beyond the words: the power of resonance

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As I was completing the manuscript of my book on Bali (1990a), I felt a deep sense of puzzlement. Something seemed wrong, and it was not that Balinese, as portrayed by me, were so different from those of major anthropological works. I was reconciled to that, and quite prepared to stand up for my own interpretation. What troubled me, on the other hand, was that the Balinese of my account should seem so plain and ordinary, so nonexotic.

True, they did believe in black magic and that one could speak with the souls of the dead and so forth. But that did not detract from the fact that they seemed basically like you and me, picking their way about the world much as we do, and living by the same sort of stratagems. The Balinese of Bateson, Belo, Mead, and Clifford Geertz, by contrast, seemed to come out of another world. And they were brilliantly exotic.

To give you an idea of what I have in mind, we might note Bateson and Mead's notion of a lack of climax in Balinese affairs (1942:32f.). Or their assertion that Balinese are entirely confused if they lose their sense of direction, of knowing "which way is north" (1942:6). Or Belo's observation that "the babies do not cry, the small boys do not fight. . . . The women accept without rancor the role of an inferior. . . . The system of stratification works smoothly as a rule, and all those individuals who conform to it seem happy" (1970 [1935]:106–109). Or Geertz's observation that Balinese have no selves beyond what is encapsulated in their masks (1984 [1974]:128). Or his argument that they are guided not by morality, but by aestheticism: "to please the gods, to please the other . . . but to please as beauty pleases, not as virtue pleases" (1973a [1966]:400).

What I, at least, gathered from such accounts was that the Balinese were truly, as Geertz had said, impossible to meet. They even do not "meet" one another (1973a [1966]:365). Those I met, by contrast, though puzzling in many ways, seemed to reach out to me in a very recognizable way.

Now there might be various reasons for the discrepancy in our accounts, and I tried to speculate. I had focused on people's ordinary, everyday affairs, not their colorful rituals and ceremonies. But so, to some extent, had Bateson, Belo, Mead, and Geertz. What is more, those authors *converged* in their accounts; their Balinese resembled one another, though they had

The article juxtaposes a Balinese theory of translation endorsing resonance with Davidson's maxim of "passing theories," as rendered by Rorty, to explore how convergence is achieved in actual, everyday life. But the article is not an exercise in the anthropology of language. It addresses the issue of how we as persons can live together in the world and understand one another—with our cultural differences. Thus the concern is with morality and pragmatics, and implications for fieldwork method and anthropological representation. I advocate a focus on persons in lived situations, rather than discourse, and suggest that resonance is the crucial—and charitable—orientation that allows us to go beyond the words to engage people's compelling concerns. [resonance, culture, discourse, translation, fieldwork method, Bali]

been studied by different persons at different places and different times. Had I then missed an important dimension? Why was my study lacking—as I felt it was—in exotic features?

There was a second reason for my sense of puzzlement. I had written a book that aimed to convey the lived experience of actual Balinese, yet I had not told what they did for a living, or what their political (in the narrow sense of the term) concerns were. I had, paradoxically, preached the virtues of contextualizing interpretations and positioning actors and anthropologist while leaving actors, in these respects, floating in the air. Again, what was wrong?

translation

I am posing these questions as my way of entry into the problem of translation. In the end, and when there was still time to remedy these faults or omissions, Balinese came to my rescue and convinced me it was all right what I had done. Of course, they did not simply read my manuscript and pass a final judgment. But inadvertently this was the message they gave me when, on my last visit (in March 1989), I engaged some men—or they engaged me—in a discussion of epistemology, and they proposed a theory of translation which, I believe, holds potential general relevance.

I shall link this theory to a theory of language and communication as proposed by Donald Davidson and elaborated by Richard Rorty in his book *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989). I shall further *use* these theories to reflect upon my fieldwork in three other "cultures"—in Egypt, Oman, and Bhutan—trying thus to test out their more general applicability to fieldwork methodology and transcultural understanding. Last, I shall trace some implications of our taking in earnest what these theories purport for the concept of culture, arguing that it needs to be fundamentally reworked if we are to help build a world based on enhanced understanding among peoples.

What the two theories have in common, as I see it, is that each advocates a procedure of going beyond words, of looking past outer trappings and semblances to that which counts more, similarities in human experience.[1] Moreover, they converge in being anchored in "practical reason" (Schutz 1970)—a universe of moral discourse about how best to learn in order to live, and vice versa. To put it in Rorty's words:

> The view I am offering says that there is such a thing as moral progress . . . in the direction of greater human solidarity, . . . thought of as the ability to see more and more traditional differences (of tribe, religion, race, customs, and the like) as unimportant when compared with similarities with respect to pain and humiliation—the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of "us." [1989:192]

His words echo those of a Balinese priest and healer who upon lecturing my husband on the stark differences between the world religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam—concluded with a bright smile: "You see, completely different, exactly the same!" (Barth In press a).

This sameness in the face of diversity is my starting point and ultimate concern. It is born not of conviction but of the reluctant realization of a confirmed cultural relativist that the stance I had embraced was neither substantiated by my own experience cross-culturally, nor does it prove a feasible way to live. Robert Paul has warned us to take care not to build theories that contradict our "own actual experience of what being alive is like" (1990:433). This article is an exercise in that spirit.[2] I begin with the Balinese theory that first opened my eyes to these issues.

convergence of tongues

I once went with a Muslim friend to a Hindu *balian,* or traditional healer. My friend was in great pain, for her family had long been afflicted with a series of misfortunes. She had tried to

alleviate their suffering by seeking the help of healers—all Muslim, as she told me—from all over Bali. When her efforts had proved all in vain, I convinced her to come with me to this Hindu healer. He was a man I understood her to hold in high respect, for she had been the one to introduce me enthusiastically to him.[3]

She had argued against it. It would be of no use. The *balian* would treat her as if she were a Hindu and prescribe remedies consonant with his religion. But she proudly considered herself a fanatic Muslim *(orang Islam fanatik)* and was so esteemed by her community. When now she agreed to accompany me, she stressed that it was only as a friend, and to help me in my work. She would *not* bring up her own problems with the *balian*.

When the *balian* saw my friend, his face lit up. He was so glad she had come. Actually, he had been waiting for her. He knew all about her problem, which had three causes. And taking her in with his broad, contagious smile, he proceeded to explain. Both black magic and supernatural spirits were involved. But third, and most important, was an oath that her husband's ancestors had made to the gods to place offerings in the Muslim holy place once they became prosperous enough to go there. They had not kept their promise and this constituted a grave sin in the eyes of the gods. That was why her family had been so afflicted.

My heart sank as I listened. I was distraught to think that she would now have her worst suspicions confirmed. This talk of oath and ancestors and offerings in the Muslim holy place (presumably Mecca) reeked even to me of idolatry and ancestor worship. What must not she—a fanatic Muslim—think! (And as Balinese give little public clue to what they think, I was left to suffer through my distress, only half listening to their conversation. To be frank, I felt slightly let down. Surely, the *balian* could have managed better.)

But on the way home my friend's face was luminous and her voice buoyed with hope. It was true, all that he had said: the black magic, the supernatural spirits, and particularly the oath. She would take it upon herself to remedy the faults of the ancestors. She would make a promise to God that very night. And she launched into a long, enthusiastic appraisal of the *balian*'s wisdom and erudition, which, perforce, I must cut short. Her eulogy ended with the words "He says *karma pala,* I say *taqdir*—it's all the same!"

In terms of religious ideology it certainly is not, and she should know, she is reputed for her religious learning. *Karma pala* is the doctrine of reincarnation, according to which one's fate in this life is determined by actions (of oneself or the ancestors) in previous lives. But for Muslims there *is* only one life; and so *taqdir* (fate or destiny) refers merely to God's omnipotence in deciding what the course of *that* life will be. Nor, for Muslims, should *oath* have any meaning, for the ancestors are powerless to afflict you by what they do or fail to do. Only God has such power.

So I brushed off my friend's facile reconciliation of major theological differences as the wishful thinking of an afflicted soul desperately in search of meaning and relief. Perhaps so did you? I did not even ask: what could she be meaning to say by her words? What was at stake? To me, *karma pala* and *taqdir* are "completely different," not at all "exactly the same." If words do not actually stand for themselves, there must at least be limits to how one can circumvent them.

resonance and appreciation

It was a long time afterwards, and I was sitting with a group of scholars pondering Western views of knowledge in a comparison with Balinese epistemology. They belonged to a *lontar* society, an association devoted to the study of sacred scriptures harboring age-old wisdom, and were all very learned: one was a philosopher-priest, another a professor and poet, a third a medical doctor. Now they were at pains to impart to me their visions of how I must write—and think—if I wished to convey to the world an understanding of what Balinese are like. (They knew my book was nearing completion.) Their message was: I must create *resonance (ngelah*

keneh)[4] between the reader and my text. But first, they said, I must create resonance in myself with the people and the problems I seek to understand.

