

The Organic Presence of the Sign in Balinese Performance Texts

This paper is dedicated to my mentor and friend Saskia Kersenboom, Department of Anthropology, University of Amsterdam

The primary intention of this paper, although with as its main subject Balinese textuality, is to present an alternative, organic approach to the sign, one where the process of semiosis occurs in the the context of an embedded cultural situation. To do this, I refer to Balinese 'performance' texts which can not be viewed in terms of the traditional dichotomy which exists between the definition of 'textuality' supposedly maintained between *literate* and *oral* cultures: the Balinese are neither radically 'oral' by nature nor 'literate'. The way we look at 'texts' has to be extended in such a way that it is possible for the 'text' to exist in its Ricoeurian sense on paper (or in the Balinese case, on palm leaves which are widely referred to as *lontar*), but also for the textual model to be able to encompass the dynamic sensuality of performance, a 'meaning' which continually changes depending on the needs of individuals. In order to understand the sign we have to understand cultural texts which continually reinscribe a given culture into the present, and at the same time we have have to examine which means are used to make a text sensual and organic, functioning to bring the text into the presence of the present, into the reality of the observer.

In order to realise the approach to the sign and text discussed above, the following major steps will be transgressed in this paper:

- (i) The prevailing *Langue/Parôle* paradigm characteristic of much semiotic thought regarding the sign and its semiosis is brought into question;
- (ii) A third category which accounts for dynamic change in performance is introduced to extend the duality to a three angled form, allowing and accounting for the dynamism of individual subjectivity, creating an 'embedded sign'. This third element is, of course, *Langage*;
- (iii) The term 'text' is redefined as a specific tool used for cultural perpetuation realised in real space/time environments and in every way 'multi-medial' (combining different forms of media such as language, music and images) which contrasts with a Ricoeurian approach to text;
- (v) The inscribed 'texts' of the Balinese shadow play (*Wayang Kulit*) are referred to and viewed in the context of their *Lebenswelt*: these texts are demonstrated to function as embedded signs which form a blue-print for the Balinese sense of selfhood.
- (vi) Finally, the dynamic "musical" element is brought into play, one which touches not only on the musical nature of the texts themselves-an important significative element for the Balinese in the process of semiosis-but

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also the *Gendèr Wayang* (the musical accompaniment to the shadow puppet theatre performance) which functions very much to give the performance dynamic and organic meaning in the context of the performance of the inscribed 'texts'. The music forms a thread between the iconic nature of the ancient texts and their symbolic reinscription in the present.

It seems remarkable today at the dawn of a new millennium to discover that Jakobson was busy making rifts in the world of contemporary theory closer to the beginning of this century. In 1919 he wrote in Moscow that "the overcoming of statics, the expulsion of the absolute-here is the essential turn for the new era, the burning question of today" (Jakobson, quoted in Kersenboom, 1995). Today, at the entrance into a new age, the third millennium, it seems all the more pertinent, especially considering that we seem to have taken very few steps forwards in the theoretical world (and lots of steps backwards) since Jakobson's daring statement. The following paragraphs will involve major icons of twentieth century thought in the field of semiotics, and shall discuss the importance of transcending many of these icons in order to present a new theoretical paradigm for a new age. Some alternative suggestions are presented as to how we can interpret these 'icons' of contemporary thought as a result of recent multi-disciplinary research.

