1977) as an exemplary way of solving problems suggests knowledge is less an abstract mental entity than culturally and historically changing kinds of activity. The revolutionary and dialogic metaphors suggest in different ways that there is a case for considering knowledge as different kinds of practice which are more contested, confused and fragmented than is implied in the more authoritarian claims of knowledge to be an abstract conceptual system.

### **Knowing as a practice or event?**

What does it involve to talk of knowledge as a practice?<sup>7</sup> Negatively, it requires us to pause before assuming knowledge to be a reified, ahistorical abstract entity, a tendency in anthropology that includes depicting local, or indigenous, knowledges as inherently systematic (Brokensha et al. 1980). Although doing so may encourage us to take local knowledges seriously, it is to invite in a Trojan Horse, because the effect is to impose alien categories and to ignore the case for taking knowledges as historically situated practices. Not just local knowledges, but also expert knowledge, may be more about 'knowing how' than 'knowing that'. Even academic writing is in no small part a craft. Local knowledge often exists as rival versions, which are not separable from the social conditions of their being known (Cohen 1993). It does not follow that such kinds of knowledge are irrational. They are subject to testing and modification, and involve theory and presuppositions (van der Ploeg 1993). Knowing, in this sense, requires evaluation by some measure like appropriateness to particular circumstances or adequacy, rather than by its being true as such. Talk of truth is often meaningless, when what one is dealing with may be more like a performance (as in agriculture, Richards 1993), or is so local that it could not be authentically codified as knowledge (Burghart 1993). To encrypt such a

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<sup>7</sup> As the contributors to Hobart 1993a have written at length about the relationship of local and global knowledge, and tried to show ethnographically the case for treating knowledge as practice, I shall not repeat the arguments here. I merely note a few points as I assume them in what follows.

pullulation of practices in the coffin of knowledge barely leaves a skeleton.

To turn at last to Bali, the island has been the refractory object of western knowledge for centuries (Hobart 1990a). Indeed it already had a place in western knowledge before it was discovered according to Boon (1977: 10-34), because somewhere on earth paradise was thought still to exist. The problem was just to find it. Balinese and Europeans have a long history of mutual gazing and misunderstanding (Wiener 1995a). Dutch colonization, the Japanese invasion, Independence, the massacres which followed the abortive coup of 1965, development and finally mass tourism are among the indices of Balinese encounters with the modern world. The relationship is not all one-way. Leaving aside the impact of Balinese music on western music, more prosaically the silver for *Les Musts de Cartier* is now worked in Bali, just as in the eighteenth century were rifle barrels (Vickers 1989: 18), because Balinese have turned out to be more skilled at working metals than Europeans in the respective periods. The book on how Balinese used Europeans (such as Walter Spies) to further their dealings with outsiders still remains to be written.

Such accounts however tell us little about Balinese practices of knowing, teaching, learning, questioning, criticizing and so on. Treating knowledge as a social practice also links rather nicely with Balinese discursive usage. Balinese whom I know commonly explained what we often call states of the world and mind in terms of action, *laksana*, or as work, *karya*.<sup>8</sup> The roots for ‘know’ in daily usage, *tawang* or *uning*, apply to both knowing and being conscious or aware. Interestingly, the words are rarely used in noun forms. I am not proposing that Balinese usage has no recourse to metaphor. Balinese themselves on occasion relate *uning* to *ening* ‘clean (of water), transparent’ and *nerangang* ‘to explain’ to *terang* ‘clear, bright’. Nor am I advancing the crude Whorfian argument that Balinese cannot conceive of knowledge as an abstraction: they have available a range of Old Javanese (ultimately

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<sup>8</sup> Significantly *laksana* in Old Javanese is glossed as both ‘action, doing, taking action, proceeding, operating, performing, practice’ and ‘mark, sign; that by which something is distinguished from other things...way of being or appearing...having the particular form of’ (Zoetmulder 1982: 958). The connection, as Balinese put it, is that signifying is an action, as is one’s way of being. Incidentally, I take signifying, like other practices, to be public acts, the agents of which need not be individual humans, but may be complex such as groups, public meetings etc. (Collingwood 1942; Hobart 1990a).