To explain this concept of resonance, the professor-poet said:

> It is what fosters empathy or compassion. Without resonance there can be no understanding, no appreciation. But resonance requires you [and here he looked entreatingly at me] to apply feeling as well as thought. Indeed, feeling is the more essential, for without feeling we'll remain entangled in illusions.

It bears mention that Balinese do not split feeling from thought but regard both as part of one process, *keneh,* which I translate as "feeling-thought" (1990a). While they recognize in themselves feelings as distinguished from thoughts, and have concepts to differentiate the two, the Indonesian *perasaan* and *pikiran,* they are emphatic that the two are linked: "Can anyone think but with the heart?" they ask, rhetorically.[5]

They know some people can, in a self-afflicting move that severs their comprehension and ability to live ethically but can bring short-term worldly gain.[6] They also suspect that Westerners see it differently: that we think we can think only with our thoughts and yet arrive at genuine insight. To Balinese, this is like "reaching for the sky with a short string," basing one's search for knowledge on a self-eroding foundation. Without feeling it is impossible to appreciate *(menghayati)* any situation or problem.

Perhaps he saw the deep furrows on my forehead, reflecting my endeavor to understand, once again, by the power of thought, for the philosopher-priest, Made Bidja, now spoke. What he had to say hit me in my heart with a resonance he could not have anticipated:

> Take as an example Muslims in Bali who have no concept of *karma pala.* And yet they understand what it's all about. How do they come to appreciate? By the power of resonance. They use their feelings, and so they understand the basic idea as just returns, heaven and hell. But Westerners have no resonance with the idea of *karma pala* because they use their thoughts only, and so ideas and understandings do not spring alive.

My thoughts leapt, as he spoke, to my Muslim friend with the Hindu *balian.* Now I saw why his talk of "oath" *(sumpah)* and "ancestors" *(leluhur)* and "offerings" *(banten)* in the Muslim holy place—concepts that go against the grain of Muslim thinking—had yet resonated with her, a fanatic Muslim. She had listened to him with attention to what he was trying to say and do, going beyond the words. It was I who was at a disadvantage, for I had got stuck on the words and their precise conceptual entailments, and so the thrust of his message did not resonate with me.[7]

Made Bidja continued (we were on the point of how ideas and understandings do not spring alive):

> Take my friend, Dr. Soegianto, who now writes the story of Panci Sakti [a Balinese culture hero and reputed founder of the Buleleng dynasty, c. A.D. 1660–80 (Worsley 1972)]. How do you think he can? Well, because of his readings about Hannibal and Alexander the Great! He used his feelings then to understand about their lives, and so there was *resonance* between him and them. Now he uses this appreciation to understand the texts about Panci Sakti, and to communicate an understanding to others.

Resonance thus demands something of both parties to communication, of both reader and author: an effort at feeling-thought; a willingness to *engage* with another world, life, or idea; an ability to *use* one's experience—as the Muslim did with the Hindu *balian*—to try to grasp, or convey, meanings that reside neither in words, "facts," nor text but are evoked in the meeting of one experiencing subject with another or with a text.

Hannibal, Alexander the Great, and Panci Sakti—they had something in common, as these Balinese men saw it. Separated by some two thousand years and great distances, they were men, warriors, and heroes. They had friends and enemies, lovers, parents—they fought for what was dear to them, and in this they had some commonality of experience.

So it is with Muslims and Hindus or with Balinese and us. We can use this commonality—this "shared space" (Tambiah 1990:122)—to try to understand one another. Indeed we must, for we have nothing else. The men advised me to make this the very foundation of my writing and understanding.

language as a tool for tasks

But how can this be accomplished across cultures? And what of the role of language, and the pitfalls if we do not learn it—and learn it exceptionally well? Was it not that which had misled Bateson, Belo, Mead, and Geertz—that their knowledge of Balinese was inadequate? Did it not also disable me? Moreover, I have argued that we must ground interpretations in people's *own* forms of discourse and the concepts *they* use in their daily lives:

> To grasp how people actually experience their lives, we need to attend . . . not [to] their terms for gods, institutions, calendars and rituals so much as [to] the concepts with which they feel and think about, and handle, the tasks and tribulations of their individual existences. [Wikan 1990a:xvi]

Does this not contradict the notion that one should leapfrog words, so to speak, to try to grasp meanings that lie somehow beyond but can be evoked when one experiencing subject meets another? Let us turn to Donald Davidson.

Davidson, according to Rorty, takes the ultimately radical stance of trying to break with the notion that there is any such thing as language in the sense of a medium that can represent or express a relation between a core self and the world (1989:10). Davidson faces up to the contingency of language, to the fact that truths are made rather than found, because all vocabularies are manmade, they do not "fit" the world—indeed, as Rorty reminds us, "most of reality is indifferent to our descriptions of it" (1989:7). Language thus can neither express the intrinsic nature of an organism, for there is no such thing, nor represent facts of the world to the self, for there are no such "facts." In Rorty's words, "The world does not speak. Only we do" (1989:6).[8]

This theory raises a number of epistemological and other problems. But let us use it for its more limited suggestion: what we are offered is a more adequate view of language, adequate in the sense of fitting certain purposes better. Davidson suggests we regard language not as a medium but more like a *tool* that works better or worse for the tasks at hand. As Mark Hobart notes: "We are back not just to what words 'mean' but what people do in using them" (1986:12).

Davidson suggests we think of words as ways of producing *effects* rather than as entities that have or convey intrinsic meaning (Rorty 1989:15). His position entails a critical focus on linguistic pragmatics and how we do things with words (Austin 1975 [1962]) that could have far-reaching implications for anthropology, especially for how we use language to communicate with persons in the field and to convey an understanding to readers and colleagues. On Davidson's theory both are fraught with effects—indeed, the pragmatics and the "meaning" cannot and should not be separated. My own experience in Bali illustrates the double nature of this problem.

Part of the trouble I had in fitting my perceptions of Bali to the formulas I had received by way of anthropological texts was not simply that the vocabularies coined by Bateson, Belo, Mead, and Geertz were faulty or untrue. But they seemed unfit for the purpose at hand, inadequate as tools, at least for me. Had I relied on the concepts of theatricality, aestheticism, and faceless social personae I would not have been able ever to "meet" Balinese. In other words, I had read the anthropological texts not merely as providing statements about cosmology but also as sets of tools for orienting oneself pragmatically in a Balinese world.

A pragmatic view of language resonates well with Balinese perceptions of the world and of knowledge. People expressed astonishment that Westerners could think of knowledge and morality, or speech and action, as separable. Pointing to the source of our confusion, the philosopher said: "Westerners mistake their feelings for thoughts, and so they misunderstand and create disturbance." The others nodded their heads in emphatic consent.

But if words are ways of producing effects, then attending too closely to words for their "meaning" may sink one deep into quagmires. Taken to its full implications, a pragmatic view of language would suggest—and herein lies its most fundamental challenge to anthropological theory and representation—that anthropology's romance with words, concepts, text, and dis-

course may be counterproductive. It may be necessary, compellingly necessary, to reduce the words to a more true-to-life role than much current anthropology does. And to transcend the words, we need to attend to the speaker's intention, and the social position they emanate from, to judge correctly what they are doing.