We are all very familiar with the famous duality presented by the two terms which were introduced by Saussurian linguistics and developed during the *Tels Quels* era: 'Langue' and 'Parôle'. These terms have proved of great importance to the field of semiotics and have formed at the same time a hard-core epistemological basis for many researchers in the field. Langue, on the one hand, represents a complete system in which all the rules are neatly contained, a type of transcendental truth to which each of us has access but can never individually express. This is a truth which constantly eludes true expression because of the imperfection of the human being and his speech acts. *Langue* (or 'Competence') is the goal of Chomsky's "Universal Grammar" theory and ultimately of Western science in general, and can also be seen as being the foundation point of structuralism. Then we have on the other hand Parole, the imperfect realisation, which in terms of linguistics could simply be described as an incomplete realisation of Langue. According to linguistics and (empirical) science, by exploring enough instances of Parole we can come to some sort of conclusion about the true nature of *Langue*. So where is the individual, the subjective self, the ego who literally creates the world by reinscribing the past in the present? In terms of Langue and Parole, this is unaccounted for. But at the same time we are forgetting a third term introduced by Saussure: Langage. With this term Saussure does attempt to encompass this aspect of human understanding, although he and his successors lacked the epistemological foundation to develop this area. The traditional and simplistic interpretation is that *Langage* can be defined as a combination of *Langue* (the system) and Parole (all possible expressions), creating an enormous totality, one which Saussure shied away from it because he lacked the theoretical methods to approach its totality. In the context of this paper an extended interpretation shall be discussed.

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If we take a look at the diagram below, we can see the famous and elusive third element of the triangle: Langage. We can begin by describing Langage as the 'phenomenological ground' which is open to the individual during the process of semiosis. Langage is not actually a 'thing', an iconic figure to which we ascribe meaning, but is actually a potentiality, an array of possibilities which we as individuals have open to us in a dynamic spatial/temporal context. It is literally the infinitely wide-range of significative possibilities open to the individual, and was logically avoided by Saussure who preferred to view it from within the safe terrain of Langue and Parole. In this model, then, an individual makes an utterance or performs a ritual act: he/she chooses from a 'pool' of possibilities available thanks to the Langue-like communication system, and then brings it into reality into the form of Parole, a single imperfect realisation of Langue's purity. It is thanks to Langage that the individual is able to subscribe his or her own meanings to this speech or performative act in the context in which the action itself takes place. i.e. environmental circumstances can change the meaning of an individual utterance.

The next step in this short journey is to bring Peirce into the main-action, the man who attempted in his own special way to form a truly universally applicable phenomenological theory for understanding reality; a new language for science which would get us closer to the 'real' truth. His notion was that although 'reality' itself was essentially unfathomable, we attempt to get closer to it by creating signs. Like the model described above, his model was also divided into (a complex series of) trichotomies. It was Peirce's basic idea that our understanding of reality is based on our ability to represent it: this was quite revolutionary for its time, and continues to influence science by providing a universally applicable scientific language, a similar goal longed for by Hüsserl. Unfortunately in terms of this study our interest in Peirce's work stops after introducing his famous sign trilogy: ICON, INDEX and SYMBOL, as illustrated in the diagram below. Peirce's longing to get to the 'real' reality by attempting to create a pure language of icons moved him over the edge of phenomenology to problematic essentialism. Post Merleau-Pontian philosophy has demonstrated clearly that reality-or our conception of reality (through human culture)-can not simply be divided into a number of different universal categories: it is a far more dynamic and complex system which can only be worked towards by turning to other disciplines. Many contemporary theorists can provide us with some new insights which transcend Peirce's and Saussure's epistemological limitations. Frank Smith, renown for his work as a psycholinguist and pedagogical theorist, presented a remarkable theory in which the brain is viewed as an "artist - as a creator of experience for itself" (Smith, 1985: 195). which forms a 'theory of the world', one that is in a constant state of dynamic change, adjusting and updating itself to cope with a changing environment. According to Smith, "Fantasy is not reality manipulated; reality is a fantasy constrained by the objective world" (Smith, 1985: 200). In other words, reality is but a fantasy, an individual creation, and usually one which works and is common to a cultural group, especially if they have common 'objective' sources which they can use to base this understanding. Saskia Kersenboom, herself a linguistic anthropologist, can also provide us with an interesting approach: she sees human culture as a performing art, based on the conception that "all that we can achieve and know"

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(Kersenboom, 1996) is what we can experience on the human 'stage' of cultural experience and in real space-time environments. Everything beyond that stage is not provided for in by our culture, and the only way we can perceive that darkness is by giving it a form which fits into our pattern of understanding, one provided to us by our culture. Both these approaches distance us from a quest towards an attainment of transcendental, universally true knowledge, placing us clearly in the dynamism of the individual's learning experience, reacting and interacting with his/her environment in order to create a theory for understanding the world, and testing these theories by "throwing them at the world"¹ in the form of human performance.