Sanskrit) words. The term most widely used, *pramana*, suggests however "ways" of knowing' (Matilal 1986: 97), the 'means of acquiring right knowledge' (Zoetmulder 1982: 1392). And the Old Javanese (and Sanskrit) term for knowing or knowledge, *jnana* in Balinese become *pradnyan*, 'clever, knowledgeable', which like the other word often employed, *kawikanan*, implies a demonstrated ability to be able to do something. To start off an analysis by ignoring Balinese usage is peremptory and unwarranted.

Balinese stress on knowing rather than knowledge has parallels in Indian Nyaya accounts of perception and knowledge. Knowing is a process which

is set in motion by doubt and ends in a decision... The end-product takes the form of a mental episode called *prama*, 'knowledge' (a knowledge-episode). It is such a cognitive episode (*jnana*) as hits the mark! (Matilal 1986: 100)

Indeed Matilal's example is the same as the one Balinese used to me: seeing something in unclear light. (In passing, Balinese words for what we call 'meaning' imply hitting a target or reaching an objective.) By contrast to much western philosophical thinking, which emphasizes knowledge as 'a more stable, intersubjectively communicable item' or disposition (1986: 101), Nyaya philosophers and Balinese stressed believing and knowing as momentary episodes, which are recalled in subsequent acts of remembering.<sup>9</sup> As Matilal put it: 'Indian philosophers viewed a world or constructed a world of a series of cognitive events rather than collected a mass of true propositions' (1986: 105-6). Is knowing an act or an event though? Matilal compared Nyaya accounts with Geach's theory of mental acts (1957) and opted for knowing as a mental episode rather than a mental act on the grounds that acting 'in ordinary language is ambiguous', as it applies 'primarily to physical movement and observable physiological behaviour' (1986: 112). At this point, I prefer to suspend judgement as to how far his argument applies to Balinese. As they speak cheerfully of thinking, knowing and remembering as *laksana*, there is little point in doing unnecessary violence to their practices by over-interpreting them.

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<sup>9</sup> On the significance of remembering and its implications for representations of agency in Bali, see Hobart 1990b: 327-30.

## Healing or doctoring patients?

Among the ways of knowing, *pramana*, to which Balinese give serious attention is the speech (*sabda*) of the dead, who do not lie. Unfortunately the mediums (commonly *tapakan*, literally ‘those who are impressed upon’) on whom they must rely are all too capable, in their view, of dissimulation. As doctors and health clinics purveying western medical knowledge have proliferated, become more affordable and less likely to kill patients than before, Balinese healers have had to take account of them. One response has been the rise of highly sophisticated local practitioners, to whom people travel from all over the island. Although most Balinese have now made use of western medicine at some point, the local healers have an epistemological edge over their rivals. Like many of their British counterparts, Indonesian doctors do not explain what they are doing or why. They treat the patient as passive and ignorant. By contrast, the local healers with whom I worked involved their clients as co-agents in inquiry into the causes of their condition.<sup>10</sup> Healing is a public exercise in knowing, of moving from doubt to deciding whether what was said hits the truth.

Let us consider brief extracts from one case treated by a celebrated healer, who was so popular that clients came to obtain numbered tickets, sometimes days in advance. Her sessions took place before a large audience, anywhere from thirty to seventy-five waiting patients and their families. During the boring parts those waiting watched television. When the healer was in *séance*, they listened and commented, sometimes in horror or sympathy, more often much with amusement at the sorts of mess peoples’ lives got into. The session, like others, began and ended with the question of responsibility, and so agency, being discussed explicitly. (In the translation that follows, the clarificatory parentheses are mine. Italicized English words have been translated