Just as we would not read a love letter with the same meticulous attention we apply to the fine print of an insurance policy, it is a matter of keeping the proper perspective. The celebrated Sámi poet Valkeapää (1991) expresses this well:

Her kan du finne så mye	There is much here for you to find
og har du øyne å se med	and if you have eyes to see with
behøver du ikke lete.	you will not need to search. [translation mine]

When the Hindu *balian* offered the Muslim woman his compassion and advice, cast in idioms of value and meaning to himself, but alien to her religious principles, she went beyond his words in an almost literal sense: she overlooked that aspect of their content, and—on the powers of resonance—recognized the deeper intention beyond. It was not that the meaning she discounted was undecodable. "It [was] 'wrong' only in that it provide[d] misleading evidence about the speaker's intentions" (Sperber and Wilson 1989 [1986]:23). How could she know? By numerous ostensible clues in the situation—among them his insistent expression that he had something important to say to her, to help her in her situation.[9]

As Sperber and Wilson point out, people take all manner of risks when they speak. It is a miracle that speaker's "meaning" is communicated at all, given that any utterance can convey an almost limitless number of meanings. And yet people are able to understand one another quite well much of the time (1989 [1986]:19ff., 23). What Tambiah—following Davidson—refers to as "the maxim of interpretive charity" (1990:122), and Sperber and Wilson—following Grice (1957)—as "the cooperative principle" (1989 [1986]:32ff.), is clearly of relevance here. Were it not for her practicing such charity, what would a *balian* have achieved in speaking *karma pala* to a Muslim?

resonance, experience, and sameness

But is there not a danger here: that in trying to practice such interpretive charity across cultures, we may come to impute to people a commonality with our own experience? That experience is nothing in and of itself, but culturally construed, is one of anthropology's most basic insights (Hallowell 1955; Turner and Bruner 1986). How are we to harmonize this with a view which says Hannibal, Alexander the Great, and Panci Sakti "are" more or less the same? Is it at all worth heeding?

In "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage" (1989a [1984]) Renato Rosaldo provides powerful testimony to the *barriers* to appreciation of a failure to heed such facts. Not until he let Ilongot's words resonate with himself, he writes, was he able to come to grips with their saying that they took heads to cleanse their hearts of anger. Leach (1984) has taken this to mean he took "their" anger and "his" anger to be "the same." This seems unjust (Rosaldo 1989a [1984]:10). What the story teaches are the costs of going to the opposite extreme. It thus stands as a convincing demonstration of method.

But what "is" resonance? And how does one induce it? Rosaldo stresses the point of applying one's life experience in realization that this can be an asset, a resource, that will help one to grasp certain phenomena better. His view seems in harmony with a Balinese stance. As the *lontar*-scholars said: resonance fosters empathy and compassion; it enables appreciation; without resonance, ideas and understandings will not spring alive. There is an underlying appeal to shared experience here, akin to what Shweder notes: "psychic unity is . . . that which makes us imaginable to one another" (1991:18).

Resonance thus resembles attitudes we might label sympathy, empathy, or *Verstehen*. Whether it is "the same" or "different" I cannot say. Balinese see as critical that it entails using

one's feelings as well as, and at once with, one's thoughts. Only this enables *appreciation*.[10] I see this as consonant with Obeyesekere's view that empathy and disengagement are not opposed, but mutually engaged in all kinds of creative and intellectual activity (1990:227f., 238).

I believe little is gained by trying to pin down "resonance" further. Most of us intuitively know what it means. Words by the celebrated Tibetologist Giuseppe Tucci spring to mind: "Words are symbols which can evoke living experiences which the word as such can only suggest but not define" (1988 [1970]:viii). What Sperber and Wilson (1989 [1986]) write of "relevance" applies to "resonance" as well, and I take the liberty of replacing their term with mine in the following text. Resonance is

> a fuzzy term, used differently by different people, or by the same people at different times. It does not have a translation in every human language. There is no reason to think that a proper semantic analysis of the English word ["resonance"] would also characterize a concept of scientific psychology. . . . [However, there seems to be] an important psychological property—a property of mental processes—which the ordinary notion of [resonance] roughly approximates, and which it is therefore appropriate to call [resonance] too, using the term now in a technical sense. What we are trying to do is describe this property: that is, to define [*resonance*] as a useful theoretical concept. [1989 (1986):119]

A few words on "sameness" are also in place. As Tambiah, quoting Hilary Putnam (1981:117, 119), has noted:

> "Interpretive success does not require that the translatee's beliefs come out the *same* as our own but it does require that they come out *intelligible* to us." . . .
>
> An anthropologist's successful translation and account of another people's beliefs, norms and actions implies that there is some shared space, some shared notions of intelligibility and reasoning (rationality) between the two parties. . . .
>
> Ultimately then the anthropological project of translation of cultures is committed to the maxim of interpretive charity which commits us "to treating not just our present time-slices, but also our past selves, our ancestors, and members of other cultures past and present, as *persons;* and that means . . . attributing to them shared references and shared concepts, however different the *conceptions* that we attribute." [Tambiah 1990:125, 121, 125]

Was it not that which he tried to do, the Balinese scholar-physician seeking to encompass Hannibal, Alexander the Great, and Panci Sakti within "the same frame"?

beyond the words

At first, the lesson Rosaldo draws from his experience might seem the opposite of mine: he cautions, as does Keesing (1989), against going beyond words in the sense of reading them too deeply. Thus he writes, "Ilongot . . . mean precisely what they say. . . . Taken at face value and granted its full weight, their statement reveals much" (1989a [1984]:3). And yet I believe we converge. The issue is the need to *attend to* what people say and the *intent* they are trying to convey, rather than groping for some "larger" answers within the particulars of their spoken words.

I call this "going beyond the words" for two reasons. First, the term offered itself when I became apprized of my, and others', "stuckness" in words like *karma pala*. It seems to point in the requisite direction: *to* actors' intentions, somehow "beyond" their manifest sayings.[11] It is consistent with this that one may have to take at face value what people say to get at their intentions. But I use "beyond the words" for another reason as well.

I am concerned with our discipline's current preoccupation with "words" in the sense of text, discourse, meaning. My "beyond" is a plea that the pendulum be swung. What I take exception to is *not* discourse analysis as a move to explore the uses of language by bringing vast amounts of contextual, nonlinguistic materials to bear on the analysis of what is happening between people during a discursive exchange. This attempt has yielded some truly excellent results (see, for example, Basso 1990a; Brenneis and Myers 1984; Haviland 1977; Watson-Gegeo and White 1990) that show the pragmatic uses of language in relation to broader life matters. What concerns me, however, is the broader application of "discourse" as a template,

or metaphor, to represent *all* social interaction. For persons—the living, human beings who act in the world—may fade from view when the focus is on "the said" of people's lives, however much it is situated in context and with a view to power and pragmatics.[12]

the allure of context

"Contextualization" need not suffice to ensure an adequate rendering of what is said or understood.[13] As Hobart has observed, "Contextualizing . . . raises the delicate issue of whose formulation of relation and whose criteria of relevance are at stake" (1986:8). Think of a contextualized interpretation of the Hindu *balian*'s discourse with the Muslim woman. Would not "the context" here have to be composed, in large part, of their discrepant religious positions, leading us to presuppose a blatant confusion of tongues? Certainly, this was the context I brought to bear on the scene, as it was what the Muslim's deliberations beforehand had suggested would be the appropriate one. Had I not been unusually close to her, I do not see how this context could have been invalidated. I might even have embedded my (mis)interpretation in thick description to make it emerge highly plausible.

The invocation of "context" can lend a false sense of security while explaining nothing. I sense a tendency in our field nowadays to call on "context" as if to underscore the authority of one's account. "Context" parades like "I was there" (Clifford 1988) to lend credibility to one's account. And for this reason too Rosaldo's story is exceptional. It exposes the arbitrariness of context: the "new context" his reinterpretation called for was one that had been there, in Ilongots' conceptual universe, all the time. Such reappraisals are all too rare in anthropology (but cf. Colson 1984).

Context is "just an analytical convenience . . . but there is a danger of it being seen as somehow substantive" (Hobart 1985a:34). Another problem that Sperber and Wilson point to is that we tend to invoke "context" in our analyses as if it were given beforehand, whereas in real life "context" is continually shifting. Indeed, "each new utterance . . . requires a rather different context" (1989 [1986]:16, 137). The theory of relevance is a major step in helping us understand how context is selected in actual everyday life.

I suggest that instead of "contextualizing" we should try to transcend conventional notions of context. Thick description (Geertz 1973b) is not the answer, for it leaves unanswered what it is that is to be thickly described (Rosaldo 1989b:94ff.). Rather, we need to refine our ways of attending, thus better to grasp what people are up to, their multiple, compelling concerns, and what is at stake for them, against a backdrop of the social relations in which they are engaged, and the resistance life offers to them. A Muslim "reading" *karma pala* as *taqdir* does so in part because she has superior interests "located" far beyond the arena where this discourse takes place: a sick husband, a tormented family, grinding poverty that *could* be mercifully alleviated if other things went well. There is no way her "discourse" with the *balian* can be separated from such wider life concerns, always multiple and compelling by their nature.