With these insights as a foundation, I would like to draw your attention to Jakobson's (rather unconventional and certainly most applicable in the context of this work) interpretation of Peirce's work. Jakobson refers to his famous sign three angled form in a temporal context. He sees the ICON as something which represents the 'past', and the INDEX as something which represents (re-presents?) the present. The SYMBOL, however, is not a time based factor, but a 'loi-cadre' or as I have interpreted it, a 'rule-frame', or even better, a 'frame of reference'.

"A l'opposé de l'indice comme de l'icône, suivant la théorie de Peirce, le symbole n'est pas un objet, mais seulement une loi-cadre qui donne lieu à différentes applications contextuelles de fait, les occurrences" (Jakobson, 1980: 91).

This is a reference system that provides us with choices, with a potentiality for individual interpretation which makes the act of the 'performance' of a 'text' so much more a dynamic, creative process for all involved parties. The analogy is clear: as illustrated in the diagram below, according to Jakobson the staticity we connect to the past can only have meaning when it is brought into the present by way of the performance (Parole), the indexical nature of the sign, and that it is only according to the individual's dynamic symbolic interpretation at a given moment that a text can have a meaning: in many cases, especially in non-literate cultures or cultures with 'partially' literate texts such as the Balinese, a text isn't considered to have a meaning until it is brought into life through performance. I shall from now on refer to this approach to the sign as the 'embedded' approach.

To make this model all the more clear I would like to present a particularly exciting example from the hand of Kersenboom herself.² This particular example involves a cultural sign, in this case the Virgin Mary, as realised in a particular 'embedded' Russian Orthodox context. In a given church, the picture of the Virgin Mary is the ICON: thanks to cultural texts such as the Bible, and the iconic extension of strong western media such as film, literature and television, our society presents us with a strong iconic image of what the Virgin Mary signifies, even if we never consciously think about it. As part of an act of worship, a woman lights a candle and places it in front of the image. The lighting of the candle is a ritual act, one which functions to bring the iconic meaning

¹ These notes were taken from Lectures given by Dr. Saskia Kersenboom in the 1995-1996 academic year at the University of Amsterdam: The Multi-Medial Text .

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of the sign to fruition, which in this case comes to bear as the "Milk of Human Kindness." Because it is a symbolic potentiality there are many different possibilities: another example could be "the Eternal Mother" or "the Purity of Womanhood," or whichever meaning the individual may symbolically apply to the sign. Through performing (in terms of Jakobson's interpretation of Peirce) an 'indexical' act, the worshipper triggers the symbolic potentialities dormant in her very phenomenological being, and in this way brings into the present a sense of self-hood which has been made very much her own in the process described above.

The lesson is simple: how do we understand reality? By creating signs. How do we substantiate this reality? By testing our signs, often in the form of performative, indexical acts committed in a dynamic space/time context. How do we test our signs? By literally "throwing them into the world to see if they work" (to quote Kersenboom's own words)³ in a Smithian sense, to test our "theories of the world" by comparing the objectively sensed reality with our symbolic conception of it. This performance is the ritual act of discovering, of learning, something we as individuals have done since the moment we were born and will do until the moment we die.

This model is unique perhaps because of its ability to encompass cultural change. The world is always in a constant state of change anyway, and for signs to retain an embedded cultural value the icons are constantly updated so that they can be brought into the present by indexical methods which suit our new approach to knowledge (including sensuous knowledge), and which can still provide us with 'symbolic' satisfaction. In terms of our example, however, the iconic nature of the image of the Virgin Mary has in many cases and places not been able to change quick enough to keep up with the rapidly changing nature of our own culture: its indexical realisation does not provide the symbolic opportunities it used to. This has resulted in the abandonment of traditional forms of ritual/religious expression, leading us to new epistemologies which are far distant from the old ones, and thus a lot less people go church than in the past.

