

Chapter 2

Thinker, thespian, soldier, slave? assumptions about human nature in the study of Balinese society.

Tis evident, that all the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature; and that however wide any of them may seem to run from it, they still return back by one passage or another...since they lie under the cognizance of men, and are judged by their powers and faculties.
Hume, *A treatise on human nature*. xv.

Monsignor Quixote, according to Graham Greene, believed his car, Rocinante, to run on prayer, care and attention. Academics are, sadly, seldom as fussy about what keeps their idiosyncratic models going. Stopping every few miles to see if, and why, the engine is working is a silly way to drive. To have little clue as to what keeps one chugging along may be still less wise. It may be all right for legendary little old ladies, but it is worrying when scholars relax at the wheel, so to speak, with blind faith in the inexhaustible capacities of the academic machine and ignore what goes on under their intellectual bonnets. The immediate issue is the problem of 'meaning' in other cultures, and in Bali in particular; and the spanners in the works are the importance of context in interpreting speech and action, and the presupposition of some universal theory of human nature. What the connection is between context and theories of human nature forms the subject of this chapter.

The background

If meaning is partly contextual, how can the nigh infinite range of possible contexts delimit a coherent object of study? Answers take the form of cutting down the field of possibilities by selecting criteria of relevance. One way is to focus on what is implied or presupposed in utterances (e.g. Sperber and Wilson 1982), although this has yet to be done successfully. Another is to filter possible contexts by appeal to human interests. People are seen as trying to maximize some goal, to strive for some ultimate end, or *telos*. Apart from models of Man as economic or

rational (Heath 1976; Hollis 1977), two of the most popular are humans as seeking to gain power (Leach 1954), or to render the world meaningful (Geertz 1966). So it is common to talk of ‘utility’ being ‘maximized’, social ties or interpretations being ‘negotiated’, or ‘meaning constructed’. In order to cut context down to size, a theory of human nature, or human interests, and the ends of human agency, are invoked. The confusion over context is intimately linked with confusions of which model of human nature to appeal to. Sadly such judgements are almost always the observer’s. The four images alluded to in the title, for instance, are four of the more popular construals of who the Balinese are. Western commentators’ and Balinese models not only differ, but even what explanation is about may be incommensurable. In seeking to ‘explain’ the Balinese, Western scholars have actually sentenced them to silence and incomprehensibility.

Contextualization in Bali

A difficulty underlying much of the interpretation of Balinese culture turns on the assumption that language or meaning works in one particular way, so that the Balinese may be adequately explained from a single perspective.¹ There are grave weaknesses with such an approach and it may be fruitful to explore an alternative, namely the possibility that language in its broadest sense has different uses. One might consider then the conditions under which statements seem to impute an essential meaning or close off the range of potential contexts.² Rather than assume words

¹ Such visual – and often also spatial – metaphors tend to bring all sorts of presuppositions and implications with them. These are discussed in Chapters 3 & 5.

² A *caveat* obviously applies to my use of terms like ‘culture’ and ‘the Balinese’. I do not wish to suggest there is any essential Balinese culture. There are only the myriad statements and actions which people living on the island of Bali, and calling themselves Balinese, engage in. In referring to the Balinese I am referring to those in the settlement and this includes both men and women, and high and low castes, unless otherwise stated. How far usage varies between communities is an empirical issue and is still far from clear. Rather than impute an entity called ‘Balinese society’ and postulate its structural principles, I shall look at how the people in one area set about interpreting their own collective representations. The significance of this formulation will become clear later. Much of my information comes from the settlement of Tengahpadang, in North Gianyar where I did research, but the results have been checked as broadly as possible. James Boon has taken issue with this stance, which stresses the specificity of the objects of inquiry. His argument and my reply are discussed in Chapter 5. Boon and I are both concerned with the implications of the breakdown of conventional notions of the self-evident nature of the object, and the method, of study. We differ on how we deal with the resulting complexity. On my reading Boon tends towards assuming singularity, in the sense that, however complex the phenomena, their source and explanation is ultimately

must denote definitely, we might consider essentializing as a style or strategy (depending upon the emphasis one wishes to place). This opens the way for a more ethnographically sensitive recognition of the other styles or strategies which may be found. Contextualizing would, in some form, then be an obvious alternative. So might making do (or, less elegantly, ‘pragmatizing’ after the pragmatic theory of truth) where it is necessary to take action without the time, or need, to consider the intricacies or the full contextual implications. From the speaker’s, rather than the listener’s, point of view there is also a whole battery of loosely ‘rhetorical’ devices to attract attention and persuade an audience. There are, of course, potentially many others, but these will do for the moment as convenient labels.

One of the seemingly simplest kinds of situation which Balinese villagers encounter in everyday life is in how to apply terms for the groups and institutions, which make up their immediate frame of reference and action. The question is how far such groupings can be unambiguously defined, and so circumscribe their context of use.

Balinese settlements are often known as *désa*, a term which is linked to the Sanskrit for country, countryside, region or place (Zoetmulder 1982: 393). In Bali, *désa* commonly suggests a village and its territory and is opposed taxonomically and in practice to the ward, or *banjar*, the group responsible for organizing not only residence on the territory but also the daily affairs of the residents. In Tengahpadang, as in many other areas, the *désa* tends to be considered a group with mainly religious functions, the foremost of which is the observance of religious law and practice to ensure the ritual purity of the traditional settlement area, *tanah désa*. Difficulties, however, arise over exactly what the *désa* is, and so over the scope of its responsibility. Its members are the heirs to compounds on village land; but everyone on the land is under the protection, and authority, of the village guardian deities. It is commonly thought of as defined by the boundaries of the *tanah désa*. On the other hand it may equally be viewed as a zone of influence over an area where villagers live and work, which extends into the fields beyond the borders proper. As people migrate, the nature of their ties to the *désa* becomes complicated. On different occasions, then, the *désa* may be defined by a bounded territory, in terms of control over whoever lives or works there, as a zone of influence of a set of deities, or a

singular. I reject the idea of singular explanation, not least because it is almost invariably a eurocentric singularity. So I am concerned with how to address specificity without being able – or having to – to fall back on encompassing notions. On the significance of the distinction between singularity and specificity, see Hallward 2000.

place of origin. Which aspect comes to the fore depends on the circumstances; and disputes over its jurisdiction occur. The problem stems in part from the several ways that the relation of people to land may be understood. So defining a single referent of *désa* is not so simple: an issue which becomes important when the question comes up of which group is responsible for what.

In order to define Balinese village structure, Geertz has attempted to circumvent the ambiguities in the terms like *désa* by appeal to ‘planes of social organization’ which are ‘a set of invariant fundamental ingredients’ (1959: 991), the possible combinations of which define the parameters of Balinese society. The aim was to escape from the misapprehension that a society can be epitomised by a representative unit any more than a synthetic amalgam of materials depicts the social structure. Unfortunately in steering clear of one essentialism, Geertz fell into another.³ His generative, or transformational, model if anything imputes more still to an essence, in behaviour or in ideas, according to the reading.⁴ Whichever, the *désa* is part of the ‘shared obligation to worship at a given temple’ (1959: 992). Defining the group by worship is ambiguous though, as it confuses three different relationships. One may *nyungsung*, ‘support’ a temple, which is to be a full member of a temple group with the ineluctable rights and duties, or one may *maturan*, ‘make offering, give to a superior’, which refers here to the daily offerings each household takes when its members go to pray. Many members of the *désa* are expected to *maturan*, but are not required to *nyungsung*, the latter duty falling only on owners of compounds on the traditional village land. Finally it is possible to pray *muspa* (in high Balinese; *mabakti* in low) without making large offerings. *Maturan* and certainly *muspa* may be done by people with no formal membership of the group, across all sorts of social and even caste boundaries. Boon has suggested that the plane of temple organization is better understood as ‘a meta-mode to index the other modes’ (1977: 61-2). It is certainly of a different logical order than some of the other principles, but if its function is as an index, cognitive map, or ‘simplified model of Balinese social

³ .’Clues to the typologically essential may as often lie in rare or unique phenomena as they do in common or typical ones;...essential form may be seen more adequately in terms of a range of variation than in terms of a fixed pattern from which deviant cases depart’ (1959: 1008-9).

⁴ For instance, is ‘social organization’ to be understood in a Firthian sense (1964), or are these ‘planes of significance’, Boon 1977: 59? There is also an intriguing parallel between Geertz’s definition of planes and the variety of ‘substance-codes’ Inden has suggested are found in Bengal (1976: 13-14). There is a critical difference however. For Inden carefully locates these principles in an indigenous metaphysics; whereas in Geertz’s case it is quite unclear how far these are the analyst’s or a distillation of natives’ constructions.

structure' (Geertz 1967: 239) then it fails abysmally. For the sheer range and diversity of temple congregations is far more complex than the reality of which it is supposed to be the index (see Hobart 1979: 123-31)!

The confusion is due partly to there being more than one criterion involved in the principles of incorporation (Smith 1974). The same holds for the other planes of social organization. *Subak*, often glossed as 'irrigation association', is defined as about the 'ownership of rice land lying within a single watershed' (Geertz 1959: 995). However it is quite possible to own rice land within a watershed and not belong to the local, or indeed any, *subak*. In their charters (*awig-awig*) such groups are commonly defined in terms of control not of land, nor use of land, nor of labour, but over water, although not necessarily from a single source. On different occasions, according to circumstance however, their sphere of competence may be differently interpreted. Depending on the context one element or another may be stressed. Similar observations can be made about other social institutions. At times discussion may be about what the *désa* or *subak* really are, or should be; but much of the time practical matters demand action. Coping with conflicts requires adjustment with other institutions as does resolving perceived contradictions between collective representations.