The approach I advocate is thus in tune with a commonsense view, analytically framed in Sperber and Wilson's theory of relevance (1989 [1986]). It would have us attend to the *effect* people are trying to make and the *relevance* of their words in terms of how they are positioned and where they seem to want to go, rather than the message their words might seem to encase.[14]

Does this not come closer to what we all do in our daily lives when understanding is of the essence and we can ill afford to go wrong? It would also entail another kind of reading of anthropological texts: again, a going beyond—in a manner I myself have failed to do in my readings of Bateson, Belo, Mead, and Geertz—and for lack of which my understanding, and eventual representation, of Bali may have suffered (Wikan 1987, 1990a).

Another essay would be needed to pursue this crucial point: of the *costs* to cumulative understanding of taking a consistently critical, rather than a charitable, stance. Now I propose to

follow Davidson on an experimental tour that exoticizes the anthropologist's familiar round. With his theory, what light might be shed on the fieldwork encounter?

passing theories

Now imagine that our task was to meet a person from a different culture. How could we proceed?

We would need to evolve a vocabulary that would fit the task at hand. To avoid being taken by surprise, we would probably also resort to a set of guesses about what the other person will do under the circumstances. And so would she in response to us. Davidson refers to such guesswork as a " 'passing theory' about the noises and inscriptions presently being produced by a fellow human" (Davidson 1986, cited in Rorty 1989:14). It is part of a larger "passing theory" about this person's behavior as a whole. Such a theory is "passing" in the sense that "it must constantly be corrected to allow for mumbles, stumbles, malapropisms, metaphors, . . . egregious stupidity, strokes of genius, and the like." Rorty remarks:

> If we ever succeed in communicating easily and happily, it will be because her guesses about what I am going to do next, including what noises I am going to make next, and my own expectations about what I shall do or say under certain circumstances, come more or less to coincide, and because the converse is also true. . . . To say that we come to speak the same language is to say, as Davidson puts it, that "we tend to *converge on passing theories*." Davidson's point is that all "two people need, if they are to understand one another through speech, is the ability to converge on passing theories from utterance to utterance." [Rorty 1989:14; emphasis added]

To make this less abstract, more grounded in fact, let me invoke my experience of being a languageless person in a foreign land (Bhutan), confronted with the task of striking up some accord with (as well as obtaining the practicalities of life from) villagers in remote Himalayan valleys. With my husband, Fredrik Barth, I did precisely what Davidson suggests: I formed a passing theory about what kinds of humans they were so as not to be taken by surprise, and so as to get them to accept, and preferably to like, me. My passing theory was constantly in flux. So, no doubt, were the passing theories of our hosts and acquaintances in respect of us. After the first fieldwork of three months we could not claim much. Most aspects of Bhutanese "culture" remained enigmatic. But—and I think this is not to be bypassed as the banal insight it seems—we had learned a lot by the use of rudimentary speech coupled with the five senses, which allowed us to scan the unfamiliar scene and take in a wealth of information on all manners of parameters within which life in Bhutan unfolds—all the givens and self-evidences within which any Bhutanese speech is cast. *And*—we had managed to get along quite well (Barth and Wikan 1989).

How much subtle analysis of words and discourse is not obviated when I have seen the remoteness of farms and walked the distances; noted the gross structures of power, class privilege, opulent monasteries, and poverty; or discovered the absence of any kind of marriage rituals and contracts. Simple signs of insecurity and anxiety in the face of sickness and misfortune, or vis-à-vis men in power, will start to resonate in me. Childhood, love, pregnancy, and old age are colored by such circumstances. And as I slowly begin to get "the" language,[15] I shall have a reference point, a "context," so that when people say, for instance, "We women, the enemy is our body" (Wikan 1990b), I can better understand something of what they mean. To link up with Davidson:

> Davidson's account of linguistic communication *dispenses with the picture of . . . different languages as barriers between persons or cultures*. To say that . . . two communities have trouble getting along because the words they use are so hard to translate into each other is just to say that the linguistic behaviour of inhabitants of one community may, like the rest of their behaviour, be hard for inhabitants of the other community to predict. As Davidson puts it,
>
> > We should realize that we have abandoned not only the ordinary notion of a language, but we have *erased the boundary between knowing a language and knowing our way around the world generally.*

> For there are no rules for arriving at passing theories that work. . . . There is no more chance of regularizing, or teaching, this process than there is of regularizing or teaching the process of creating new theories to cope with new data—for that is what this process involves. . . .
>
> We should give up the attempt to illuminate how we communicate by appeal to conventions.
>
> [Davidson 1986:446, cited in Rorty 1989:14–15; emphasis added]

a pledge of relevance

If this seems a far cry from Bali, let us go back to the Muslim woman with the Hindu *balian*. She may be seen to have done just what Davidson suggests: evolved a passing theory—before we set off to the *balian*—so as not to be taken by surprise. On this theory she was able to tell me more or less what was going to happen. And experience proved her right—as far as the sheer "facts" of the case go.

What she may have failed to consider was the divergence between thinking out a scenario and living it in practice. Faced with the *balian*'s broad, contagious smile, his expression of earnest concern for her, and his compassion—what became of a fanatic Muslim's determination not to be taken in? Her passing theory, I take it, started to crumble. She must have begun to feel that he truly willed her well, and that his efforts to reach her, using his Hindu ways, yet came with a pledge of relevance to her.[16] He who is expert in handling "surprises" probably uses communication to its fullest effect and is skilled at fashioning and refashioning passing theories.

Whatever happened between them I cannot say. It could be considered a miracle of a kind, one of those daily miracles of achieving mutual understanding that are so easily taken for granted. Their theories converged. They were able to communicate quite well, though speaking different tongues: "He says *karma pala,* I say *taqdir*—it's all the same!"

Enter the Hindu man: but Westerners do not understand because they do not use their feelings, and so they have no resonance with the word.

Indeed, for the longest time I did not. For I thought meaning resided in words: I must grasp them or I would grasp nothing.

on the hither side of words and concepts

Now let's move to Egypt, and try out a theory of going beyond words on the field experience I had. When I began work with families in a poor quarter of Cairo in 1969, my language facility was poor (Wikan 1980 [1976], 1983). I had studied Arabic for a year at a university in Cairo, but I could not speak much. Did that deter people from trying to reach me? Far from it! They poured their hearts out—as if I could understand everything they said, though it was quite clear to them I could not. When their attempts to get at me met with a blank expression, they would produce *another* set of noises and mumbles, verbal and nonverbal, to try to reach me with their points. Soon, thanks to this intensive exposure, I learned to speak quite fluently.

Did I then communicate better? Of course I did. And the materials I thereby obtained were essential to enable me to write my ethnography and compose my analysis in a way that might make it compelling to a reader. But what is striking to me now, when I reflect back, is *how much* I understood, and *how much* they assumed I could understand, without having much of a "language."

Let us move again: to Oman, where I worked in the mid-seventies (Wikan 1982). I *had* language by then; I prided myself on speaking quite fluent low-class Egyptian Arabic. Now the Omanis spoke a very different dialect, but at least they could understand me well from the start, for Cairene is a kind of lingua franca in the Middle East. However, having or not having this kind of language availed me little. For Omanis did not speak much. Oman is the one place I have been where people truly treasure silence. It is even written that foreigners who stay in the country come to cherish silence (Darlow and Fawkes 1976:15).

As an anthropologist, what do you do then? I despaired. I got no "material," thinking that material must necessarily reflect words, utterances, concepts. Every evening when I came back to our house to write the day's "notes," the pages would stare blankly back at me. And I felt miserable. I yearned for words: that true fountain of insights—or at least—of field notes!

I managed poorly for the first six months. Then, by the force of circumstance (Wikan 1982:299ff.), and not superior insight on my part, I developed a passing theory that actually worked—the first clearly had not. I gave in to the silence, and suddenly I tuned in to a lot that was happening between people. To experience silence not as a void or an absence but as a space full and pregnant with meaning is difficult for a word-mongering academic (Delaney makes the point that it is even difficult for Americans to sit still and listen [1988:294]). In my case it took resonance of a kind I came to develop only by the force of circumstance. I sensed then that *they* came to regard me more as a decent human being. This is not to depreciate the good use of having a particular language—Arabic in casu. But it is to undermine—and undermine quite drastically—some of its assumed importance.[17]

No neophyte anthropologist, then, should despair at having rudimentary language or even "no" language at first. There is a time and place for everything, and perhaps even a time when one might bless oneself lucky not to have words to get in the way of one's senses or intuitions. We all know what happens once we have those words—coupled with limited time on our hands! If we are willing to "give up the attempt to illuminate how we communicate by appeal to conventions" (Davidson 1986:446), then here is some food for thought.