The Balinese culture, in contrast, have a cultural system in which one can find a dynamic approach to their 'texts', one which has allowed much more religious adaption to take place. The Sanskrit term 'Desa Kala Patra' is of particular significance here, as it is one which has been appropriate by the Balinese. Like our model of the sign, the Balinese notion of 'meaning' is dependent on where and when the event takes place, in other words, the signification of the sign depends on a temporal and spatial context. Translated from Sanskrit, Desa refers to 'region' (space), Kala refers to time and Patra to 'vessel', which can be seen as the impersonation of a given act in a given context. According to the Balinese, the meaning of something could change depending on when it happens, where it happens and by whom, suggesting that they have a model which is much more conducive to socio-cultural change. It is also forms part of a Lebenswelt which continues to frustrate western theoreticians and practitioners who attempt to analyse their culture and are searching for 'truths' in terms of a western epistemological model. The ability of the Balinese to adapt their 'signs' to cultural change shall become clear in

² ibid.

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the remaining section of this paper.

With the conception of the 'embedded sign' in mind, I believe that we have the theoretical facilities to approach the expression of a cultural text, although it is first important to clarify in further detail the approach to text which forms the foundation of much western thought, present in the work of two important French theoreticians, Ricoeur and Barthes. Each of them have presented opposing interpretations for this ambiguous term. Ricoeur, for example, starts by defining a text as being simply "any discourse fixed by writing" (Ricoeur, 1981: 145). He suggests further that there is a deep distinction between the role of the 'writer' and the 'reader'. When the writer lifts his pen, the text becomes divorced from the writer and is "free to enter into relation with all the other texts which come to take place of the circumstantial reality referred to by living speech" (Ricoeur, 1981: 145-149). The reader, then, when reading the text takes it from its Langue-like state, retaining no sensual connection with the author or the act of writing itself. Here the relation of the text to its creation seems to be obliterated, which is problematic in terms of a Balinese sense of meaning because it is only in a texts 'reinscription' in the present that it is considered to have any meaning. Texts don't even have 'authors': they are largely anonymous. After each performance, the texts have been literally 'written' again in a new and dynamic context. Barthes, in comparison to Ricoeur, finds an interesting comparison between a [completed literary] 'work' and a 'text', concepts which according to him contrast highly. The notion of 'work' seems to refer better to Ricoeur's conception of 'text' in that it is written, completed discourse, an object which fixes knowledge into a permanent form: "the work is a fragment of substance, occupying a part of the space of books (in a library for example)." He sees the approach to the 'work' as something which has to be transcended in western theory, and provides in its place a dynamic new meaning to the concept of text: "the Text is experienced only in an activity of production" (Barthes, 1977: 157). This notion of Text, where Barthes envisages it as something in motion which encompasses more than just its literal contents, seeing it even as being "radically symbolic," (Barthes, 1977: 158) referring to the "stereographic plurality of its weave of signifiers" (Barthes, 1977: 159). Here Barthes refers to text in its original etymological sense, as it relates to its original Latin signification: *texere* means 'weave', from which the English word 'textile' has also evolved (Sykes, 1976: 1197). Contemporary research into non-western cultures has developed this further and clearly demonstrated that it is simply not possible to view 'texts' as static 'works' in a Barthesian sense, but as dynamic 'processes' actualised in temporal/spatial contexts. This is of course particularly applicable to Balinese performance texts.