To what degree one feature is essential and the others ancillary, or not, emerges from a brief look at the definition of marriage in Bali.⁵ The *sine qua non* of marriage appears to be the rite of *masakapan* between two partners (a term which unfortunately also means 'to work someone else's land', (but not as an in-law)). The practice of low caste girls undergoing the rite, not with a prince, but with his sword or house pillar, can be accounted for by introducing metonymy. By this criterion, however, it is not just humans who marry. For pigs, slit gongs and drums pass through an identical rite. In what sense one would wish to state these to be married is a moot point. This is not as trivial as might seem. Whether the union of humans is the essential feature of marriage and everything else metaphoric 'extensions', or whether, for instance, we are dealing with culturally appropriate forms for the conjunction of complementary opposites, of which humans are an example, is hardly by the way.

The serious difficulties begin when we consider what marriage involves. For rites vary in degree. So the distinction between a woman being a secondary wife, or a concubine, may be hard to fix, and could lead in the

⁵ The impossibility of providing a universal definition is argued by Leach (1961) because the plethora of legal rights that may be conferred alone is too complex and diffuse.

past to confused legal claims. It is also possible for a ceremony to occur but to be overlooked. The problem is one of assent. The Balinese may engage in marriage by capture (*malegandang*, as opposed to mock capture *ngambis*). If a girl is taken by force, at least from her and her family's point of view, the rite may actually be ignored. Matters become more complex still, because what constitutes agreement is open to dispute. What one side may consider elopement, the other may treat as capture and act accordingly. In other situations marriage may be a necessary criterion of membership of certain groups. For instance, the unit of membership of the ward is normally the *kuren* (which Geertz curiously renders as 'kitchen', properly *paon*, 1959: 998), comprising an able-bodied male and female, usually but not necessarily married. Both a male and a female are required because of the sexual division of labour in collective tasks. A person's opposite sex sibling may well be an acceptable alternative to a wife or husband. The *kuren* is not incidentally 'the basic kin unit from the point of view of all superordinate social institutions' (Geertz 1959: 998). Owners of compounds on *désa* land are members of most groups regardless of their marital status. It is, of course, perfectly possible to tidy all the exceptions away and maintain there to be an essential characteristic of Balinese marriage. The result, however, is pretty vacuous. It also ignores the kinds of confusion in which Balinese villagers often land and the problems they face in interpreting these. Such an approach might be valid if it could be shown that the Balinese acted as if there were always essential features, but no one seems to have asked.⁶

One of the most common ways of circumnavigating the complexities of what people actually do is by recourse to the 'rules' which inform their activities. Regularity is not then to be explained at the level of actions, but in terms of the rules or ideals which guide the actions. The ploy is as popular as it is pernicious. The sanctuary of a warm Platonist cave may be comfortable, but it appeals to a questionable epistemology and commits a category mistake by confusing the analyst's and actors' (asymmetrical) frames of reference. There is also a hidden contextual clause in much reference to rules. For is a rule a categorical, or a hypothetical, imperative? Is it an unconscious structural determinant, a legal injunction, an expectation or a regularity? It is common to find different senses being put forward in different contexts by the same people who deny that context is important at all.

⁶ A counter-argument might run that although marriage may take different forms, it still constitutes a rite of transition with the classic features of separation, transformation and re-integration. Without disputing these may be a feature of *masakapan* as of many other rites, the universalism often claimed for such rites of transition is a good instance of circular argument: what is transition if not separation, change and reframing?

For all a rhetorician's rules
 Teach nothing but to name his tools.'⁷
 Samuel Butler, *Hudibras*.

Such analytical assumptions beg the question of how the Balinese regard and use such rules. A simple example will make the point. One of the few rules over which ethnographers seem to agree is the Balinese ban on sister exchange, which is usually represented as an absolute prohibition (Boon 1977: 131ff.). Unfortunately the Balinese have different interpretations of their own kinship rules. What is an absolute prohibition on one reading, is merely undesirable on another (see Hobart 1991a). Different castes, and people talking about different aspects of persons, tend to adhere to different versions of what is proper, or possible. Rules may be read as categorical for example; or they read as embodying hypothetical injunctions. So the proscription on sister exchange may be treated simply as a ban, or it may be seen as a means of protecting people from dangerous liaisons. Sister exchange is classified as a 'hot' (*panes*), as opposed to a 'cool' (*etis*), union, which brings a risk of damage to the people and their social ties. In Tengahpadang one man did contract such a marriage. He was politically opposed to the then-dominant local elite, who stressed the religious and social value of observing what they saw as 'traditional' kin ties. Was his action then mere ignorance (as the establishment claimed), was it deliberate defiance, or was it that the girl was attractive? His action could be, and indeed was, interpreted by different people differently in different contexts. Rules do not just exist as cast-iron commands, as constitutive of 'culture' as such. They may be a matter for contemplation, interpretation and rival assertion and challenge under different circumstances. Perhaps we are dealing not with the determination of 'fundamental invariant ingredients' but the circumstances under which some people assert and others deny different interpretations in different ways. Closure of representation is apparently only one possibility, as Balinese ideas of meaning allow for dissemination (see for instance the brief discussion of *Dasanama* below).

This rather open view is at odds with most of the conventional accounts of Balinese marriage. Boon, for instance, notes the existence both of negative injunctions of the kind mentioned above and positive marriage standards. He suggests there may be alternative registers (1977: 12-30). Marriage may be romantic, by elopement or mock capture, and is most likely between kin groups not in alliance.⁷ The other kinds of marriage are

⁷ Boon glosses mock capture as *ngarorod* (1977: 121), a term used for 'moving place' and so colloquially said of elopement (*malaib*, running away). *Ngarorod* is in many places

more likely to be arranged. They may be strategic and designed to forge or cement alliances between groups; or it may be sacred and within a kin group, although this last is also ‘hot’ and dangerous among very close kin like first cousins, unless one is strong enough to resist the dangers. There is latitude between culturally available alternatives.

There are serious problems with the model however. For a start it is ethnographically inadequate. There is no simple connection between ways of contracting unions and the three kinds of relation involved. Important forms, like real capture, are omitted (it may be illegal, Boon 1977: 121, but the illegal is not the impossible and merely gives capture greater impact). *Mapadik*, formally asking for a woman in marriage, is conflated with the negotiation of agreement between all concerned (*adung-adungan rerama*), and with *atepang rerama*, where the parents impose their will on the children. Externally they may seem the same but, as the last involves coercion (*paksa*), to the Balinese the psychological implications are starkly contrasted. The link of ideals with social consequences suggests a mechanical connection, which overlooks the extent to which ideals are asserted contextually. Collecting genealogies in Bali is a tricky activity because commonly different parties will claim the unions were of different kinds according to their interests, presentation of self, and the social situation. There is a broader lesson to be learned from this, namely that the sort of statistics which anthropologists imitate sociologists in collecting are mostly entirely vacuous and refer to nothing but themselves.⁸

It is assumed that marriage is essentially the same cross-culturally (otherwise the reference to alliance theory would make little sense), even if its specific cultural forms differ. There is little consideration of the possibility that, as marriage involves at least two persons, we might require recourse to Balinese ideas of personhood and so human nature. In describing romantic marriage based on love (for which Boon incidentally is obliged to use the Indonesian term, *cinta* from the Sanskrit ‘thought, care, anxiety’ 1977: 122-23), the assumption seems to be that there is an emotion or inner state commensurable cross-culturally. He appeals to literary traditions, like the tales of prince Panji, for collateral evidence. This is treacherous on two grounds. First it may be tautologous: how do we decide to translate the motivation of characters in literature as ‘love’ in the first place? Second the robust sexual flavour the Balinese are wont to read into

part of every marriage rite, when the couple are secluded in someone else’s house prior to *masakapan*.

⁸ For an elegant account of how a new reality, the average or normal, came into existence in the nineteenth century and made sociology possible, Hacking’s book *The taming of chance* (1990) is invaluable.

personal attraction ('Chaucerian' perhaps, if one is to import alien categories) fits ill with the connotations of 'love'. Romantic lust might be a better gloss!

The dangers of simplistic translation come out clearly in Boon's handling of 'sacred' marriage. As Hooykaas has noted (e.g. 1975: 241), what constitutes 'the sacred' and what Balinese word would even roughly correspond to this is fraught with difficulty. The nearest term is probably *suci*, which is often glossed as 'pure'. The two are clearly not coterminous. *Suci* is also understood by the Balinese in quite different ways. It may be used descriptively as if an attribute, it may be prescriptive as an ideal. It may be treated at times almost as if substantial (although one should note the Balinese generally avoid imputing the existence of matter, preferring to speak simply of particular objects as existing and events as occurring). Introducing a notion of the sacred merely distracts attention from the serious question of indigenous ontologies and styles of argument and interpretation.

About which we cannot speak, thereupon should we remain silent.
Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*.

Contextualizing and essentializing

The examples discussed so far have hinged on the ambiguity inherent in institutions that are defined in terms of more than one feature. Which feature is to the fore depends upon interpretive style, context, and personal concerns. Obviously life can carry on despite different readings being given by people on different occasions (Wallace 1961: 29-44). Some collective representations, presuppositions and words, however, are asserted to be more critical, axiomatic or necessary to a postulated hierarchy of values than others. Such closure of possibility is arguably an aspect of power. So in this section I would like briefly to consider some of the conditions under which this is more likely to happen or not.⁹

⁹ I am here arguing, partly on the basis of my reading of the Balinese ethnography, that ideas do not always come singly, but are part of more complex, if changeable, semantic sets. That is I am not using the conventional epistemological model of statements of fact or hypotheses being testable independently of one another, but as being part of a wider frame of reference which determines what shall count as a fact in the first place. That position is closer to the Duhem-Quine thesis (see Quine 1953a). I also follow Quine in speaking where possible of words, or terms, to avoid imputing a questionable reality to ideas, concepts and meanings. When I use expressions like 'meaning', 'idea' or 'statement', these are my glosses of Balinese words, here *arti*; *pemineh* (opinion); and

For example, the Balinese have had a system of ranking, similar in certain aspects to the Indian caste system. Kings, as warriors (*Satriya*), were at the apex of the hierarchy, being ranked in purity above everyone except a caste of priests, *Brahmana*. Many of the diacritica of caste status were held to be transmitted by birth. For *Satriya* these were courage, loyalty and honesty, among others. Members of other caste groups were regarded as lacking such attributes, at least by comparison. To speak of someone as being *Satriya* implied having those characteristics. (It will be noted that the word may be used both as a title, or name, and as an adjective.) If being a *Satriya* implied being brave and so on, being brave implied one was *Satriya*. Here we seem to have an example of how qualities may be prescribed of a title, so the proper contexts of use are circumscribed.