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<sup>10</sup> As everyone is aware that the ill are easily persuadable, one always takes along an independent person, whose job is to use their critical judgement. To a determined materialist, all this might seem peripheral to the central question of whether the treatment works. According to an old friend and ethno-medical specialist, Ivan Polunin, Balinese pharmaceutical expertise is remarkable broad ranging. In a chemical idiom, you may pay many times more for a remedy in the form of pills from a clinic than for much the same as plant extracts from a healer. Knowledge once again is underdetermined, in the sense that different explanatory practices may achieve similar results. For Balinese specialists, the healer referred to below was a *balian tapakan* from Banjar Lintang Hidung, Sukawati, in Gianyar.

from the Indonesian; the remainder of the text is translated from Balinese.)

*Healer:* Now whether you will get advice or not is not yet sure. Whether you will be successful or not, we share (responsibility for what happens) together. Is that acceptable?

*Clients:* Yes.

The session concluded:

*Healer:* The *risk* (responsibility for deciding the validity of what was said) belongs to you, the petitioner. If you think it appropriate, write down what follows.

*Clients:* It is.

In several of her cases, the healer explicitly questioned the efficacy of Indonesian doctors. She began the séance by indicating that an unnamed forebear wished to speak. (Later to their suitable astonishment she named, apparently correctly, the clients' father who wanted to speak to his children.) The forebear described the (absent) patient's symptoms in detail: she was confused, she failed to hear what was said, her heart pounded, her joints were numb and she felt pain in her bone marrow. Worst of all she, and the other people in the compound, had terrible dreams every night. The healer continued:

*Healer:* What is more the ill person is unaware of being confused. It is no use referring this to a doctor, the doctor will be at a loss to work out what is the problem (i.e. the doctor will be as confused as she is). The reason is that there are no clear *symptoms*.... When she is out in public, she is quite capable of sorting out East from West (to be muddled over directions in Bali is the acid test of deep confusion); but as soon as she *enters* the compound, she is worse than a chicken under a clay water pot. If you say she is mad, do not think this is sent from God, if so she would be mad both in the streets and at home. She is not mad, but ill. However, this is not an ordinary illness; it is different; it is called 'not well, not ill'.<sup>11</sup> So, those are the *nature* of the signs (of something unusual) in your compound now. Have you understood?

*Clients:* Yes.

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<sup>11</sup> This is a way of talking about 'illness of the thoughts' which is considered quite different from insanity, which may now be referred to psychiatrists.

She then went on to explain, apparently speaking as a dead family member, that it was the collected forebears who had sent the illness as a warning that a dangerous device (*pakakas*) had been placed by ill-wishers within the compound.

*Healer:* If I can illustrate, it is like a *guided missile* (which has almost reached its destination) because it is about to explode (literally ‘it is on your *doorstep*’). In order that it doesn’t *reach the point* of your being *blown up*, I, together with the purified dead and the recently cremated dead, have let loose my servants (*bebutan*, Balinese invisible followers) to visit you with disturbances which would make you quickly seek clarification. This was in order that you would not be just *convinced* by a doctor. If you had been *convinced* by a doctor (‘s diagnosis), you would now be dead. Now what is the use of dead followers to Me? This is why I sent bad dreams, even to the smallest toddlers. Have you understood?

*Clients:* We have.

Balinese had been greatly taken with television footage of missiles pursuing aircraft around the sky during the Falklands war. And the healer made use of such ‘modern’ images in her diagnoses. (On another occasion she likened the form of attack on a victim to a radio-controlled device.) She also showed that she was familiar with Indonesian and the basics of clinical terminology, which she encompassed as part of Balinese healing practice. (In Balinese terms, it was the deity who knew about all this. In Bali the dead too can learn.) Here the healer set up a confrontation, which pointed to the limits of western medical knowledge. Where there are no clear symptoms or they fail to fall into pre-set categories, western medicine cannot cope. Its symptomatology is fixed, inflexible and unsituated, a dead monologic code. Doctors could not recognize an unusual sign, because they are bound by the straightjacket of received textbook knowledge. By a juxtaposition (known in Balinese as *masisimbing*)<sup>12</sup> she elegantly linked the patient’s confusion with the doctor’s inability to make sense of the symptoms. The picture she drew was of mortal danger impending, as real as a missile just metres from its target, while the doctor ran around in circles