Back to Egypt, and lessons to be learned in view of a theory of resonance. How did I learn my most fundamental insights? Today—and only since I began preparing this article—I no longer believe it was by virtue of my good Arabic. Of course, it helped. It meant I had rich verbal data with which to falsify passing theories, nuance provisional understandings, and refine my insights, so that when people spoke—often many at a time—I had the ballast of my knowledge of a rich vocabulary and its uses. And yet I had already grasped many essentials of what life was all about, what was at stake for people, the sources of their pain and humiliation, in the early stages when I tried to see beyond the words—because I could not grasp them.

The sources of pain and humiliation for poor people I met in Cairo were the ceaseless struggle for money, for making ends meet; the inability ever to make *all* one's children happy *all at once* because there was never enough to go around; the fear that one's sheer material deprivation would be exposed to the world with the *Schadenfreude* and gossip this would elicit; the continual bickering with husbands who could not be counted on to *listen* to one's pain. Yes, it is a woman's view I am giving, for sources of pain and humiliation are never the same for all.

If I had gone about it in the way anthropology teaches us today, I would have attended to the words much more, for we live in an era when "meaning" is focal and "cultural construction" an essential part of our jargon. Take as an example the Egyptian word *zaʿl*, which means sadness, anger, distress, disappointment, etcetera. Think what I could have done with it! As it was, I did nothing. It didn't strike me that here was anything to do. I listened to people's accounts in which *zaʿl*—along with many other things—featured. And I tried to grasp what they were trying to tell me about their lives.

They were, after all, speaking for effect. They could not care less—I dare say—whether I grasped the meaning of *zaʿl* so long as I grasped what they were trying to tell me. I am reminded of Veena Das's observation—*pace* Wittgenstein: "To say 'I'm in pain' is not a statement, it is a complaint" (1989:3).

learning to attend

How can we build an anthropology that better enables us to heed people's complaints, along with their joys, to inscribe in the record of what humankind has said not only how they have

spoken but what they have actually said? What concerns me is more than just field method: I am pleading for a broad and naturalistic theory, one that allows us to see communication within social relationships and to put what is unspoken and self-evident to speakers into place before focusing on concepts and discourse (Barth In press b). *This* is the meaning of my plea that we attend to "the concepts with which [people] feel and think about, and handle, the tasks and tribulations of their individual existences" (Wikan 1990a:xvi). It is *not* an invocation to attend to concepts per se, but to the shifting aspects of being in the world and acting on it by which concepts uniquely spring alive.

Consider Tim Ingold's lucid discussion of how he "learned (up to a point) to see the world in the way a reindeer herdsman does." It was

> through involvement with others in everyday contexts of practical action . . . [and] becoming immersed in joint action . . . in a *shared* environment. I experience the components of this environment as they do, not because I have learned to *construct* them in my mind according to the same categorical conventions, but because I have learned to *attend* to them in the same way, according to what they afford in the situational context of herding activities. Such communion of experience, the awareness of living in a common world, establishes a foundational level of sociality that exists—in Bourdieu's (1977:2) phrase—"on the hither side of words and concepts," and that constitutes the relational baseline on which all attempts at verbal communication must subsequently build. [Ingold In press:18–19][18]

This also answers a problem hitherto left unexplored: how to transcend one's own "context" so as to defend against "false resonances."[19] As Ingold shows, it is by painstaking engagement on a day-to-day basis in events and routines which are "theirs" so that we come to share as much as possible in them. Sharing a world with others means learning to attend to it in the same way. Such a practice dispels any mystique of "resonance" as field technique and epistemology. It is a down-to-earth concept, grounded in practical action.

We need not have the "same experience" to be able to attend in the same way. But we must dip into the wellsprings of ourselves for something to use as a bridge to others. It does not come by an act of will, though will helps. Practical exposure to a world of "urgency, necessity" (Bourdieu 1990) is required. But for resonance to work, we need to shed the stifling preconception that can be a stumbling block along the way: that others are essentially different from us, to be understood only by means of their "culture"; and that their words bespeak different life worlds.

culture and natives

They do, but only to an extent. And so even I can come to understand *karma pala,* to an extent, given that I am prepared to understand. Were Balinese to reformulate this, they might say "courageous enough" *(berani)* to understand. Courage is required because we may have to shed our preconceptions of what understanding "is." And that is the crucial challenge I see my Balinese scholar-friends as posing.

I hear their words—"But Westerners have no resonance . . . because they use their thoughts only, and so ideas and understandings do not spring alive"—not as a statement but as a complaint. They clearly imply we should have managed better. The cross-cultural discipline of anthropology will increasingly have to face up to the challenges of what a multivocal, inessential "they" (Spelman 1988) see as requisite and crucial to understanding. It will require us to do more than just "let their voice be heard," for that is typically limited to other people's accounts of *themselves* and their particular world. Rather, we must be willing to learn *general* lessons from their insights and analyses of the human condition (Wikan 1991:299f.). With Nader (1988:155), I find deeply disturbing the extent to which "the interpretation of culture makes use of the European great thinkers for ideas with which to understand *native* systems of meaning."

The Balinese scholar-friends seem to warn us that a quest for "meaning" easily blinds us to what life is all about. It entices us to get lost in words and lose sight of the larger issues: that

karma pala is actually, as they said, about "just returns, heaven and hell."[20] To translate across cultures we must be willing to forgo some precision for the sake of enhanced human solidarity. For when we engage in an interpretive quest, we may indeed discover esoteric meanings in *karma pala*—but to what purpose?

The concept of "culture," of course, is crucial to our endeavor. I argue, as have others before me (Abu-Lughod In press; Ingold In press; Keesing 1987, In press; Lock 1990; Spencer 1990), that we are at cross-purposes with ourselves if we allow our concept of culture to freeze difference and magnify it beyond proportion. For then it backfires, inviting a search for the exotic. And it blinds us to people's lived predicaments.

It is not coincidental that the urban poor of the Third World remain peripheral to the anthropological scene: they don't have much to offer us that is exotic. They don't use fancy words, or cite poetry, or engage in elaborate rituals. As E. V. Walter notes, "The poor have plenty, but it is plenty of what nobody wants" (1966:122). They may even seem lacking in "culture": How can it be that when in Cairo, with the poor, I "forget" about anthropology and get absorbed in people's lives, whereas in Bali, also with poor people, I am all too well aware of something we call culture which separates them and me? I have raised the issue elsewhere and tried to formulate an answer (Wikan 1991:289ff.). Here I suggest it has something to do with my differential ability to listen and become engaged. As an anthropologist, I am trained to think the Balinese are a truly exotic people.[21] But no one makes such a claim on behalf of the Cairo poor. And so I meet them as one human meets another.

Balinese suggest the problem is that Westerners have no resonance with them, *and not because we do not speak their language*. It is essential to underscore this point. The problem they see is not a lack of "language" as such but that we fail to use those means we would have available to us if we would only let their concerns resonate with ourselves. They would side with Davidson, I believe, that knowing one's way about the world and knowing a language amount to practically the same thing. Or with the Cairo poor who poured out their hearts to me, trusting I would understand, though for all practical purposes I was deaf and dumb. Who says deaf-mutes do not understand (Sacks 1989)?

I show below how "resonance" and "culture" lead us in different directions, and how the attitude of resonance can be useful as a flag to hold up to ourselves and others to deter drastically dangerous feats of interpretation. I illustrate with examples from my fieldwork in Bali.

truth versus how we feel-think

How did I work in Bali? It was rather different from in Egypt and Oman. Whereas in Cairo I would forgo *za'l*, to listen rather than hear, in Bali *karma pala, atma, sakti*, and the like became exotic glosses to be probed for their very meanings. Now, to be frank, that was more marked toward the end, when my concerns grew that my attempts to represent something of life and society in Bali might be dismissed if I disclosed I did not know what such words "meant." The anthropological discourse intervened much more to decide my priorities than it had in Egypt or Oman.