Kersenboom has demonstrated in her work (Kersenboom. 1995) that Tamil 'texts' which have been written-or rather inscribed-on leaves known as 'oleh' actually play the primary role of being memory aids to complex multi-medial performance acts, and not the complete literary 'works' themselves as has been incorrectly presupposed by many western scholars (according to Kersenboom). The meaning of the text has to be applied to a particular space time environment, and the actual single fixed interpretation which is longed for by western

³ *ibid.*

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scholarship is not possible because-referring again to the Sanskrit *Desa Kala Patra* analogy-the meaning of the texts change just as the culture changes. The Balinese also have their written texts: according to Zurbuchen Old Javanese poems, treatises and didactic works which were written in central Java during the 9th century, were brought to Bali to be studied and copied onto palm-leaf manuscripts (Zurbuchen, 1987: 14). Zurbuchen provides us with further insight: "The writing materials used down to the present in this tradition are specially prepared leaves (*ran*) of the tal palm (hence the words *rontal* and *lontar*, describing manuscripts), into which letters are cut using a small, pointed blade" (Zurbuchen, 1987: 43). Like their Javanese forefathers, the texts were inscribed and reinscribed, which resulted naturally in gradual change, and were also used as a basis for an entire performance tradition, one which will be elucidated further in this paper. The Balinese, like the Tamils, have an existing 'literary tradition' made up of these written texts, but Zurbuchen goes further in saying that we as Europeans "need to have a clearer understanding of how the biases of Western literary studies have coloured our understanding of 'literariness' as it exists for the Balinese" (Zurbuchen, 1987: 25) and has objected to the fact that western scholars have "persistently chosen not to look at performance and contextual aspects of literature in Bali" (Zurbuchen, 1987: 23). According to her, "our understanding of the terms "'literature' and 'text'" must "extend beyond the margins of the typographically fixed page and permit the values of sound in verbal art, the oral/aural literary mode, to dwell alongside our dominant visual orientation towards literature" (Zurbuchen, 1987: 23). In the cases of both Tamil and Balinese inscribed literature, the knowledge implicit in the texts is obviously transferred in a far more complex form than simply through accessing an objective, transcendent pool of textual knowledge; this is dynamic, sensuous knowledge. At this stage I would like to make a proposal: cultural texts are little more than tools which members of a culture can employ to help form their 'theory of the world', providing a sort of blueprint for reality. Thanks to such texts we are able to probe into that dark space beyond the 'stage of human performance', in other words we are able to explore the phenomenological ground which our culture provides us with by using these texts as tools of experiential understanding.

This is particularly true for the so-called *lontars* which are actually the texts used in Balinese *Wayang Kulit* (shadow-puppet theatre). Again in comparison to Ricoeur's image of the 'text' as being distant from a particular time and place, the Balinese see the textual transferal of knowledge quite differently. For us, the sign in a text has a meaning behind it which we ascribe to it. To the Balinese, however, there is no such distinction. The word itself-or the sound of the utterance of the word-contains an almost 'magical' power in the sense of performative speech acts (see Tambiah, 1985: 17-59). According to Lansing, Balinese texts are not in actual fact 'read', but 'sounded': he has created a theory for the 'sounding' of Balinese texts which is embedded in a different concept of textuality, one in which words and music have power in their own right. This is further demonstrated by the two different forms of *Wayang Kulit* which both play an important role in Balinese life. The lesser-known form performed during the day known as *Wayang Lemah* is particularly interesting because the *dalang* is used almost purely for ritual functions. In this case, there is not often even an audience to watch the action: the performance of the text has a ritual function which is designed for the gods. In this case, it is obvious that the 'meaning'

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implicit in the words is so strong that it doesn't even have to be heard by an audience for it to have meaning: the meaning is implicit in the very act of its performance. The better known form, performed at night, is Wayang Peteng where an audience comes with the specific purpose of participating in a Wayang Kulit performance. Here there is a story to be told, even though a particularly new meaning may be attributed to it. It is this form of Wayang Kulit which will be discussed in the latter part of this paper.

"The sounding of the texts brings written order into the world, displaying the logos which lies beyond the illusions of mundane existence. Obviously, for this to be effective the stories told must bear an important resemblance to events in the lives of the hearers, or audience. Consequently, it is one of the distinguishing characteristics of serious Balinese drama, shadow theatre (wayang), or other soundings of the texts that the performers must not decide on the story to be told until they have assessed the needs of the audience" (Zurbuchen, 1987: 39).