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<sup>12</sup> *Masisimbing* is ostensibly to refer to one subject, but the real target is another, which is either indicated in the utterance or made clear by the circumstances under which the utterance is made. The significance of her juxtaposing the patient, doctor and chicken was lost neither on the onlookers nor on villagers to whom I played the recording later.

clucking furiously, blind to what was going on. Granted the calm, self-important gravitas and superiority to which most Indonesian doctors pretend, especially when dealing with villagers, the alternative image is delightfully ridiculous.

This was only the start. The deity explained that it had to send illness, including dreams, of a kind which doctors could not explain. It was crucial that the clients would be unsatisfied with any western medical diagnosis and would have to inquire further. Otherwise the planted device would have killed them. The deity's whole strategy depended on the limitations of western medical knowledge. Significantly, the healer made the logical crux of the argument hinge upon the doctor not succeeding in *convincing* the patient. Here she contrasted the authoritative, monologic voice of the putative doctor, which aimed at convincing an intimidated patient, with her own – or the forebear's – combination of sinuous logic, practical reason (a deity needs followers and so has a quite different concern for the patient from a doctor who is ultimately only interested in money) and dialogue. Action and signs were closely linked in the healer's speech. The dead had taken the action of sending a sign in the form of an action (making the victims have nightmares), which the victims had to think about to realize it was a sign requiring action. As they did not know the significance of the sign, the action was to seek advice. On this account, hermeneutics is not a limp-wristed preoccupation with textual meaning (it is the doctor who is tied to a closed system of signification determined by textual authority), but a sensitive ability to consider actual events critically and devise an appropriate response to them.

### **Alternative positions**

My second example is from a play performed in the research village in March 1989 by members of the Indonesian State Radio Company, before an audience of over a thousand people. The plot does not concern us here. I take two short extracts. The characters on stage were an Old Retainer, *Panasar*,<sup>13</sup> a Young Retainer who was his younger brother *Wijil* and the low caste wife of the Prince of Nusa Penida, an

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<sup>13</sup> The root is 'base, foundation'. 'Anchorman' is the nearest English equivalent which comes to mind. The piece was in Prèmbon style. That is it resembles, Arja, 'opera, or rather musical comedy' (de Zoete and Spies 1938: 196), except that the actors playing retainers wore masks.

island off Bali. This last role, the *Liku* (played here incidentally by a man) is the stock part of a slightly mad and spoiled princess, who breaks polite conventions by saying what is normally left unsaid in public. Only the outlines of the plot were fixed, the rest was extemporized in the light of how the spectators reacted.

The first extract is from the opening scene, in which the Old Retainer entered alone and addressed the audience. (As in the previous example, the clarificatory parentheses are mine. The original was in Balinese, and translation from Indonesian is in italics. Performers drew on two other languages: *kawi*, represented in bold, and English in bold italics.)

*Old Retainer:* ...**All of us** living on this island cherish our *artistic and cultural life*... How do we ensure it flourishes? What's the way to bring it about? (For a start) it's kind of you to put on this play. Also, Ladies and Gentlemen, it's good of you to come and watch, **because** if we aren't going to appreciate and look after our *arts*, who else are we to tell to do so? That's the reason that *guests* now come, that *tourists* come **from all over the world**. What are they really looking for? Is it not **solely because of** your *arts*, your *skill* (at crafts), your wisdom and expertise at making **all sorts of art objects**? That's the reason then that *tourists* come. What's this? Two of them have turned up. '**Welcome, good afternoon, thank you. I hope you glad see here.**' I know a couple of words to string together to start up a conversation. Well, now people *from overseas* enjoy watching, but we've all grown *indifferent*. Don't let it be like that. If things are as they are here, I feel happy and proud to address you. Isn't that so? I hope that we may succeed in looking after (what we have) **for ever**, so we can even improve on it...