When its impact was yet much less than I had anticipated, it was partly because I found I had to craft my own tools, but also because I met myself in the door, so to speak, when my enthusiasm for words launched me on wrong tracks: "It's right what you say, but it is not the way we think," warned a man when I probed the concept "balance," which I had come to think, from the scholarly literature, must be a key to Balinese experience, even though it did not appear as salient in my own materials.

I have elsewhere stressed problems of relevance and the need to attend to people's multiple, compelling concerns and to follow them as they move—if we are to grasp what is at stake and how they construe their own experience (Wikan 1990a). I have argued for the need to cross

thresholds *along with* people, and to bridge domains, if we are to grasp what concerns cannot be shed but impinge and require simultaneous attention. This methodological stance represents my own best effort to get a hold on those trials and tribulations by which people often feel "trapped," and to which Balinese bear testimony when they complain, as they often do, "There's so much to care about!" It comes across as an oft-exasperated sigh about how to manage, to cope, in a life of multiple, simultaneous concerns.

Here my concern is substantially the same, but analytically different. Taking up Davidson's challenge to abandon "the attempt to illuminate how we communicate by appeal to conventions" (1986:446), I am concerned to question hitherto unproblematized assumptions in my own work regarding how my most crucial insights were gained. I may have long had a nagging suspicion that things were not quite as I had made them out to be. How is this borne out by my work in Bali? I shall provide three examples for what they reveal of the power of words to illuminate and mislead.

Tacit communication. I have argued that the notion of managing the heart *(ngabe keneh)* is a key to Balinese experience—truly a formula for living. Significantly, I had grasped the notion—and written about it as "emotion work" (Wikan 1987, 1989)—long before I realized that Balinese had, and used, the very concept. Stumbling across the Balinese concept was exhilarating and assured me I was on the right track. But it was not *formative* to my understanding. It merely lent credence to a theory I had already formed by way of other sources of insight. How did I come to grasp it?

By perceiving people's struggle; by coming up against the enigma of clear bright smiles in the face of ordeals like bereavement and other crucial losses; by perceiving the quivers in a voice; by "reading" somatic complaints about overwhelming pain and suffering, and. . . . What else was there? Too many things for me to remember now, for such clues do not stand out in the field notes I took, even when, after Oman, I had learnt to pay close attention to silent communication.

Words. Once, in what I have called an "enlightened moment" in fieldwork (1982:282, 1990a:121), a young woman—Suriati—made the cataclysmic statement, "It is very bad if you are sad and they laugh; that's why we hide our feelings." I had taken these words to be crucial to my understanding, but they were only, I now recognize, because they were taken together with a host of other clues to significance; they helped me perceive the struggle. Her words were also misleading, for I failed to perceive how they were spoken for effect. A year later she brushed aside her "confused" *(bingung)* saying of a year ago and spoke other words to effect. Again, those were not to be taken literally. The first was a complaint, a cry of pain and pressure. The other was euphoric, a testimony to relief and joy. How would she give an account of the same events today? Doubtless, by the use of *other* words and concepts, as she would be recalling them from yet another position. Balinese seem aware of this, and consistently interpret words in the knowledge that they are spoken for effect.[22] Why does it seem to be more difficult for anthropologists?

Partly because when we work as anthropologists we are not truly implicated in the world of other people. It does not matter that much if we understand them or not. Our misunderstandings are not likely to resonate with crucial effects. We are concerned to produce effects on the anthropological community, and only secondarily on the people whose language we are trying to grasp. I take up this point below.

Metaphors. "And does the rat beget lions for children?" sniped a woman—with perfect grace and poise—at another who had demeaned her for less than excellence in a certain field. The deprecator was of high social origins, the other of low. How are we to interpret the import, indeed the "meaning" of her words? Let me attempt to answer by drawing on my personal experience.

I grew up beyond the Arctic Circle—on the same latitude as the northern tip of Alaska—and had to learn to deal with "the world" when I came down south to go to university. We have a

particular way of speaking up there, full of "music" and vivid, rather than precise, expressions. More civilized people down south find our way of speaking both entertaining and rather ridiculous. What happens then when a southerner and a northerner meet?

To be brief, there is some room for misunderstanding. To judge by my own experience and that of many people I know, the northerner has to learn to lay off her metaphors, for they tend to be taken literally when they are spoken for effect! It is a sing-song kind of thing we are doing, one resonant with the beat of our dramatic surroundings—it adds color and tone to our act. But when this metaphorical way of speaking is probed for "meaning" and not effect, we may get into trouble. If the threat were only that we might be studied by anthropologists who might construct a world of their own meaning—and a fanciful one it could be!—from our humdrum "doing" with words, not much would be risked. But we are dealing with people who have the power to *act on* what we (appear to) say. So there is need for great caution.

Again I find resonance in what Davidson (1984) has to say. He disputes the view that metaphors simply express one facet of experience more deeply or significantly by means of another. As Sperber and Wilson point out, if this were all that a "speaker wanted to convey, she could have saved the hearer some processing effort by expressing [her thought] directly" (1989[1986]:235). In Davidson's view,

> tossing a metaphor into a text is like using italics, or illustrations, or odd punctuation. . . . To none of these is it appropriate to respond with "What exactly are you trying to say?" . . . That one uses familiar words in unfamiliar ways . . . [reflects rather] . . . the unsuitability of any such familiar sentence for one's purpose. [Rorty 1989:18–19]

Naturally, there is more to metaphors than that (Barth 1975; Lakoff and Johnson 1980). But Keesing (1989) also warns against reading them too deeply. As Crapanzano (1989) argues with reference to the interpretation of emotion words, glosses may be just that—ways of calling a context. And thus the pragmatic uses of language must be a reference point for all interpretation of experience or meaning.

meaning and power

Language is a quagmire into which one can sink deeply, and I wonder how many anthropologists have, "wordstruck"[23] as most of us tend to be. Improving one's language facility does not necessarily improve one's accounts or understanding. It may even have the opposite effect. What concerns me is both the *unquestioned assumption* that more language is necessarily better and the rather peculiar importance to which we have elevated languages.

Whereas in our daily lives we use words mainly to get things done and to "work on" family and colleagues, the anthropological enterprise construes language as a kind of technical fix—not unlike biomedicine's hegemonic representation of its laboratory tests. We can do so in part because we do not experience the *consequences* of our own misinterpretations. We have this "freedom from urgency, from necessity," because our anthropological observation point is "founded upon the neutralization of practical interests and practical stakes" (Bourdieu 1990:381, 383). Thus we are in a protected situation where we can build up our own little secret, carry it home, and busy ourselves "with problems that serious people ignore" (1990:381).

But when we are part of a world that we and they take for real we may be punished, as I felt I was by southerners, for failing to use words to the effect for which they are "supposed to" be used. Power and pragmatics enter, whether we like it or not. The interpretive quest in which many of us are entangled further works to segregate our lives from our works and to shield us from certain self-defeating aspects of our enterprise: it blinds us to the predicaments of people, and thereby also to our own. An attempt to develop greater resonance would mean implicating ourselves, actively and emotionally, in the other's world—rather than using our strange com-

bination of power and marginality to elicit texts and ask people's help in "contextualizing" them—on our terms.[24]

Tambiah has observed that translation should be the last, not the first step (cited in Kleinman and Kleinman 1991). I assume he is referring to representation as well. I will next try to show how conventional ways of representing domains of culture can easily trap us in "meaning" to the detriment of appreciation.

writing for effect

Suppose I have discovered that black magic is of compelling concern to Balinese: how best to convey it? Suppose too that they have a variety of forms and techniques: how best to render the information? It will depend, of course, on what I see as my task. Let's presume it is to "*bear witness* to the variety of ways of being human, . . . to bear the burdens of one's observations" (Delaney 1988:293). How then should I proceed?

The issue arose when, after I had completed the manuscript of my book on Bali, some colleagues kindly pointed out to me that my allusions to black magic were all dispersed throughout the text. I had failed to give a systematic account, though clearly I had much information. I therefore set out to remedy my representation. Black magic was assembled into line, and organized into a comprehensive account. It looked impressive—I thought. But slowly a nagging suspicion arose. Was *this* my task? What had been achieved? Would the reader now be better able to appreciate Balinese? In answer, let me again invoke my experience as a north Norwegian.

In the region beyond the Arctic Circle where I grew up, everybody's life is perpetually affected by relentless changeable weather. A two-month-long polar winter night follows the scintillating summer of midnight sun. Storms sweep across mainland and islands; fishermen are lost at sea; blizzards and snowdrifts and sleet and thaw play havoc with life and the best-laid plans.