In the fragment above Balinese performance texts are demonstrated to differ from our own written forms because they are naturally thought to retain such a moment of the presence in each new interpretation. The Balinese have developed complex systems for 'reading' or 'sounding' their texts. The obvious example is of course the Wayang Kulit performance itself, where the dalang brings ancient Balinese, Javanese and Sanskrit texts to life by presenting them in a form which is understandable by the Balinese audience. He achieves this by having the texts spoken by the higher caste royal or godly characters brought into the present by using particularly unique 'clown'-type characters known as parekan who seem to be able to move freely between the discourses and time-frames of the gods and royal figures, and the audience, translating this information into a language the audience can understand and also interacting with the texts in a particularly unique way, providing extra signification. The language the texts are translated into is usually one of the forms of Balinese, although these characters have also been known to speak Indonesian and English depending on contents of the audience. The method the Balinese have developed for their dalangs to learn these ancient texts is particularly interesting and is significant to this discussion. In Bali, the complex rigidity of social-life is well-known and discussed by many researchers and scholars. Lansing, in an earlier work, discusses the Balinese notion of *kaikêt* (Lansing, 1974: 1) which can be interpreted as being 'tied' in a complex system of families, groups, clubs and unions, and it is only by being *kaikêt* that one can be human: the greatest Balinese fear is to be banished from their village and to lose this complex system of connections.

Outside the family, one of the smallest units of connection is the 'club' or *seka*. There are *seka* for almost everything from cleaning the street to playing gamelan, although the *seka* which is of particular significance here is known as *sekehe bebasan*. It is in such a group that the ancient Balinese texts are 'read' or 'sounded' (as Lansing would refer to it). When a man has reached a certain age where he is considered to have reached a stage where he should take a greater interest in learning about and perpetuating his culture, he joins such a club.

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According to Hobart, men are "still considered responsible for the perpetuation of the cultural heritage. Particularly as they grow older, men become increasingly concerned with philosophical, religious and literary matters" (Hobart, 1987: 185) A group of men get together and discuss the 'meaning' of certain of the famous Lontar texts which have been inherited from Java, although attention is paid not only to the 'literal' meaning, but also to the sounds of the words themselves: the words are not considered to be 'read' correctly if they have not been 'intoned' in the right fashion: here returns the notion of meaning being embedded in the action of recital. Below is an interesting passage from Lansing's work in this regard:

"A reader intones a line from the text, which may have to be repeated if he strays from the correct metrical pattern. Next, another reader will propose a spontaneous translation into modern colloquial Balinese. Once the 'meaning' has been tacitly agreed on by all those present, the first reader chants the next line" (Lansing, 1983: 79).

Such a recital of the Balinese texts is the basis for the dalang's ability to bring the meaning of the performance to the audience not only through the literal content of the 'text', but through the complex weave of sound, music and theatricality which is so characteristic of Wayang Kulit performance. Not only is the programme accompanied by 'music' (the Gendèr Wayang repertoire), but the text itself is also of a musical nature. It is interesting to note that it is at these sekehe bebasan meetings that the dalang learns the texts he will later interpret into his complex multi-medial performance.

During a Wayang Kulit performance which involves the explication of certain ancient texts, the audience is subjected to much more than simply words. As a result of the orchestration of the media, they "are affected by the patterns of meaning conveyed by the various dramatic components" (Hobart, 1987). The parekan, or clown characters mentioned above play a similar role to the other readers in the sekehe bebasan who provide spontaneous translations of the text. The dalang, however, provides a particular depth to the parekan, who are the characters responsible for linking the textual nature of the performance with the symbolic necessities of the audience. A Balinese audience can be very critical if the dalang does not provide them with a good performance, in other words one which provides them with symbolic potential for expression in their own lives or significance to the particular ritual context for which the dalang has been summoned. The parekan are responsible for uniting all the media involved, bringing a variety of musical and textual levels into unison in such a way that the audience is provided with extra levels of signification. No performance of Wayang Kulit, of course, is ever quite the same: we can refer here once again to the Sanskrit phrase *Desa, Kala, Patra*.