As a highly skilled professional, the man playing the Old Retainer ranged across four languages even in this brief extract. The effect was to show the capacity of Balinese in theatre to encompass not only the past (in the use of Old Javanese), but the immediate present (Indonesian and English).<sup>14</sup> He started by referring to Balinese artistic and cultural life, for which he used a recently invented Indonesian expression (*seni budaya*). This framing of practices as 'culture' is part of the Indonesian state's drive to re-present ethnic differences, in Bali's case with the tourist market in mind (see also Chapter 7). What people in a particular

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<sup>14</sup> The non-Balinese words were known to many adults in the audience, except for the English, which was known to only a few.

part of Bali previously just did is coming increasingly to be constituted self-consciously as ‘culture’. The problem, as Balinese often complained, was that the opportunities for making wealth by working in the local tourist and handicraft economies have made people less willing to take time off to keep this new-found culture going. The retainer praised the audience for turning up to watch and noted that what brought tourists to Bali is their *knowing how* to do all sorts of things. (The sentence neatly combined the verb form of being expert, *wikan*, with the new Indonesian vocabulary of ‘skill’ at making ‘art objects’.) Conveniently we were on hand in the audience to point to as an example and for the actor to suggest how important speaking English had now become in Bali. The very indifference Balinese had towards their own cultural heritage was implicitly linked to the new Indonesian order by his use of an Indonesian word, instead of several available vernacular ones. Ironically, his hope that Balinese would continue their past practices had already constituted culture in a moribund museological mode.<sup>15</sup>

Immediately before the following extract, the princess had been expatiating upon why the prince married her although she was ugly, and pronounced on what a woman must do these days to become a good wife. She continued:

*Princess:* If I *did not fulfil the specifications*, no one would have wanted to take me. I wouldn’t have looked for a man. Do you know what *the first requirement is?*

*Young Retainer:* Indeed.

*Princess:* *Submit a letter of request!*<sup>16</sup>

*Young Retainer:* Huh!

*Princess:* *Second: be prepared to submit to a trial period of three months.*<sup>17</sup>

*Old Retainer:* It’s very severe to apply for a job with the condition that one must *submit to a trial period of three months*.

*Princess:* *Be prepared to take up any possible position.*<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Apart from this last sentence which is my own commentary, it was clear from a long conversation with the actor that the other nuances were intended.

<sup>16</sup> This was a sideswipe first at the formal protocols, which are so striking a feature of Indonesian bureaucracy. It also suggested writing a love letter.

<sup>17</sup> It has become practice in some organizations to engage staff on a trial basis in the first instance. The statement also referred to the increasingly common practice, especially in towns of a couple sleeping together fairly openly before marriage.

*Old Retainer:* Carry on.  
*Princess:* Do you know (the significance of) *be prepared to take up any possible position?* Did you think it was *in the whole of the archipelago?*  
*Old Retainer:* Doesn't it indicate *in the whole of the archipelago?*  
*Princess:* No.  
*Old Retainer:* What then?  
*Princess:* *Be prepared to take up any possible position.*' It means: '*on the right, on the left, on top or underneath.*'  
*Old Retainer:* Oh dear! I thought it was to agree to go wherever one was posted.

Here the princess made fun of Indonesian bureaucratic protocols by applying them to the sexual attraction between couples. Instead of young people meeting in the many venues available to them, they should submit a formal letter of request. Starting from there she developed an implicit sexual theme to the hilarity of the audience by a play on the Indonesian word 'position' (*tempat*). Finally she subverted the ostensible theme completely by detailing sexual postures. As several spectators pointed out, it was all the more amusing because it was a man who was pretending complicity with the female members of the audience. Like the healer, the actor juxtaposed two themes and left it to the audience to infer how they linked. At various points in the play, the performers made it clear that how the spectators chose to understand what was said was up to them.