There is a catch though. In practice not all princes were brave by Balinese standards; and some brave men were not *Satriya*. The assertion ‘(all) *Satriya* are courageous, loyal and honest’ has two non-identical applications. The one through which the caste hierarchy was celebrated in dynastic chronicles and other texts, was an ascriptive reading. This was the official version, an authoritative discourse of how the world should be seen. Another rendition was, however, possible. For despite the weight and majesty which could be brought to bear upon prescribing and attributing qualities: some princes were palpable cowards and some members of other castes sufficiently brave and gifted with the qualities of *Satriya* that their presence could not be ignored. The scribes of dynastic histories had not uncommonly to face the rise and accession, through war, of upstarts who could not be passed over in silence. On such occasions, the official explanation was in terms of lost ancestry, divine intervention or something similar (see Hooykaas 1958; Worsley 1972). In such a way the essentializing of the attributes of *Satriya* could be maintained, while events were far more fluid than such ideological assertions made it seem.

This brief outline should make it clear why it may be useful to talk in terms of essential and contextual meanings as being styles or strategies, not as the way words of themselves mysteriously relate to the world. Being able to essentialize the ‘meaning’ of *Satriya* and to minimize its unexpected contextualizations has epistemological and political overtones at the same

sané kabaos (what was said) respectively. For a fuller analysis of Balinese terms and ideas about meaning, see Chapter 5.

time.¹⁰ Relevance would seem, however, not to be an attribute intrinsic to language so much as a variable aspect of discourse. Not all words may have so much political significance obviously at stake. What kinds of word have been treated as neutral and under what circumstances is an interesting question.

Some terms have been subject to so high a degree of cultural elaboration that it might seem their contextualization in novel ways has been effectively ruled out. Perhaps one of the most systematically and consistently developed distinctions in Bali is the directional axis of *kaja* and *kelod*. *Kaja* roughly denotes ‘towards the interior’, ‘upstream’; *kelod*, ‘towards the sea’, ‘downstream’. These, rather than Western compass points, form the dominant system of spatial representation, according to which the structure of houses, villages, shrines, temples, the layout of offerings and much else is oriented. The result is a totalizing classification because the extremes of the axis are linked with other qualities, which are of great importance. *Kaja* is associated with ritual purity, and *kelod* with pollution; the two often being expressed metaphorically (and used metonymically in ritual) in the flow of water: pure water comes from mountain streams and reaches the sea bearing the detritus of human existence with it.

The classification encompasses a great deal. For instance the arrival of foreign merchants and then tourists could be slotted in easily. For contact with traders was conveniently on the coastline; and more recently tourist hotels have been sited for the most part around the few sandy beaches on the island. Both sides, working with quite different models of space, have seemed happy with this arrangement. Tourists sunbathe, swim and step on stonefish - and the traders pushed their wares - while the Balinese classification of space was upheld, by appeal to the associations of purity and pollution. (There was a possibly contingent bonus in that the most feared centre of destructive magic (*pengiwa*) is little more than a stone’s throw from the Intercontinental Hotel.) On one reading, demons are large, red, hairy and uncouth - the attributes the Balinese tend to give to Westerners - so it was in strict accordance with the classification that they should prefer to live by the sea, which is the cess-pit of pollution. Desire, which should be controlled – here for tourist money, new fashions and new political resources in the Indonesian state administration (much of which is focused on the tourist areas and the geographically peripheral capital) –

¹⁰ This suggests that, in searching to explain context as implied in propositional assertions, Sperber and Wilson (1982) have treated a style, or strategy, as a natural state of language or communication.

runs riot, a gloomy picture which fits however with Balinese and Hindu theories of the entropy of the world. Such a powerful model seems able not only to cope with new situations, but to structure the Balinese world which is built partly around it.

The *kaja-kelod* axis is described variously in the literature as towards and away from Gunung Agung, the highest volcano, mountain-sea, inland-sea, interior-exterior, upstream-downstream; and is linked with the propitious and unpropitious, purity and pollution, life and death and so forth (Hobart 1978). Part of this is simple inexactitude, part is variations in Balinese contexts of use. One of the most common referents for this spatial axis is the path of water (so linking it to the familiar Malay direction of *ulu* (upstream, headwater). Because most water comes from volcanic lakes and springs, it may refer to the direction of the mountains. But as *kaja* is associated with the pure and auspicious, by a transposition there are contexts in which *kaja* becomes any propitious direction (although I have not met it actually referring to seawards). Similarly the attributes of life and death often associated with east and west may be mapped onto the upstream-downstream one and *vice versa*. It differs then from Euro-American ideas of a polar axis around notionally fixed points, both because the Balinese axis is more like the dial of a clock around the island's centre and because of ways it may be contextually interpreted.

The classification is not, however, neutral in that many other sets of values are linked to it. In so far as the political and religious hierarchy in Bali is underwritten by the presupposition that ritual purity is graded, a differentiated spatial grid may be more or less tied to hierarchy. The seemingly neat closure of the system is prey however to problems of consistency, and allows unexpected contextualization. If water is identified in some way with purity, then what about the largest body of water of all, the sea? On one interpretation, it is polluted; on another, it is so extensive in its purity that it is able to absorb all the impurities of the world. Demons may be identified with pollution and the periphery, but they are partly divine beings and so probably purer than humans; and they are identified with the dangerous aspects of high gods, who are far from inferior. While the traditional centres of Balinese culture and excellence lay inland, new wealth, new possibilities and new sources of power centre on the coast. So even the most entrenched classification cannot ensure closure.

A simple but elegant example of the problem of context comes out in discussion of which is the proper, desirable or ritually ideal direction of motion. Almost all Balinese agree that the proper direction for movement is to the right for processions, ritual lustration, the order of eating in ritual

meals (*nasi agibung*) and even the erection of house posts (Howe 1983: 152-4). Usually this is recorded in the ethnographies as ‘clockwise’. Observation of Balinese temple ceremonies shows however that people quite frequently circumambulate the temple anti-clockwise. The link seems not to be to Hindu ideas of *pradaksina* (and reverse movement, *purwadaksina*, in Bali), but to different ideas to the context of ‘right of’. Is it to the right of the speaker, or to the right of the subject or object being circumambulated? The problem is familiar to students of Javanese shadow theatre, where the question of right and left, Pandawa and Korawa, victors and losers,¹¹ is usually defined relative to the puppeteer, not the audience. So quite different emphases are suggested by motion to the right being egocentric instead of focused on the other. In fact widespread confusion reigned in my area as to which was proper in which situations.

If classifications like this are tied to others, could it be that part of the closure is linked with the preservation of key cultural assumptions, absolute presuppositions, which somehow lie behind, or govern, surface manifestations? Were it possible to show there to be such a hierarchy of values, this would be a strong ground for arguing that context can only play at the feet of the towering structure of culturally essential beliefs. There is evidence aplenty of hierarchies being referred to in Bali; but we must be careful before leaping to conclusions. In order to see how a hierarchy of values is invoked, it is informative to look at a brief case study.

A problem arose in one of the wards of Tengahpadang. A woman who owned no rice land used to be one of several traders in cooked meals in the main square. Her stall was an expensive brick building, sited as it happened directly beneath a *waringin* tree, the Balinese equivalent of the Indian *banyan*. Various misfortunes had befallen the village, including the devastation of many families following the abortive Communist coup in 1965. It was remarked by a number of villagers that, unlike many other wards, there was no shrine in the square, so perhaps it could be that this might account for the spate of troubles which had happened.

¹¹ The gloss was suggested to me first by Alice Dewey and is preferable to the crude ‘good’ or ‘bad’ traditionally ascribed to the two sides. For a start, good and bad tend to be (logically) attributive, not predicative, adjectives (Geach 1956). That is they are attributes of a predicate, not full predicates themselves. (For example, a good cricketer is not good and a cricketer.) So we run the risk in saying that someone is good of implying he is good in essence. To gloss the camps in the Mahabharata in the common way is effectively to pre-empt discussion of the complex issue of what kind of world and what image of humanity is being portrayed in shadow theatre. For a more detailed discussion, see Hobart 1985.

It was also recognized however that erecting a shrine would require destroying the stall in all likelihood. However, against this view ran the argument that the calamities were sufficiently grave that so serious a step might well need to be taken. In addition the stall happened to be sited on public land (that is belonging to the *désa*). Among the issues at stake were whether the misfortunes were connected with the absence of a shrine; whether they would be forestalled by building one; whether such a shrine should be erected underneath the tree; and whether the spiritual benefits to the community outweighed the loss of livelihood of a villager, or at least that part of the capital that had gone into building the stall; or even whether the stall had contributed to the misfortunes by a place for making profit being put in a pure spot.

A high caste geomancer¹² was called in, who was celebrated for his knowledge and mystical power (*sakti*). He agreed before a full meeting of the local ward that there might be a link between past troubles and the lack of a shrine. He further assented that misfortune might be mitigated in the future by building one. He confirmed after geomantic measurements of several possible sites that the ideal place was where the stall stood. But he also offered other places, especially one behind the ward meeting pavillion. Seeing that the woman's stall was beneath the *waringin*, he warned the village against the wrong doing which would be brought about at the woman's expense, by ruining the source of her income. The public meeting, which had been called to hear his decision, promptly voted however that, to be on the safe side, both the shrines should be put up. And that, as the stall was on public land, the responsibility for its removal was the woman's and that she should bear the costs of pulling it down as well.