To depict this elemental and manifold force of the weather to shape and wreck human life, should I attempt to describe all its forms, or average temperature fluctuations, or the natives' more than 12 different terms for different kinds of snow? Such knowledge may suddenly become essential to be able to act wisely in a crisis in the mountains or at sea, but it does not shape the way we live in the weather's permanent grip. The Arctic weather's impact on our lives depends on how it pervades people's awareness as an ever-present potential of unpredictable diversity. All the more so, this should be our main way of trying to grasp the ineffable threat of evil in all its diverse imagery.

Weaving black magic into the text had been done unselfconsciously, but not without a purpose, I recognized retrospectively. I had tried to speak words to effect, to give the reader a feeling of what it is like to live with this all-pervasive threat. To systematically map and explore evil as a separate "cultural domain" seemed to mystify more than it revealed. And yet my colleagues' critique carried its weight. With one eye to my scholarly reputation and another to Balinese I struck up a compromise of a kind. I now believe it was a bad one.

culture versus resonance

Implicit in the preceding has been a deep concern with "culture" and our ways of using it. Crucial for my position have been my Balinese and Bhutanese experiences but also daily life in my home country, Norway—a modern welfare state, fiercely egalitarian yet now turning multiethnic—and the uses to which I see "culture" being put by various parties to the struggle under way there.[25] I contrast this with my experience of the "preculture" days. When and where I grew up, we had not heard of "culture," except as a gloss for the fine arts (which we also did not have). There were Sámi (we called them Finn) living in the vicinity of my home,

and we considered them wildly different from us, and also inferior. The Sámi had strange habits and customs *(skikker),* but not culture, for these were the preculture days.

But we did consider them people. They had passions, drives, and motivations, more or less like ours—though theirs took peculiar forms. And we converged in the "language" we spoke. My grandmother had "Finn" visiting in the kitchen (an intimate sphere), though as a child I was so afraid, I ran and hid.

With "culture" having entered common parlance, are "others" considered people or persons any longer? Or are they more akin to exotic breeds, propelled by a force—culture?[26] It is essential that we show the utmost caution in how we deploy the term, and that an ingrained disposition to represent "difference" be joined by a no less urgent need to acknowledge the limits to otherness (Carrithers 1990; Delaney 1988; McHugh 1989; Shweder 1991; Spiro 1986).

"Resonance" and "culture" seem to point in different directions: the one evokes sameness, the other extols the exotic and strange. As concepts they are not on a par. "Resonance" connotes a faculty, a feeling-thinking engagement. "Culture" is an abstraction, a gloss *on* experience; or an analytical implication (Hastrup and Elsass 1990); or a model of and for life: what we see *with,* rather than what we *see* (Quinn and Holland 1987:11). And yet the two can be compared if we take a Davidsonian approach. For then both emerge as words that can produce effects and as embedded in languages more or less suited to the relevant task.

I read my Balinese friends' plea for resonance as in tune with a growing call in anthropology for deexotication. Resonance evokes shared human experience, what people across place and time can have in common. Where culture separates, resonance bridges—from a lived realization that this is the only practicable way. It does not deny difference: Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam *are,* as the *balian* said, completely different. But it renders difference relatively insignificant in the face of that which counts more for certain purposes: shared human potential.

coming full circle

I opened this article with a pressing question: Had I perhaps misrepresented Balinese by failing to appreciate how different they were? I end with the opposite question: Have I instead portrayed them as more exotic than is justified? Putnam notes, "What we cannot say . . . is what the facts are independent of all conceptual choices" (1981:33; emphases omitted). Have I then let myself be trapped—by certain paradigms in vogue—to perceive, and construe, unwarranted differences?

Between my opening and my closing question lie two years and new field experiences in Bhutan. But what really set me on the path eventuating here was one morning's encounter with a countryman, a person of "my own culture." But for this event, I might not have reconsidered, as I now do, my own position in configuring the lives of others. To put it into perspective, a comparison is in place.

In Bali, I had been puzzled to find that Balinese often seemed to express empathy even for people whose suffering they hardly knew. It was puzzling because other anthropologists had maintained that Balinese were lacking in empathy (Mead 1942:23; Geertz 1973a[1966]), and also because I could not see how they could see beyond people's faces when those were always "bright and clear" *(cedang).*

After long pondering, I hit upon an answer. Balinese had another way of situating emotion from us. Rather than seeing it as a private response, arising *in* the individual, *they* perceived emotion as embedded in social situations, and thus it could be probed by the assessment of sheer social facts (Wikan 1990a:161). When I came upon an article describing a Chinese theory of emotion similar to this (Kleinman and Kleinman 1991), I was intrigued. But then I had long suspected that there were similarities between Balinese and Chinese.

Months later, reading the morning paper, I came across an interview with the poet Kolbjørn Falkeid. He was in great pain, for his daughter had recently died. And the portrait could not avoid touching also on his sorrow. How did he cope? Did he and his family, and the neighbors, talk much about the tragic event? He answered:

> To survive, it may be necessary to barricade oneself behind tons of indifferent thoughts, behind a shield of everyday concerns, behind conversations about the weather, and the exhausting trivia of life. "How are you?" people ask. It can be a gentle way of approaching, a light brush across the cheek, words that wish to remove bandages gently so the wound will not start bleeding again. And I could have answered with long explanations, I could have told of all the rents in the fabric we call life, I could have told everything. But I answer: "*Takk, bare bra*—Fine, thank you." *Each in our own way we know it so well.* And it is good to have everyday trivialities to cover it with. [Bistrup 1990; emphasis added]

To me, this stands as an "enlightened moment" in life and work—after which things will never again be the same. To think I had invoked a particular emotion theory to make sense of Balinese, when I could have dipped into my own self and applied resonance! A forceful reminder of the dangers of interpretivist analysis, what the incident teaches is the importance of going beyond words and expressions as well: not in the literal sense of reading deeper meanings into surface behavior, but to attend to the concerns and intentions from which they emanate. If we are not to be allured by the spectacle of either *karma pala* or a bright face, resonance is a way of reaching for that hither side of words and concepts to help us appreciate their panhuman relevance.

notes

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[1]This argument may not be in line with Davidson's or Rorty's own intentions. I have read out of Rorty not a theory of language and communication as such but some broader perspectives that have helped me identify a misplaced emphasis in much anthropology, one that Balinese seem to correct. The convergence between Rorty, Davidson, and Balinese lies here, and that is why I feel justified in applying Rorty, though he himself notes (personal communication, 1991) that my discussion of resonance "suggests a notion of getting behind language which is indeed antithetical to what I (and, I think, Davidson) want." I am talking about a *theory of being together in the world and understanding one another,* not a theory of language as such.

I am encouraged to find, since writing this article, that Tambiah (1990) also finds in Davidson a useful perspective on the key problems of translation, relativism, and the commensurability of cultures. I have also discovered Sperber and Wilson's *Relevance* (1989[1986]) and been struck by the convergence of their theory with my perspective. I have tried to incorporate, as best I can, their theory into the original text.

[2]If I sound overly self-referential it is because this article does in fact represent my first endeavor to bring aspects of my life as an anthropologist fully to bear on my ordinary life, and vice versa. I intend a self-critique as well as a reappraisal of certain aspects of anthropological method and representation.

[3]Muslims and Hindus live interspersed in north Bali, with about eight percent Muslims to about 85 percent Hindus. They intermingle, and consult each other's healers in misfortune and illness, though they prefer to use their own kind (Wikan 1990a).

[4]The closest Indonesian translation would be *timbang rasa,* which my dictionary defines as "a sense of rhythm; balance; reasonableness."

[5]Obeyesekere (personal communication, 1991) has pointed out that I seem to use "heart" in its literal Western sense, whereas the crucial idea is simply that feeling and thought are fused. Space limitations prevent a closer scrutiny of this problem here; and I regret that I have not tackled it adequately in my book either (1990a). Interestingly, I have come across a similar notion in Bhutan. Said one woman:

We who have been to school and have learnt biology and science know that the mind is in the brain, in the head. But Bhutanese will always point to the heart to locate thinking. We have a proverb: "If one has no heart with which to think, then one's eyes will be blind," meaning one will be insensitive to the suffering of others.

[6]It is easier to pursue selfish motives if one deafens oneself to one's heart. Balinese say of such people that they act "as if thinking alone will do," or that they have "a short string [*tali*]." In the long run the price will have to be paid in accordance with the principle of *karma pala,* though perhaps not before the next reincarnation.