The commentators with whom I discussed the play in detail said that most young people probably just enjoyed the double reference. However those who reflected more on what was said could interpret it as ridiculing the pompous, rigid procedures of the Indonesian bureaucracy. There was a third reading, which a commentator made (interestingly, a middle-aged man), namely a play between the desire for self-advancement through obtaining a government post and the ordeals this might entail, with sexual desire and the ordeals women have to go through to please men. It has become something of a cliché to describe theatre in Bali as didactic. To do so would be to miss much of the point as members in the audience I spoke to took it. Behind all this was an implicit, but sustained, mockery of the institutions of the Indonesian

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<sup>18</sup> There were two senses. 1) Be prepared to go on a posting anywhere within Indonesia. This is a common requirement of official postings. 2) Be prepared to have to adopt unusual sexual positions.

state by the repeated introduction of obscene themes which the actors wove together with quite different themes throughout the play. The humour moved easily between simple poking fun and obscenity to social criticism and to opening up alternative, sometimes deeply unsettling, possibilities. It suggested that there might be radically different understandings, not only about the conventions of behaviour being lampooned, but of the nature of the genres of representation themselves.

### **Knowing and laughing**

Knowledge among western academics is generally a very grave business indeed to judge from the conferences of various anthropological associations I have attended over the years. The ponderous joke while delivering a paper, the occasional moment of levity during discussion just highlight how serious and important the occasion is. When visiting Balinese High Priests, textual specialists, healers and other experts, I have often been struck how often their conversation was interspersed with laughter, as were the healer's séances. When I tried to break the bad intellectual habits of a lifetime, I realized how important laughing was and a motley of occasions came to mind when laughing and knowing seemed linked in some way.<sup>19</sup> No one is above being laughed at under some circumstances. This is a theme familiar to Balinese specialists. In shadow theatre, the humble, fat servants routinely debunk one another, chaff their lordly masters, scoff at terrifying demons, make fun of the gods themselves and of members of the audience.<sup>20</sup> The people with whom I have worked in Bali stressed repeatedly to me that in theatre, as with other activities, you cannot learn or teach unless it is mixed with laughter.

One way to explain the healer's mockery of modern medicine or the fun poked at Indonesian institutions might be that it is a response to the

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<sup>19</sup> My debt to Bakhtin in both his studies of Rabelais (1984) and of dialogue (1986b) should be obvious.

<sup>20</sup> Vickers (1984) and Worsley (1984) have noted the contrast drawn in traditional Balinese paintings between the energy, noise and – I would add – the laughter of the common people at work by contrast with the relatively cool, restraint of the aristocracy, who hold themselves aloof. Knowledge seems to be set apart here as self-mastery. I have discussed the conjunction of laughing and knowing (and death) with several specialists on Balinese and Javanese. Each of them agreed they were somehow connected, and some gave examples, but none of us knew how to link it to our 'knowledge' of the societies in question.

fear of something beyond the capacity of Balinese to understand, let alone control. As the Old Retainer indicated, there is grave concern among an increasing number of Balinese over the effects of tourism and economic development. To reduce laughing to a mechanism for dealing with tensions and their psychic release (the tensions may even be inferred retrospectively from the catharsis itself) involves unnecessary over-interpretation. Appeal to the writings of Freud may not help, because too often they are invoked to underwrite a universalistic, closed and authoritarian theory of the human mind. The emphasis is on control, by which mind is made to mirror certain features of knowledge, of which mind itself is one object. The problem with such explanations, as with so much knowledge, is that they do not tell us very much. It does not tell us what Balinese do in fact laugh at, and what are the implications and consequences. A striking feature of genealogies of organized knowledge such as anthropology is quite how much they exclude rather than include. Human agents are reconstituted as ciphers of a narrow and exclusive anthropological imagination, such that not only are they alienated from their own actions, but the agents become largely unrecognizable, even to themselves on the few occasions they obtain access to ethnographic descriptions of themselves. The fact that laughter, fear, indeed so much of what people actually do and say, are so successfully eliminated or trivialized in most anthropological writings is a pretty damning indictment of our pretensions to knowledge.