Several principles were at issue in this case. The link between the shrine and the misfortune was accepted on the geomancer's authority (it is not unusual to seek several different opinions), while his suggestion of alternative sites was ignored. There was the rather unclear question of peoples' rights to make use of public land (it was not mentioned in public who, if anyone, it was who had originally given permission). As discussion wore on over the weeks before and after the consultation, however, the main issue became phrased in terms of the relative priority of an individual to pursue their living against the possible threat to public welfare. Balanced against this consideration was a widely accepted principle that the interests of disadvantaged members of the community, such as widows (which the woman was), should be protected where possible.

¹² In fact a *balian usada*, an expert in medical texts, *usada/wisada*, but by virtue of the effects of space on health and welfare, he needs to understand architectural and geomantic treatises as well.

In the course of argument, a hierarchy of values was referred to by several parties. The problem is, which exactly was the right hierarchy? The short answer is that, faced with contrary assertions, the different parties made more or less use of the assumption that there was such a hierarchy, or at least that some principles had greater weight than others. No one could agree though which principle was the key one. If everyone agreed that one had to choose between values, or that in principle there was a hierarchy, no one could agree as to what it was. Hierarchy did not exist as a fixed system of reference, but its form and structure were invoked variously to interpret the situation.

Context was vital in other ways, which make the inadequacy of an analysis in terms of cultural ideals alone quite apparent. I note merely the most salient. Ten years later the geomancer had developed so great a pan-Balinese reputation for his mystical power that I doubt anyone would have lightly override his *caveat* about endangering the woman's welfare. At the time his reputation was solid enough for his professional opinion to be accepted, but not unquestioningly, as reasonably authoritative. The woman's personal life was an unmentioned issue, as were the political party aspects of the whole *débaçle*. She had left her husband for the man who had been responsible for his death in 1965; and then deserted the latter for a man deeply embroiled in local politics, who had carried out the savage beating of her lover on political, and probably personal, grounds. (It was this lover, while wielding political influence, who had ensured that the building of the stall slipped through quietly.) The last man was an outsider, bitterly hated for his brutality, and sufficiently infatuated with the widow that it was thought he would pay the costs of demolition and rebuilding the stall for his new mistress. (I omit such issues as the dubious status of widows in Bali, because if we start to consider all the possible relevant contexts of this issue, the account would become extremely complicated. These were not mooted publicly, and I restrict myself to what was said.)

Several points emerge from this (highly truncated) story. First, any appeal to a definite hierarchy of values would reify the situation and ignore how such principles are used. Second, almost everyone did imply, but not always state, at some point that there was such a hierarchy. If some claimed to know the proper order of priorities, others pointed out the issue had further aspects, questioned the essential principle at stake and suggested another, or left the matter open. Here essentializing and contextualizing were part of political strategies, but was this all? Villagers seem to have understood and argued the dispute differently. For the geomancer there were ideal, and alternative possible, sites according to the proper criteria in his manuals. For some, who were concerned at the spate

of inauspicious events, it seems to have been a matter of having to find an urgent answer regardless of the niceties; others were seeking the most fitting, *manut*, solution to conflicting interests. A minority, by their own account, were as interested in humiliating the woman as in the shrines and were using the latter as acceptable decoration for unacceptable motives. So the dispute was occasion for different styles of argument over the same set of issues.

Are there though presuppositions in Balinese culture which are absolute for any group at any one time? If there were, would they be free of context for their exposition? Arguably, even the most apparently ‘absolute presuppositions’ (in Collingwood’s sense 1940) may presuppose other issues, so absoluteness here may be relative!¹³ It is one thing to trace logical presuppositions (assuming the logical operations of a culture, in theory and in practice, have been studied) in an intellectual tradition which stresses consistency as highly as ours. It is another to explore such presuppositions in cultures where a premium may be placed on matters other than consistency. In short, while inference or empirical evidence may be used to show that the Balinese recognize and appeal to presuppositions, it remains a matter for research how systematically, and under what conditions, ‘absolute presuppositions’ are found (as opposed to how fervently they are asserted). For present purposes, my concern is with meaning and context, where recourse to such presuppositions tends to be an essentializing strategy, and the transformation of hierarchy a contextualizing one.

Context and human agency

Is it possible to infer a model from the Balinese material, which would account for the ways context is invoked? I think not, for several reasons. One obvious approach is to establish a set of ‘core’ or key presuppositions, change to which either produces so much conceptual confusion or endangers the structure of authority, that it can be taken as fairly stable. To do so however would be to reify what I have called essentializing and contextualizing styles. Neither is the exclusive prerogative of any group or

¹³ Krausz remarks that what Collingwood identified as the Kantian absolute presupposition of the indestructibility of substance, itself presupposed the existence of substance (1972: 236ff.).

caste; rather they are two ways of attempting to work out how collective representations should be applied to events and actions.¹⁴

Relevance and context seem then only to be establishable empirically. If it is not possible to circumscribe the relation between cultural representations and actions in terms of a theory of meaning, might one not instead focus on the agents?¹⁵ In other words, can we provide an account of human interests or action, which would delimit the goals, and so the effective means that the Balinese seek?¹⁶ In order to pull off such a feat, however, we are involved in postulating a theory of human nature and human agency. Oscar Wilde is supposed once to have remarked,

the more one analyses people, the more all reasons for analysis disappear. Sooner or later one comes to that dreadful universal thing called human nature.

As Collingwood has argued, the philosophers on whose models much anthropological theory is based

assumed that human nature had existed ever since the creation of the world exactly as it existed among themselves...that *our* reasoning faculty, *our* tastes and sentiments, and so forth, are something perfectly uniform and invariable, underlying and conditioning all historical changes (1946: 82-83).

Further, models of society rely on some truth, palpable or implicit, about human nature. For instance,

Durkheim sides with Hobbes and Freud where Marx sides with Rousseau and the Utopians. For the former, man is a bundle of desires, which need to be regulated, tamed, repressed, manipulated and given direction for the sake of social order, whereas, for the latter, man is still

¹⁴ Nor is it simple to extrapolate criteria of relevance from such core presuppositions. The latter do not exist in a timeless Platonic world, they are asserted. One would be assuming consistency in the postulated core, such that alternative criteria of relevance could not be found. And, as the definition of essential meaning is reached through Balinese usage, relevance would have to be inferred *a posteriori*.

¹⁵ Another way might be to examine indigenous theories of meaning. We are still left with the problem of the relation between such a theory, if it exists (and the Balinese have some shared ideas about meaning, see chapter 5), and how it would be used.

¹⁶ Unfortunately two different issues often get confused here. Are we trying to explain why people actually did or said what they did? Or are we looking at how they represent such actions and motives? It is one thing to postulate a model of interests or agency, it is another to assume that this provides the necessary and sufficient conditions of all possible action.

an angel, rational and good, who requires a rational and good society in which to develop his *essential* nature (Lukes 1967: 145, my emphasis).¹⁷

The issue is not whether Lukes's characterization does justice to the views, nor yet who is right, but that a vision of human nature is an unacknowledged part of Euro-American academic baggage. Unfortunately the humble ethnographer, panning his chosen backwater for nuggets of empirical truth, cannot safely dismiss the problem as part of the paraphernalia of the armchair theorist. What we find in the field depends largely on what we sift the facts with, so to speak.¹⁸

The problem may be seen in the seemingly contradictory ethnographic accounts of Bali, which portray its inhabitants as wildly different kinds of human beings. At once the Balinese appear as driven to establish order and meaning in the world; as fey actors strutting the proscenium of life, worried over stage-fright; as belligerent men of action, poised to attack their neighbours, enslave other islanders, or loot Dutch ships; as slaves to tyrannical rules or to established social and moral conventions. At times, of course, some Balinese may be thinkers, others thespians, soldiers, slaves or much else besides; but there is little point in asking 'would the real Balinese stand up?' For the question assumes the Balinese to have an essential nature.

Am I not caught in a quandary? At one moment I argue for the need to recognize presuppositions about human nature; the next I question whether any such nature can be ascribed to people living in a society. The dilemma is false, however, but its exposure helps clear up some common confusions.

Inquiry into how people *represent* human nature and agency in explaining actions is quite different from assuming that such representations *cause* the actions. My concern is not with what human nature really, or ultimately, is - which I regard, for reasons to be discussed, as a meaningless question - but with how context and meaning is interpreted according to available representations. In other words the issue

¹⁷ Lukes himself later noted the kinship between Durkheim's and Rousseau's ideas at certain points in a later publication (1973a: 125-28).

¹⁸ There are two further problems in such representations of human action and nature, which should be considered in a fuller analysis. First, is it possible to produce a model of human nature independent of society? Second, might there be universal aspects of human nature, independent of culture, such that we could produce a two-part model of human interests, one universal one culturally specific? These are important issues in any general explanation of action, but are not immediately relevant to the topic of representations of action in Bali. For my concern is less with the ultimate explanation of action than with the presuppositions that have been used in existing accounts.

is about the conditions under which the Balinese act, and explain action, not why they act in a particular way. To search for, let alone assume, the Balinese to have an essential nature begs the interesting questions.

The nature of culture in Bali

What kinds of model of human nature have been suggested to explain Balinese society? There are, of course, about as many as there are commentators. As Boon has argued, much of the early work on Bali should be seen in the light of Western, here especially Dutch, constructions of ‘the Other’ (1977). To the extent that the stress was on a supposedly neutral description of social institutions, the assumptions about human nature and society tended to be those of various schools of anthropology, such as Dutch structuralism. Sufficient has been said about the kinds of assumptions which they made as to require no further comment here (see e.g. Geertz 1961; Koentjaraningrat 1975).

A rather different model of social action has been suggested by Geertz, which claims to explicate the Balinese ethnography. It is worth considering as a text in its own right, because it is the most explicit formulation of a problem which other accounts have tended to take for granted. The problems of explaining the Balinese ethnography are assimilated to a general theory of culture which

is essentially a semiotic one..(where) man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun (Geertz 1973c: 5).

It is largely taken for granted that a key aspect of human nature everywhere is the need to make sense of the world, and peoples’ place in it. So the focus in analysis is ‘an interpretive one in search of meaning’ (1973c: 5).

How is the relationship between human beings and culture-as-meaningful described? At this point Geertz’s language becomes strikingly metaphorical. A fascinating gradual shift occurs in the images in which this relation is represented. We start with something close to culture as a kind a building.