These texts, therefore, are clearly complex tools, forming blueprints for the Balinese sense of selfhood. Their symbolic and indexical status are in a constant process of adaptation according to the rapid changes that occur in

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the contemporary world. Although taken from ancient Indian and Javanese epics, these texts are "ingeniously modified and adapted to fit the Balinese context" (Hobart, 1987: 16). The Balinese use images, characters, sounds and melodies as a constant source of reference, and these symbols are considered to be of high educational value: young people are always encouraged to go and see performances. Hobart states in her important work on the subject that the characters and events which take place are used as blueprints for the Balinese understanding of experience, meaning that the enactment of wayang performance texts presents an epistemological basis for the Balinese. In the Balinese language they even have words which refer to the characters in the drama, words which exemplify particularly admirable or undesirable characteristics. An example is the verb *sekai Dursana*, which means "to be like Dursana" or in other words to have all the bad qualities of the prince, implying that the person to whom the word is referring is bad-tempered and unfriendly (Hobart, 1987: 187). Wayang symbolism is also used to refer to things outside the Balinese Habitus in the sense meant by Bourdieu⁴ in that the Balinese bring foreign objects into their scope of understanding, into the field of textuality which is familiar to their *Lebenswelt*, by attributing to them characteristics from Wayang characters or symbolism. An example from Hobart's book elucidates this 'inscription of external elements into a common textuality' particularly well:

"In the course of my fieldwork, a large, hairy, pink-faced Australian came to my village. His movements were ungainly and he seemed to look down on others. One of a group of villagers passing by instantly applied the following epithet to him: *dageg Dèlem*, proud and pompous like *Dèlem*, the Korawa servant. So the villagers' experience of the foreigner was aired and pooled. As an unknown entity he also posed a threat which was neutralised once he was incorporated into a framework which all comprehended and shared" (Hobart, 1987: 188).

Balinese texts, realised in a dynamic spatial/temporal context, are complex meaning bearing systems which are very much tied up with a sensual poetics, a notion of meaning directly connected with the dynamics of the performance of ritual acts. Although the texts are 'written' in that they are recorded on palm-leaf manuscripts, the Balinese culture itself can certainly not be defined as being 'radically literate' as we could view our own culture because of the varying contexts in which the texts are used. Gender Wayang performance, certainly the most important vehicle for the perpetuation of Balinese culture, is in a continuous state of inscription and reinscription of these texts into the present. The factor which makes these texts so much part of the present is the multi-medial performance forms adopted. Firstly we can refer to the musical nature of the texts, but secondly to the indexical function of the music, which literally directs the attention of the gods and the audience to the performance, making it very much a part of the presence of the present, an organic *nowness* implicit in musical performance, making it tangible and sensuous. If texts are the tools we use to explore that space which exists in the dark area beyond the stage of our human performance, as Kersenboom might say, then music is the closest

⁴ The unconscious logic of social practice, or the epistemological foundation for textual acts, see Bourdieu 1990.

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we may get to reaching that ineffable extreme, an area unaccountable for in other communication systems but necessary for our understanding of the organic nature of our existence as beings alive on the world at this moment. I would like to end this paper by referring to a particularly interesting quotation from a major work by Lansing, one which refers to this element of our musical experience of the world:

"Music is never merely ornamental, it is an integral part of the process by which the boundaries between the words are made permeable. The sounds of powerful words are mingled with the flow of music, which has the power to shape and bend time itself, in the minds of the hearers. The flow of sounds creates a tempo, a perceived rhythm of time. Thus as the texts are sounded, performers and even members of the audience are caught up in the flow, experiencing sounds to which they fit their movements, their thoughts, and ultimately, perhaps, their whole perception. Obviously this is not only a Balinese phenomenon; it is the common human experience of music" (Lansing, 1983: 88-89).

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