The excerpts suggest that, unlike the use of the serial metaphors for knowledge outlined earlier, Balinese do not separate the knower from what is known, nor from the other participants. In theatre, the spectators are notably not passive, but are openly invited to reflect critically on what is being discussed. This hardly squares with the familiar stereotype of passive Asians by contrast with active Westerners. Knowledge is still rarely commoditized and is not objectified in any simple sense. This is not to suggest that there are not specialized writings, which might appear to have objective authority or efficacy. However in my experience such as it is, Balinese paid less attention to the text as a source of objective knowledge than to the qualification of the person, and the study required, to master the practices necessary to realize the text's potential. Attaining such expertise affects your whole being: you do not just acquire texts and so knowledge. And part of knowing is knowing that such texts must always be used in a manner appropriate to *désa kala patra*, the particular place, occasion and circumstance.

Instead of prejudging what knowledge is, I prefer to start with situated practices: what people did and what people said about it. Ernesto Laclau has argued (1990a) that social scientists have been preoccupied with the claims of structure for too long and have signally failed to take seriously the degree to which what happens is historical and contingent. Anthropologists' difficulties over unintended consequences are an obvious example. If we start to look at actual practices, then such unexpected themes as laughing and dying, for instance, seem to be linked in Bali to knowing in complicated ways. For instance, in the village where I work, there is a well-known story of a poor and illiterate man at a wake, who was teased by being asked to read a palm-leaf manuscript in Old Javanese. He fled in tears. On the way home he was summoned by giant figures who appeared, inscribed something on his tongue and told him to go back to the wake. On being taunted once again at his illiteracy, he astounded everyone by knowing how to read (and so to understand) the text. On Balinese telling, the story involves Balinese ideas of pleasure (*suka*) and suffering (*duka*). It also presupposes that, when matters reach an extreme (for instance, being mocked to the point of despair), they transform (*matemahan*) into their opposite. To reduce this story to being about compensation or some such would be paltry. Asserting the superiority of western, or global, knowledge requires ignoring much of what people actually do and say, declaring them ignorant and incapable of commenting on their own actions. This seems rather silly, not to say narrow-minded, when the presuppositions people work with affect what they do and how they understand one another's actions.

One theme, I hope, is clear from the examples. Knowing is not the exclusive prerogative of some superior knowing subject. Both the healer and the actors assumed that the audience also knew what they knew. What was at stake rather was the significance of what everyone already knew and the importance of thinking critically about its implications. Knowing commonly takes place as part of a dialogue, which is how Balinese mostly study and read texts. (Actors deeply dislike appearing on television, because there is no audience and are reduced to working off one another.) What has all this to do with laughter? Laughter is equally dialogic: you laugh with, or at, someone in company. Laughing to yourself is a sign of madness, not only in Bali. Knowing is directed at a target as, in a different way, is laughter. They are both about doing something in and to the world. If we insist on being dazzled by the apparition of global knowledge, we shall miss noticing practices which might tell us something, if only, like the

doctors of the healer's image, we could stop running around under clay jars while unbeknown to us trouble looms. Above all, imagining or stating you have knowledge all too easily justifies not inquiring too carefully or critically, lest it upset the illusion. The greater the claim to global dominion, the more such knowledge is likely to ignore what people are actually doing somewhere in the world.

Academic practices to do with knowledge are often *en clé de mort*: grave rehearsals of the traces of our presence. Dialogue with the people with whom we work offers no panacea. At most it is a warning against vacuity. The brief examples may have hinted at the complexities of Balinese commentaries on their own rapidly changing lives. One woman leaving the theatre performance remarked

*Pragina kaliwat duweg, tiang atenga mati kedèk.*  
The actors were so clever, I half died laughing.

To claim I knew what she meant would be laughable.