Our data are ‘constructions of other peoples’ constructions’, as they are ‘structures of signification’ which are erected on a given ‘social ground’ (1973c: 9). So ‘analysis penetrates into the very body of the object’, this object - culture - being fictive in the sense that it is ‘something made’, ‘something fashioned’ (1973c: 15). Once the point has been made that

culture is man-made, the images shift to various natural scientific techniques for observing and preserving. For 'anthropological interpretation consists in tracing the curve of a social discourse; fixing it into an inspectable form' (1973c: 19). We must rescue from the flow 'the "said" of such a discourse from its perishable occasions' (1973c: 20). When culture has been 'inscribed', its study becomes archaeological (if of the object) or archival (if about our inscriptions). For we must 'uncover the conceptual structures' (1973c: 27), in other words the meaning, a 'pseudo-entity' which previous anthropologists have only 'fumbled with' rather unsuccessfully (1973c: 29), because they ignored the 'hard surfaces of life...and with the biological and physical necessities on which those surfaces rest' (1973c: 30). From this the anthropologist gleans answers that those he has studied have given 'to include them in the consultable record of what man has said' (1973c: 30).

Geertz's metaphors might seem a little out of place in what purports to be a 'scientific' approach to culture. There are, however, grounds on which Geertz can justify such a view. For most scientific paradigms rest upon implicit metaphors (Kuhn 1962; Masterman 1970); and, as Salmond has shown (1982), the depiction of 'theoretical landscapes' in terms of sustained progression of metaphors is quite common, if questionable, in writing about cultures. What is of more concern is the principles by which one extracts from all that is said and done, what shall be 'inscribed'. A difficulty in describing culture as man-made is that the view is circular, because ideas about what humans are partly at least are themselves culturally formulated. Also the depiction of biological and physical necessities raises the interesting question of whose idea of biology and the physical world are we dealing with? Arguably a cultural account should consider indigenous ideas rather than postulate any set of contemporary views as universal.

The unexceptionable grounding of Geertz's argument is in ethnographic detail.

Behavior must be attended to, and with some exactness, because it is through the flow of behavior - or more precisely, social action - that cultural forms find articulation (1973c: 17).

Already we have two transformations: behaviour becomes action, and from this a specific category of 'social action' is somehow extrapolated. The next step introduces a significant framing of what anthropology is about. For 'anthropological interpretation is constructing a reading of what happens' (1973c: 18). In the following flight of metaphor however the

ontological nature of social action, or culture, undergoes a series of further re-interpretations. For it is a construction, made by people. So we are already committed to a particular relation of society and the individual in which culture is created, or invented, by people, through ‘symbolic interactions’ with its dubious assumption of ‘voluntarism’ (see Bhaskar 1979: 39-47). This culture takes the form of an inscribed text (following Ricoeur 1971). One might note here that the sense of ‘text’ is what Barthes has called a ‘work’, that is specific inscriptions, rather than the presuppositions and conditions of possibility of social action (1979). However subtle compared to previous views, the object of study is firmly positivist. Further these man-made inscriptions are, it seems, the surface of conceptual structures. At this point we are further committed to the existence of abstract entities ‘concepts’ and to them having a purported structure. Starting with the idea of culture as behaviour, then as something man-made, then as inscribed, then as a readable document, then one which reveals an underlying conceptual essence, we have reached a quite different and questionable vision.

One of the most intriguing silences in this progression is exactly how the impressions of the anthropologist are related to those of the native. While it is obvious in one way that the anthropologist is concerned with ‘our constructions of other peoples’ constructions’ (in the sense that an interpretation, but *not* all behaviour, is a construction), it does not follow that their and our constructions are of the same logical or empirical order, even if ours depends on theirs, nor that they are even commensurable. Anyway, Geertz’s whole argument is predicated on the assumption that there is a ‘we’ clearly distinguishable from another equally essentialized category ‘they’. But what is understanding - and the whole point of anthropology in the first place - if not a mutual process which involves ‘we’ becoming ‘they’ and *vice versa*? Such a dichotomy is not just a pernicious fantasy, which presumably owes something to the chauvinism of colonial epistemologies. It serves to distance the subjects with whom we work and turn them into objects whom we study. It also creates the illusion of there being a coherent ‘we’ as a knowing subject – whether that be Euro-Americans, the international world of scholars or whatever – when its practices make it clear there is no such coherent subject.

The *deus ex machina* here is an assumption about human nature. It is that people everywhere in the world (by virtue, one assumes, of the assertion that people make culture) engage in actions for the same reasons or causes, that they interpret actions in cultural styles, but that they share essential features of humanity which enable them to do so with identical logics, perceptions and semantic processes. As Hollis has pointed out,

these are however at best epistemological, or even metaphysical, presuppositions and not empirical truths (1982). The psychic unity of mankind has been assumed. Unfortunately, those who appeal to such a principle interpret it in such different ways that it can underwrite approaches as far apart as hermeneutics and truth-conditional semantics. In Geertz's case his view of culture incorporates the idea of 'the knowing subject' (see Hacking 1975: 159ff.), which gives his interpretation that flavour of individualism and freedom, so popular in much Western metaphysics of self. It has not been established however that it holds for other people. The fact that Americans or Europeans may find his interpretations appealing does not mean they are true, it merely means they fit their present prejudices.

The danger in Geertz's image of culture as being inscribed is that it leads too easily to assuming a mechanical relation between a collective representation and its interpretation by members of a society. Brief reflection on the presuppositions behind his argument about the working of symbols shows what is at issue. In attributing meaning to their cultural constructs, we require a theory of mind, and the relation of individuals to society, such that they construe collective representations one way rather than another.

Time, person and language

In *Person, time and conduct in Bali*, for instance we are presented with different notions of time and their significance from a reading of indigenous calendars (after Goris 1933). The Javanese-Balinese calendrical system of a 210-day year consists of ten concurrently running weeks from one to ten days. Each week has different named days and different uses. As Geertz quite reasonably notes, this tends to give particular combinations of days an individual flavour. To infer from this, however, that the nature of Balinese time-reckoning is necessarily, or even preferentially, permutational let alone that it reflects 'the very structure of reality' (1973f: 392) is oddly mechanical. Might one not equally read from the system, among the main features of which is the mathematical regularity of combinations, a model of complex order distinct from the variability of human affairs? This would make it peculiarly fitting for describing the doings and prescriptions of divine agencies, which are apart from human contingency. Geertz chooses not to inquire into the vast number of ways in which the Javanese-Balinese calendar is actually used every day, but seems instead to assume that calendars have essential features which may be read

out by the analyst independent of, and prior to, detailed study of contextual use.

There is no space to enter into the rather sterile and largely ethnographically uninformed debate about the nature of time in Bali (Geertz 1973f; Bloch 1977; Bourdillon 1978; Howe 1981). Suffice it to say here that all the accounts represent time catachretically (Black 1962). That is, it is approached through constitutive metaphors, often spatial - time as linear, cyclical, zigzag, punctuated, durational – which the Balinese explicitly eschew. Perhaps part of the problem comes from assuming there to be some essential time, which is measured in different ways. In one sense time is peculiarly contextual, in that it is referred to relative to situations of its use.¹⁹ For example, Balinese recognition of stages of the sun in the sky is particularly appropriate if it is a matter of going to the fields or finishing work before sunset, or before it gets too hot. To say that the Balinese set off for the fields at 5 a.m. and return at 10 or 11 is far less informative. Much of the confusion about time in Bali might be avoided, I suspect, if, instead of asking what time really is, we were to look at how it is used and the relations which its use imputes.

A similar method is used to infer the ‘depersonalization’ of Balinese from their notionally distinct ‘orders of person definition’ (1973f: 368). Teknonymy, for instance, denotes a person in terms of parenthood of members of successive generations, and so stresses successors rather than predecessors. Again the interpretation depends upon a very literal reading of the by-passing of autonyms (personal names). As Feeley-Harnik rightly notes, teknonymy equally permits a focus upon ancestors and the domination of the ascendant generation (1978: 406). Her point is that the ‘inscriptions’ of culture cannot be read so simplistically.

Once again the focus is upon reading the essence of a system in isolation from its semantic context and the situations of its use. In fact the Balinese have a perfectly workable system, and use it, to refer to ancestors as their kin terms reach at least the fifth ascendant generation. On another score teknonymy is not equally used by all social groups. In my area, it was kin groups identifying themselves as smiths (Pandé), who strove to keep themselves apart from others and limit the range of their exchanges (including names?), who commonly used teknonyms. One wonders if it is coincidental to Geertz’s model of naming that his research was largely in

¹⁹ The issue is more complex than this. Measurement of the separateness of events here is by relative differentiation according to some scale. Events are further related to this scale; so more general comments on time scales form third order relations.

Tihingan, one of the few villages in Bali dominated by smiths? In developing the model of depersonalization, Geertz likewise suggests that

as the virtually religious avoidance of its direct use indicates, a personal name is an intensely private matter...when (a man) disappears it disappears with him (1973f: 370, my parenthesis).

This may be fine in theory but in the roll-call for village meetings the personal names, not the teknonyms, of distinguished old men (even if each is ‘but a step away from being the deity he will become after his death’ 1973f: 370) were yelled out across the village square! Whatever the idealized reading of collective representations, villagers in Tengahpadang invariably referred to their dead ancestors by the personal names they are supposed not to know.²⁰

One of the critical features of multiple ways of naming people co-existing is the situational subtleties which one can extract by using one way rather than another. The point is not that the chosen register commits one to a certain set of meanings, but the ways one did *not* address, or refer to, someone give the choice poignancy and unspoken implications.