[7]To forestall a possible misinterpretation here, let me hasten to add that I am not arguing semantics versus pragmatics. I take it *both* processes are typically involved in verbal communication. As Sperber and Wilson point out, "linguistic decoding is not so much part of the comprehension process as something that precedes the real work of understanding" (1989[1986]:177). And, they say,

> verbal communication involves both code and inferential mechanisms. . . . Thus both models can contribute to our understanding. However, it is usually assumed that one or the other must provide the right overall framework. . . . These are reductionist views. . . . Hence upgrading either to the status of a general theory is a mistake. [1989(1986):3]

I take it both the Muslim and I were engaged in a pragmatic effort to understand, and where I went wrong was not in searching for coded meaning but in the assumptions I brought to bear, the context I imposed, and the critical (noncharitable) stance I employed, all of which meant I lost out on the relevance—to her and me—of what the speaker "meant" to say.

[8]Compare Putnam: "there are external facts, and we can *say what they are.* What we *cannot* say—because it makes no sense—is what the facts are *independent of all conceptual choices*" (1981:33).

[9]Several insights from Sperber and Wilson are relevant to this discussion:

> Comprehension is defined as a process of identifying the speaker's informative intention. . . . In many—perhaps most—cases of human communication, what the communicator intends to make manifest is partly precise and partly vague. . . . Communication is successful not when hearers recognize the linguistic meaning of the utterance, but when they infer the speaker's "meaning" from it. . . . A speaker who intends an utterance to be interpreted in a certain way, must also expect the hearer to supply a context which allows that interpretation to be recovered. [1989(1986):177, 59, 23, 16]

[10]Shweder (1991:9) gives "appreciation" as "understanding plus experience." I think this would converge with Balinese views.

[11]That intentions lie somehow beyond manifest sayings or acts is a Western presupposition, but as I am addressing a Western readership here, I think it is acceptable. Marilyn Strathern (1990) notes that non-Westerners may locate intention elsewhere. Among Mount Hageners, she writes, "it is the appearance of the things that the person intends. . . . There is no way to bypass the act that is required to make things visible" (1990:4). She qualifies "appearance" as "realisation or reification, making an entity perceptible to others" (1990:25). I think that our views converge and that both underscore Sperber and Wilson's theory of relevance: it is from ostensible cues—the manifest—that people assess speaker's (or agent's) "meaning," that is, intention (1989[1986]:49–50).

[12]Excellent formulations of this perspective are found in Abu-Lughod and Lutz (1990) and Abu-Lughod (In press). While I sympathize with their endeavor, I am uneasy about their deployment of the terms "context" and "discourse," which I see as disimpersonating: Abu-Lughod argues for a shift from "a focus on what is *said* in discourse" to "the more interesting and political questions of what discourse is, what it does, and what forms it." She adds, "What we need to know is how discourses . . . are implicated in the play of power and the operation of historically changing systems of social hierarchy" (1990:28). This would seem to me to shift attention away from persons grappling with their lives to more abstract phenomena credited with the power to act, much as "culture" once was (cf. Paul 1990). Nor does the following qualification seem to me sufficient: "the term discourse marks an approach to language as spoken and used. . . . All that is being keyed is an interest in language in context, texts, and the public and social character of what we study" (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990:7–8). I think we do agree that context is inherently tricky and that texts are no substitute for nitty-gritty involvement in people's daily lives.

[13]The aspect of audience interpretation seems sorely underrepresented in discourse analysis (but see Brenneis 1990a, 1990b). The emphasis is generally on the said or the speaker.

[14]An implication of what I am saying is that I consider the use of tape recorder and also notebook problematic in social encounters in the field, and best to be avoided except for certain clearly defined purposes. Reliance on such devices seems to me to reinforce, and to be itself an expression of, our overreliance on words and the *exact* utterance. One reader has asked: what then of memory distortion? My answer would be: what if one were to let the tape recorder speak its single text with a full voice, uncorrected and unmodified by all the other cues? Would that enhance one's chance of understanding the speaker's intentions? Or might it rather provide what Sperber and Wilson (1989[1986]:23) call "misleading evidence"?

[15]The Bhutan language situation illustrates a problem in practicing what much contemporary anthropology preaches: attending to a wider sociopolitical field than the traditional community. How is one to study a small country (in this case, of some 600,000 people) that has four major languages, seven to eight minor ones, and no lingua franca?

In Bhutan, English is the medium of instruction in schools, but literacy rates are only about 15 percent for males and five percent for females, and they are close to zero for people living in villages. Recently, a national language, Dzongkha, has been invented on a model of Tibetan Chokey and is being taught as a secondary language in the schools. However, the majority of the population does not speak it.

[16]Sperber and Wilson speak of "a tacit guarantee of relevance. . . . Ostensive behaviour provides evidence of one's thoughts. It succeeds in doing so because it implies a guarantee of relevance" (1989[1986]:49–50).

[17]In a special methodological section of my book *Behind the Veil in Arabia*, I deal with silence and nonverbal communication (1982:296ff.). Other relevant readings are Birdwhistell (1970), Tual (1986), and Basso (1990b).

[18]One reader of this article observed that to go beyond the words, one needs first to have them. As these quotations from Bourdieu and Ingold make clear, I disagree.

[19]Obeyesekere raises an important issue: the possibility of misresonance (personal communication, 1991). Much misunderstanding, both within and across cultures, certainly arises from a too facile attribution to others of what one feel-thinks oneself. Adding to Ingold's remarks, I can point to two "techniques" that serve to counter such misresonance. First is an active, unstructured, patient engagement with people, even when nothing seems to be going on and one is just "wasting" one's time. Such being-together-with is crucial to grasping what is at stake for people. Maslow characterizes such an attitude as "receptive, passive, patient, and waiting, rather than eager, quick, and impatient" (1966:10). Second is an attempt not to overdo one's act as participant but to expose one's genuine reactions in a way that will, one hopes, not hurt or offend people. What more effective way of correcting one's misresonances might there be than letting them be exposed in one's unpretentious interactions with others, giving people the opportunity to point out that you are totally wrong? I would also emphasize the importance of bridging domains.

[20]Spiro observes that the concept of *karma* bears

> a striking family resemblance to concepts found in many other cultural traditions, . . . such . . . as luck, fate, predestination, God's will, kismet, fortune, [and] destiny. . . . Although formally and semiotically different from each other, . . . all of those concepts, just like *karma*, provide an explanation for the vagaries of an actor's "life chances" . . . without recourse to the agency . . . of the actor himself. [1986:267–268]

Tambiah's discussion, *pace* Putnam (1981), of *concept* versus *conception* is also relevant here (1990:124ff.).

[21]Appadurai's discussion of "natives" (1988) is relevant here. Though he seems to say that "native" is used for "persons and groups who belong to those parts of the world that were, and are, distant from the metropolitan West" (1988:36–37), I submit that Cairenes are not *natives*—the appellation does not fit the metropolitan poor. Natives are found in villages, in tribes, or in places like Bali.

[22]Hobart observes, "The agent's thoughts or feelings are seen as an active part of knowledge, speculation, and speech" (1985b:123); see also Wikan 1990a:ch. 7.

[23]The term "wordstruck" is from MacNeil 1989. One reviewer of my article objected to the very idea that anthropologists are hung up on words. I see the objection as an indication that my observation may have stung to the core. We share our predicament with other researchers and professionals, as Latour and Wolgar (1979) have demonstrated in their now-classic work on laboratory science and as Byron Good (In press) has suggested in his penetrating analysis of writing and speaking as central formative practices of medicine. It is part of our heritage from the Greeks: "We live inside the act of discourse" (Steiner 1967, cited in Obeyesekere 1990:277). For a fine discussion of this logocentric bias, see Obeyesekere (1990:274ff.).

[24]Rosenberg argues that studies of emotion discourse have sometimes sought the meanings of words out of everyday contexts and then put the words back into those contexts as if the meanings they then had were the actual ones (1990).

[25]As used in the discourse and strategic plays between refugees or immigrant workers and Norwegian authorities, "culture" is complex. Power enters disturbingly when spokesmen of ethnic groups or families define "the culture," and government officials, committed to respecting "their culture," *act on* this definition, with dire effects for those who are not lent a voice or dare not speak: children, youth, and women. An honest commitment to respecting "their culture" can serve under such circumstances as a collusion with those already in power.

[26]See Said (1981) for an incisive statement of this problem.

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