The question of naming, especially personal names, raises complex theoretical issues of the essential link of name and object. Before we rush to order Balinese means of referring to others, perhaps we might consider Balinese ideas about naming. There is a set of texts, known as *Dasanama*, literally ‘ten names’ which indicate the various names by which heroes in the literature are known in different roles in their lives, at different stages, or in different aspects of their personalities or incarnations. The applicability of names is therefore in a sense highly contextual. As the Balinese use *Dasanama*, the implications are often reversed: things and

²⁰ The only exception was one high caste man and, on Geertz’s view, such names are caste titles not autonyms. There is no evidence local usage is recent or some strange ‘degeneration’. If anything teknonymy may be on the increase as Balinese adapt status relations to new political ends, as Boon has suggested (1974).

It seems almost as if names and words had some very special essence. Pushed a little we are in danger of entering a world where digital watches imply a different sense of time from the old analog ones; or classical Romans have tripartite orders of person definition and Englishmen bipartite because they have Christian and surnames. The implication seems to be that the Balinese are not just depersonalized, but have the misfortune to have diffused identities in contrast to our unified ones. If this be so, it is not entirely clear how they can be ‘knowing subjects’ in the same sense, nor whether their ‘constructions’ of the world could be the same as ours. If not, quite what are the implications of personal names? How misleading the rigid and decontextualized link of words and ideas can prove may be seen in Wiggins’ attempt to grapple with Geertz’s model of selfhood (1976: 155). A far more sensitively contextual approach is suggested by Rorty (1976: 301-323).

people are not essentially tied to any one label, rather these are used to indicate different aspects of the same phenomenon. Names may denote, but they do much else besides.

Behind the model of detemporalization and depersonalization of the unfortunate Balinese lie several questionable presuppositions. The point comes out in Geertz's method of interpreting symbols in his later work on the 'theatre state' in Bali (1980). Having extrapolated from the ethnography certain symbols as definitive, constitutive or descriptive of kingship, the analysis is brought to a close.²¹ The assumption is that, having laid out the symbols, we are in a position to grasp how the Balinese understand and use them. This is, however, to presume a theory of the relation of symbols to action. First the argument relies on a denotational model too crude to pick up the nuances of use in utterances. Second the implication is that collective representations are the necessary, or indeed sufficient, conditions of ideas or some kind of 'inner state' (in Needham's (1981 terms) - whether they are the reasons or causes of action (or some less Cartesian relation) is unclear. Third there is an implicit theory of the relation of society and the individual, for describing some of the socially available symbols describes in some way their meaning for people in that society. Fourth, in using the notion of 'symbol' (which is so broad as to be meaningless, 1980: 135) a specific theory of human nature and human action has already been presumed and the ontological problems of the analysis of Balinese culture neatly pre-empted. How Balinese collective representations and Balinese culture are to be interpreted has been determined *a priori* by implicit assumptions about what culture and humans are - in other words, by a theory of human nature.²²

Human nature in Bali

How is Geertz's general model of human nature and culture worked out in Bali? He approaches the question through the general assumption that it is through symbols 'upon which men impress meaning' that 'man makes sense of the events through which he lives' (1973f: 362 & 363). In

²¹ For this Geertz draws heavily on Hooykaas' work on the *Padmasana* and *Siva-Linga* (1964a and 1964b). A careful reading of the differences between Geertz's interpretation and Hooykaas's cautious and scholarly account is revealing.

²² Having said this I am broadly in sympathy with Geertz's argument for examining the specific forms that human action takes (1973f; 1983a), as against Turner's universalism (see 1982: 105-9). My concern, easy of course with hindsight, is that the argument has not been pushed far enough towards a recognition of the possibility of radically different metaphysical systems.

different cultures, man's relation to society may be structured in terms of different metaphors. In Bali, as Geertz sees it, the image is somewhere between play and dramaturgy. There is a 'playful theatricality' at work, for 'Balinese social relations are at once a solemn game and a studied drama' (1973f: 400). This is epitomized in the Balinese cockfight, which is a 'melodrama' (1973d: 423), a kind of 'art form' or 'text' (1973d: 443), because it is 'a Balinese reading of Balinese experience' (1973d: 448), in this instance that social life is 'a status bloodbath' (1973d: 436, citing Goffman 1961). Perhaps the most elaborated use of this metaphor is in Balinese politics where 'statecraft is a thespian art' (1980: 120). For the state in Bali

was a theatre state in which the kings and princes were the impresarios, the priests the directors, and the peasants the supporting cast, stage crew and audience (1980: 13; also quoted in 1973g: 335).

The metaphor could hardly be made plainer. If humans in general are thinkers, in that they ponder over the conditions of their existence, in Bali they act this out by being thespians.

Geertz's notion of the 'meta-social commentary' has rightly attracted attention. It is a timely reminder that cultures may engage in reflexivity. From the cockfight, on Geertz's view, it is possible to read meaning more or less directly and learn 'what being a Balinese "is really like"' (1973f: 417). The intensity of involvement is described as 'deep play', following the English philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, through which Balinese portray their status battles to themselves. The link is through a *double entendre* of 'cock' which we are told is the source of much cultural imagery about machismo – the Balinese emerge as somewhere between Italian *pappagalli* and characters from Damon Runyan – the commentary hinging on complex, or indeed incoherent, levels of metaphor (e.g. 'the underdog cock' 1973f: 426).

There are two initial difficulties, however. It is unclear why the recondite image of a utilitarian philosopher should provide the key metaphor for Balinese gambling. The parallel is illuminating, but in what sense is it valid? It may correspond with our ideas of the use of metaphor, but does it for the Balinese? For they have a very complex vocabulary to describe the relation of signs and symbols to their referents. The term most appropriate here is *pra(tiw)imba* from the Sanskrit, via Old Javanese 'image, model; shadow' (Zoetmulder 1982: 1141). In Balinese, it is widely used in the sense of 'model, metaphor, analogy'. Now the crucial point about *praimba* is that metaphors, by comparing something to something

else are inherently false, if illuminating and are treated with great suspicion when encountered. There is nothing to prevent analytic use of metaphor, but it is worthwhile noting that our tradition of use is quite different from the Balinese.

People in Bali are also often described in the literature as ‘playful’. One should not assume however that ‘play’ refers to the same class of discriminable phenomena in different cultures (cf. Huizinga 1949: 29-45). Where the English word links the activity of children, relaxation, story-telling, sport, joking, theatre and so on, Balinese designates each by a separate term and, as far as I can tell, these are not treated as deriving from any core, or essential, set of characteristics.²³ Care is required in using such pre-constrained terms with heavy connotations in depicting other cultures.

It has not been established, however, that the cockfight is *ipso facto* a meta-social commentary, nor that its object is precarious status battle in which Geertz sees the Balinese as being caught. It is, however, unnecessarily Durkheimian to assume that status relations somehow constitute the reality of which something else is a dramatic representation (especially if one takes Goodman’s point that representations are of something as something else, 1968: 27-31). One might note that much theatre and literature develops the theme of fighting, be it interpreted as dualistic, agonistic, Manichaeian, metaphysical or whatever. The characters in shadow theatre, and orators in public meetings, are often caught in conflict of potentially lethal outcome. What is a commentary on, or reflection of, what?

The themes of conflict or contradiction (both roughly glosses of the Balinese *lawan* or *miegan*, which is also ‘fighting’) and violence are too complex to be dismissed as the idiom of status claims. The former, as the Dutch noted long ago although in a rather different context, is so widespread in many Indonesian societies as to be worth considering as a potential ontological principle. Western commentators seem to have great difficulty with the role of violence in Balinese society. The editors of the *Siwaratrikalpa*, an Old Javanese text found in Bali, felt it necessary to excuse ‘the gruesome methods of warfare which the poet’s imagination conjures up’ (Teeuw et al. 1969: 32) and remark more generally that

²³ The word ‘play’ seems to have undergone interesting changes during its etymological history, (Onions 1966), although one should beware of dictionaries, especially etymological, as sources of instant essentialism.

Another compulsory feature of almost all *kakawin* is the elaborate, and to our taste exaggerated, descriptions of wars and battles between armies of heroes and demons... The Western reader struggles through these endless scenes with difficulty - in comparison with these the fighting in the Iliad seems mere child's play (1969: 31-32).

Ignoring what they see as violence in Bali because they do not like it does not seem a good way of approaching Balinese culture, any more than telling 'the Western reader' what he or she feels.²⁴

In other words, I am suggesting that, however interesting Geertz's argument about the cockfight, it has been rather seriously essentialized. (As Boon has pointed out, the cockfight can take on all sorts of different significance in different contexts, 1977: 31-34.) Apart from failing to consider cockfighting against the background of violence and conflict, the argument's impact comes also from omitting other possibly significant contexts.²⁵ We are not, for instance, given any idea of Balinese views on psychology to understand what watching or bringing about bloodshed implies. Instead we are offered an implicit Freudian imagery of *thanatos* in the butchery and *eros* in the sexual identifications. While the cockfight is held to be about status or prestige, this is taken largely as an unanalyzable fundamental. There is evidence that the matter is far more complex than this though (Howe 1985; Duff-Cooper 1985a).

Perhaps the most serious contextual omission is any reference to the Balinese 'Chain of Being'. In most versions animals are scaled according to their enslavement to bodily urges as against their capacity for control (see below). Animal classifications accordingly do not rank mammals above birds as taxa, but take each species on merit. So doves, being peaceful and pure, are placed higher than pigs (which are stupid and eat their own kind). And cocks which, also being inclined to fight, are notoriously low. They fight not because they are forced to, but because it is what they tend to do. The homonymic identification of bird and penis to us (e.g. Leach 1964) is made in quite a different classificatory context from the Balinese. Not only were cocks and genitals never compared to the best

²⁴ Bourgeois European and American scholars who mostly subscribe to a certain rather vague humanist Protestant moral position have great difficulty appreciating other positions, such as Saivism and certain strands in Islam, without ethnocentrism.

²⁵ A curious omission is Balinese ideas about chance. Instead of treating cock-fighting in isolation, it would have been interesting to consider the links with well-developed techniques for cutting down uncertainty and manipulating the world for personal ends, like magic, charms, love potions and so on. The role of trickery and cunning in outwitting chance is so widespread as to suggest its overlooking says much about the moral background of ethnographers.

of my knowledge, but they were held to lie near the opposite taxonomic poles.

What should we make then of Geertz's elaboration on the identification of man and animal essential to the meta-commentary? As he puts it:

The language of everyday moralism is shot through, on the male side of it, with roosterish imagery. *Sabung*, the word for cock (and one which appears in inscriptions as early as A.D. 922) is used metaphorically to mean 'hero,' 'warrior,' 'champion,' 'man of parts,' 'political candidate,' 'batchelor,' 'dandy,' 'lady-killer,' or 'tough guy' (1973c: 418).

The difficulty is that 'cock' is usually *siap* in low Balinese and *ayam* in high; and 'cockfight' is *tajèn*. Unfortunately *sabung* is certainly not everyday Balinese. So on this account they are, at the least, indulging in arcane witticisms, worthy of Oxbridge dons. Nor does *sabung* occur in any of the classic dictionaries (van Eck 1876; van der Tuuk 1897; nor the recent Kersten 1978; or Warna 1978). Nor does the term appear in Old Balinese or Old Javanese, nor yet archipelago Sanskrit (see Gonda 1952; Zoetmulder 1983).

This presents us, with a serious problem. For the word is Malay, the language of trade, and has been incorporated into official Bahasa Indonesia, both being little known until recently by most Balinese. Not only does it seem that the Balinese managed the remarkable feat of expressing their tender sentiments of love in a language which most of them did not speak, but they chose to pun on private parts in a similarly erudite way. Might this be due to some deep psychoanalytic need of the Balinese to speak of the unspeakable in a language few knew in the past? Granted the interest in, and fairly easy-going attitude to, the erotic it seems unlikely. In writing about Balinese personal names, Geertz stated to be 'arbitrarily coined nonsense syllables' (1973f: 369) what are in fact mostly common everyday words. The linguistic foundations of Geertz's symbology start to seem somewhat shaky. The revelation of what it is to be Balinese seems at least in part to be about someone else's symbols in someone else's tongue.

There are, of course, other characterizations of Balinese culture, upon some of which Geertz draws (Bateson 1949 was perhaps the first to elaborate a model using notions of play and drama for Bali). A slightly different image has been developed by Boon. He distinguishes between two styles of culture: epic and romantic.

Epic posits constant, consistently principled, heroic familial aristocracies, whose leaders establish the lawful and the just at the expense of the enemies of right. Romance portrays vulnerable disguised protagonists, partial social misfits who sense surpassing ideals and must prove the ultimate feasibility of actualizing those ideals often against magical odds (1977: 3).

So sweeping is the classification that Bali - if one can legitimately pigeonhole a culture - might be both, either or neither, by turns. To assist us, however, we are offered further bearings in the form of a 'syllogism' (*sic*):

If pre-Islamic Java were Renaissancelike in its elaborate schemes, certainly rivaling Plotinus or Plato, of the interrelation of cosmos, art, and society, then Bali was and is more loosely mannerist (1977: 6).

Where Geertz offered an extended image of Bali as thespian, Boon places it in a classification of literary genres. Either people are heroes battling in soldierly fashion for the good and right, but as slaves of their culture; or they are misfits questioning the system they have inherited and in search of higher (extra-cultural?) ideals. Reference to Western models of man is hardly accidental, for elsewhere Boon elaborates his image of Balinese as Eastern Romantics. Rather than draw any link between the world views of Indian and Balinese literati, he suggests that

a more apt comparison would link Balinese Brahmanas with German romantics: Both have sought to inform their sense of themselves and their exclusive role in society and literature by referring to Sanskrit texts and to Indic ideals of literary priesthood. In a way the Herders, Schlegels, and Novalises of Germany occupy a position vis-a-vis India analogous to that of the *Ida Baguses* and the *pedandas* of Bali (1982: 207).

Quite how the Balinese combine such different centuries and traditions in being at once Mannerist and Romantic is not explained. But Boon makes an important point here: the German Romantics used ideas current at the time about India to formulate their vision of their place in the world. Needless to say it was a curiously Western view of 'the Other'. Showing that our own tradition has pictured itself at one point in terms of its image of others is not, however, a very good reason for repeating the mistake; this time by reconstructing an entire people in terms of someone else's ideas of how the world, and human nature, ought to be.

There is a final model of Balinese society, which we need briefly to consider. It has been put forward by Bloch (1977) in a criticism of Geertz's views on definitions of person and time in Bali (esp. 1973f). He argues that while there is evidence that cultures define persons differently, as they do such diverse matters as interests, goals and even time; at another level there are shared conceptions of the way the world really is, as otherwise we could never translate or speak across cultural boundaries. What we have here is a dual theory of human nature. There is a culturally specific model underwritten by a necessarily universal account. Bloch's objections centre on the absence in a cultural account such as Geertz's or Boon's, of any way of explaining much of the practical action and political manipulation recorded in the Balinese ethnography. This is indeed a difficulty in Geertz's model of culture and human nature, but it does not follow that the only alternative is a universal account. For Bloch's vision of human nature looks remarkably like Utilitarian Man writ large and it is just as cultural in another sense as is Geertz's, and grounded on equally *a priori*, but different, assumptions. Instead of one account of human nature we have two such that whatever does not fit in the universal model (determined largely by what the analyst can make sense of) fits in the other. In place of the thinker and thespian, we have the shopkeeper or mercenary.

Some Balinese ideas about human nature

The degree to which explanations of action in Balinese society rest upon imported views of human nature should, I hope, be fairly clear from the foregoing account. How much does it matter though if we import explanatory theories or metaphors? Apart from involving us in a very dubious epistemological exercise, it tends to make nonsense of the ethnography.

For example, it has been suggested that Balinese social life is widely portrayed as a kind of theatre in which the actors strive to maximize control over the presentation of self, and fear forgetting their lines, as it were, or giving in to 'stage fright' (Geertz 1973f: 401-2). Now whose idea of self and theatre is this? For the Balinese speak of theatre as about reliving historical truth, *tattwa*, grand or squalid; not with representing something as something else. Geertz is using a vision of theatre from his own culture to explain what he argues to be Balinese ideas of their roles. This is simply a category mistake.

One also wonders how wise it is to define the proper subject matter of inquiry, what is inscribed, prior to an investigation of Balinese categories of speech and action. The point is not that we must be confined to their explicit accounts (for no one is suggesting that is necessarily why they do what they do), but that, as these are the categories in terms of which Balinese evaluate their own and other's speech and actions publicly, they form part of any full ethnographic account. So, to conclude I would like to outline very briefly Balinese representations of speech, action and human nature, and suggest that they are sufficiently different as to vitiate explanations based on alien presuppositions.

Balinese distinguish between two kinds of speech which people use in everyday life. The differences are important, as upon evaluation of these, depends the kind of interpretation which is put upon their 'meaning' (*arti*). Young, stupid and uncontrolled people are likely to speak straightforwardly what is on their minds or, as Balinese put it, speak 'the contents of their stomachs' (*isin basang*). Such immature speech, *raos nguda*, stands in contrast to *raos wayah*, which is what mature adult men and women should properly use. Such wiser, or more controlled people, speak less and enfold the point, *tetuwek*, beneath the surface, which is what fools and the young will read. Those who are more reflective understand how to unravel from hints, structured according to fairly well known cultural standards, what the true reference or purpose (*tetujon*) is. Arguably, it is not a matter of projecting various kinds of image, as Geertz's theatrical metaphor suggests, but of expressing the degree of one's self control in the kind of language one uses.

Balinese also have well-developed views on meaning and communication. For instance, terms like *sakadi* or *satmaka*, normally glossed as 'like' and 'as if', may be used explicitly not as part of a referential use of language, but metalingually, to express the degree of the speaker's commitment to the truth of what they are asserting. So the expressions are much used in reporting speech or claims by others, when the speaker needs to make clear that the accuracy of the account is uncertain, and further signifies the degree of likelihood that he or she places on the statement. When I have been working with Balinese, I have been struck by their care in the use of metaphor and analogy, where this can be avoided. It is remarkable that so much of the work on Bali happily assumes the Balinese have the same penchant as we, without considering the kinds of truth conditions the Balinese use in evaluating one another's statements.

What kinds of assumption do Balinese make about human nature then? The formal framework owes much to an adaptation of classical Hindu,

most notably Samkhya, accounts. Three schemes in particular have long been in general circulation.

<i>Triguna</i>	<i>Sattwa</i>	<i>raja(h)</i>	<i>tamas</i>
	Purity, knowledge	Passion, emotion	desire, ignorance
<i>Triwarga</i>	<i>Dharma</i>	<i>Artha</i>	<i>Kama</i>
	Disposition to do good or one's duty	pursuit of material utility	enjoyment of sensual pleasure
<i>Tiga-jnana</i>	<i>Idep</i>	<i>Sabda</i>	<i>Bayu</i>
	thought	speech	energy ²⁶

The *triguna* are the three constituents of human nature; the *triwarga* are the three aims of human life; and the *tiga-jnana*, the three forces manifest in various degrees in living forms, as well as the three kinds of knowledge that are associated with different living forms. The possible connections between the three sets allow many exegeses. The system offers, among other things, a comprehensive account of the Balinese Chain of Being. Animals (and plants) at one extreme are capable only of acting as systems of energy, or at best simple speech, seek sensual pleasure in eating and sexual intercourse, and live in a state of ignorant desire. Gods at the opposite pole approximate to pure thought, are motivated only by a disposition to do good and epitomize knowledge and purity. The higher they are the more remote, but also ineffectual they become, because they lack the capacity for speech and energy. The Balinese give this set of schemes, which they seem to have adapted from Samkhya, a twist of their own. For they link this model with a transformational view of the universe of their own. Everything is thought to be in a state of continuous transformation (*matemahan*). So for humans to stress only purity or knowledge, for instance, is dangerous as it easily leads to excess and madness (or darkness, ignorance). Rather balance should be preserved between each of the three states, in each system; although the precise point of balance depends upon what is fitting for people from different castes and for different personalities. The entire scheme is run through with several contextual clauses.

²⁶ The last triad is normally given in reverse order: energy, speech, action. I have altered this here, because of the connection between the qualities in each column. The last triad is also generally unnamed, although as Hooykaas, from whom the term is taken, notes it is of great explanatory importance in Bali (1964c: 26). For it provides the basis, among other things, for a classification of 'nature' (in our terms) of a quite non-Aristotelian kind. Other names used for the triad include '*tritattwa*'. The glosses in English are crude and designed only to give a rough idea of the kinds of quality at issue (for a helpful translation see Zoetmulder 1982).

Several points need to be made about these schemes. First we have here a fairly thoroughgoing account of human faculties, goals and ‘natural’ processes. It stands as a theory in its own right, because it is a consistent, systematic and exhaustive account; and fits closely with Samkhya philosophical thinking (Larson 1987). Second, this theory is determinedly tripartite and fits ill with European-derived dichotomies like pain/pleasure, altruism/egoism or psychoanalytical models. So it is unwise to transcribe alien distinctions, dual or otherwise, onto the Balinese without careful consideration beforehand. Third the schemes are common knowledge, not priestly esoteric models, and are presupposed, if often unreflectively, in their interpretation of disputes and action in daily life, so we ignore their relevance at our peril.

How are such schemes actually used though? At this point the possible ways of contextualizing presuppositions becomes important. Among the more common renderings was the link of *triwarga* with caste. For each caste notionally has a different *dharma*, or set of appropriate caste duties, which are laid out in various texts offering an authoritative discursive view of proper relations between the different estates. Once again, however, such schemes are open to multiple interpretation. For *dharma* was also seen either as the moral duty incumbent upon all human beings or as an ideal associated with *Brahmana* and priests in particular, whether of high or low caste. *Dharma* is characterized as well in everyday life as reflective thinking (*pemineh* or sometimes *manah* from *manas*, the organ, or faculty of internal thought) as opposed to thinking about how to fulfil one’s desires instrumentally (*keneh*). So *dharma* may be linked to caste duties of different kinds; it may be seen as the ideal of a few specialized, and dedicated, persons; it may be seen as a legitimate goal for all humans to strive for; or it may be the classification of one kind of thinking. Similar styles of contextualizing the classifications can be made for each of the other terms. So, on the one hand, terms may be contextualized singly; on the other, their connections may be stressed or further their possible links with other schemes like that of a transforming world. When a scheme like the *triwarga* is contextualized in this way, however, its authoritative aspects, stressed in the caste model, may undergo great change. For an excessive stress on purity, or duty, may lead the personality to a state of imbalance and into the commission of gross acts.

Use of Balinese representations of human nature leads to a quite different kind of possible interpretation of institutions than those normally given. Cocks fighting for dominance might more easily be examples of what humans should *not* do: rather than an extended theatrical play on Balinese society, they may equally be seen as a dramatic representation of

how not to behave. Cockfights occur obligatorily at temple festivals and other rites, when the destructive and atavistic, expressed as *bhuta* (demonic, but also what is blind and ignorant), have their moment. Importing Goffman fully fledged, before exploring a promising Balinese model, is to gild the tropic lily.

Such schemes, and their possible associations with other cultural representations, offer the Balinese a wide range of ways to contextualize day-to-day issues. In village affairs, for instance, past usage may be brought to bear. In matters to do with gods and custom, there is often concern to do what is appropriate and Brahmanical example, or advice, may be relied upon. Influential villagers develop clientele, like royal entourages; and striving for political advantage (which may be classified as seeking *artha*) may use the full trappings of princely statecraft in a humble way. When funds accumulate in local treasuries, villagers may eschew local leaders' plans to invest these productively in favour of cash in hand. Orators may be adept at stage techniques for putting their points across in meetings (not infrequently orators are actors to boot). So, perhaps we can characterize recognized roles like the thinker, the soldier prince, the public actor or the poor peasant, slave to his passions, as cultural paradigms in terms of which the Balinese themselves think and depict their society?

Just as it is possible to specify the cultural forms that ideas of human nature take, so we can give a preliminary specification of the styles or strategies of interpretation. So far I have treated these as labels, not as universal essential processes, as they obviously take different forms in different cultures and periods. We noted four commonly used ways of structuring and interpreting collective representations under the rather gruesome labels: essentializing, contextualizing, making do and elaborating. It may be useful to link these provisionally to popular Balinese words widely used in evaluating words and action. *Tattwa* is the term used of 'what makes something what it is' (Zoetmulder 1983: 1962). This is generally not available directly to humans who must work through texts, inference or revelation and it is often maintained that the Supreme Being, or intelligence, Sang Hyang Widhi alone knows this. So *nattwain* is to work towards the truth of something. In Old Javanese it has the added implication of 'the essential, the actual (as contrasted with the apparent or incidental). Sometimes *tattwa* 'is the concrete object in its essence, *katattwan* the abstract essence of the concrete object' (Zoetmulder 1983: 1962). So on one reading, if one village Balinese do not often seem to make, *tattwa* is directly linked to essentializing.

Often however things are to be understood in context to ensure they are appropriate, *manut*; and it is a common word to hear in meetings and discussion of interpretations of theatrical performances. Contextualizing is then *nganutang*, ‘fitting’. Obviously ensuring things are fitting is central to making pragmatic judgements, so *manut* has practical overtones. There is another words, however, which picks up some of the connotations in English which is *pasti*, definite, certain, which, as *mastiang*, may be used with the implications of ‘making certain that’, ‘determining’, ‘stating’. While theatre should be about *tattwa*, it is recognized that most people are sufficiently weak in *dharma* that it is necessary to appeal to their *kama*. So *tattwa* must be elaborated and decorated, *maiya*s, in words and action to make them palatable. It would clearly be possible to refine and add to these terms, but this should be adequate to make the point that these strategies or styles are not pure analyst’s importations.

The advantage of characterizing the Balinese in terms of cultural idioms which they have available, not the literary genres of Europe or America, of which the Balinese know not, is that we do not run the danger of creating a *bengkiwa* (a sterile hybrid, taken from the monstrosity born of mating two local breeds of duck). There are also many occasions on which the Balinese themselves appeal to such models in explaining the actions of others. However, this still remains an essentializing strategy. Other constructions may be put upon events. Ceremonies at which *Brahmana* are called in to officiate often fail to be moments of enactment of cultural ideals, being spoiled by bickering and fights over the division of costs. A sure road to eventual ruin in village politics is to ape one’s betters. Accepted roles may be contextualized in all sorts of different ways. After all, is an orator a thinker, a human version of a fighting cock, a shadow-puppet of some patron, or a man who likes the sound of his own voice? It may be any one, all or none.

Representations of human nature in Bali bear directly on the kinds of interpretation we may legitimately put upon their actions. If we wish to use the image of ‘negotiation’, which is the popular utilitarian and transactionalist image for how social relations are to be understood, then it might be well to include indigenous ideas of what negotiation is thought to be about. One might reasonably expect the Balinese to express the actions of others in terms of styles of transaction that are culturally available. For instance the kind of bartering image of humans, present in so much of the literature, would seem to be *prima facie* out of place in a society where it is court intrigue which plays so great a part in everyday life, and in theatre. I am not saying that there is some mechanical relationship between representations and action: merely that such representations are part of the

circumstances under which Balinese act and interpret the actions of others. Omitting such points is to omit a critical part of the ethnographic record. Reflecting on our own presuppositions is also a first step away from a pervasive ethnocentrism which scholarly studies may subtly perpetuate by searching for an essence, at worst imported outright, at best by reifying what happens among the people with whom they work.

Despite – or even because of – the amount of research on Bali, how little we know is becoming clear. The plethora of unexamined, but relevant, indigenous treatises and the degree of local variation alone suggest that generalizations are pretty spurious. Much of the material has reported assertions in particular situations as fact, and fact as truth. What we have mostly is a smattering of textual sources, partial dynastic chronicles and legal codes, the opinions of well-informed informants (priests, headmen, and marginal men; but rarely women) taken out of context and mapped onto nebulous paradigms of Western intellectual history, without regard for Balinese epistemological criteria. Balinese culture remains largely an invention of its commentators. There is much in Daniel Heinsius of Ghent's motto:

How much there is that we do not know!

Afterthoughts

In taking issue with some of the presuppositions we borrow to account for other peoples' doings, I am only hinting at the tip of an iceberg. When scholars extrapolate a set of symbols, or when they describe another culture in terms of how people there 'construct' or 'negotiate' their culture, what precisely are they doing? Is the implication that the existence of symbols or evidence of negotiation explains why people do what they do? To assume this would be to import further presuppositions of our own, about the relation of collective representations and events, about the relation of thought and action, and ideas about what constitutes an explanation which are far from fixed but a matter of our own cultural fashion. The explanation of action is a notoriously tricky business (see Anscombe 1957; White 1968). The sheer difficulties in providing an account of ordinary everyday behaviour in terms of the available models of intention, reason, cause and motive, suggests the potential weaknesses of our own ideas and another good reason not to impose them on others.

We need a kind of detailed knowledge of how people use their cultural representations which has to date rarely even been considered necessary.

There is evidence to suggest, for instance, that the Balinese use their ideas of human nature in different ways than we might be led to expect. The schemes they elaborate are not generally used to provide an efficient, or final, causal explanation of particular actions. These are often held to be effectively beyond explanation. Instead the models are used to provide a general account of the conditions under which actions take place. The Balinese, suitably in the light of recent Western problems in the philosophy of mind and action, tend to treat the question of intentions or reasons for doing something as private, if indeed knowable at all. Where we develop ever more sophisticated techniques for the examination and exposure of the person, under psychoanalysis and legal definitions of responsibility, the Balinese draw a polite veil. Some things they still leave to the person. There may be good professional grounds for our doing the same. For our illusion that we can explain the actions of others is a product as much of our tendency to essentialize and simplify, as it is of any realistic possibility of being able to do so. Context is too complex to allow such certainties. If I am right then the business of explaining others is likely to be much harder than we like to make out. If I am wrong, then, like Monsignor Quixote's illustrious ancestor, Don Quixote, I am tilting harmlessly at windmills.