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Plus ça change ...

Recent developments in Old Javanese studies and their implications for the study of religion in contemporary Bali

The idea that the text changes, that people are consciously changing the text, and that such processes should be of interest to philology, runs counter to many earlier assumptions about the role of philology as a scientific method for establishing the 'original' text (Vickers 1984:4-5).

[T]he *kakawin* poetry of ancient Java acquires its character as a meaningful literary text for present-day Balinese only through oral performance (Schumacher 1995:488).

[K]*ekawin* philology as practised to date undermines the religious beliefs and values upon which *kekawin* composition has been based (Rubinstein 2000:225).¹

As noted in a special issue of *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* (Van der Molen and Creese 2001), the study of Old Javanese texts has undergone significant changes in recent years.² In this article, I would like to consider some of the critical implications of these changes for the scholarly study of religion in contemporary Bali.

¹ In a note on spelling, Rubinstein (2000:xiii) explained, 'I employ the Balinese spelling of *kekawin*, but when quoting from a Kawi source I use the Kawi spelling *kakawin*'. For consistency, I have reversed Rubinstein's convention, using the Kawi spelling in my own remarks, as it occurred most frequently in the sources cited in Fox 2003 – and to which I have had occasional cause to return. I have, however, retained the Balinese spelling (*kekawin*) when citing the work of others.

² The volume carries the subtitle 'Old Javanese texts and culture'.

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In a previous essay on Old Javanese philology (Fox 2003), I examined a series of books and articles published between 1957 and 1983. The intervening years were capped at either end with the publication of a significant article aiming both to take stock of the accomplishments of, and to assess the challenges facing, students of Old Javanese language and literature. The analysis began with a programmatic statement from P.J. Zoetmulder in 1957 ('*Kawi and kekawin*'), and ended in 1983 with S.O. Robson's retrospective evaluation of how scholarly work should proceed ('*Kakawin* reconsidered; Toward a theory of Old Javanese poetics'). The purpose driving the analysis of these publications was to consider critically the scholarly contention that Old Javanese texts 'contained' or 'communicated' the 'religion' that – to use Teeuw and Robson's phrase (1981:9-10) – 'finds its direct continuation in present-day Bali'. My essay addressed the question of how this 'direct continuation' was thought to work during the period of scholarship in question. Through a close reading of key philological texts published during this period,³ 'the Old Javanese text' surfaced as a site of conflicting qualities: poetic authenticity and artificiality, creation and imitation, purity and corruption. These diametrically opposed tropes were deployed in the philological evaluation of textual transmission, and the arbiter of value emerged in the guise of the scholar as judge.⁴ The Balinese were praised as the guardians of the text when they were thought to have functioned as an inert medium for its transmission; and they were judged unfaithful to the text when their knowledge was considered inadequate for an appreciation of its 'pristine glory'.

'The Old Javanese text' emerged as an object of scholarly knowledge through a process that was imagined as follows: First, the poet was thought to have expressed his aesthetic feeling, and this artistic expression was objectified in, and conveyed by, the text; the text then survived transmission in various manuscripts and, thankfully, the Balinese preserved these manuscripts. Yet, although the Balinese had written, read, and studied *kakawin* themselves, it seemed that, in most cases, the poet's original expression of his aesthetic feeling – couched, as it was, in an ancient and arcane language – was 'not always understood in all its peculiarities and intricacies' (Zoetmulder 1974:24) by the poet's 'unspectacular collaborators [namely, the Balinese] in the conservation of the treasure of culture that is literature'

³ At this juncture, I should emphasize that I am not arguing for a critical periodization of Old Javanese scholarship. (As my title suggests, I am in one sense arguing against it.) Rather, one of my aims is to problematize the subtle articulations of progress and period within the scholarly discourse of 'the Old Javanese text' itself.

⁴ Metaphors of judgment have been associated with scholarly work since, at the very latest, the time of Sir Francis Bacon – himself a judge – who described scientific inquiry explicitly in terms of 'interrogation'. I considered (Fox 2003) at some length the implications of representing philological work in terms of such juridical-forensic metaphors.

(Zoetmulder 1974:46). Nevertheless, despite their 'confusion' regarding the aesthetic content of these texts, we are told that the Balinese preserved the manuscripts that have allowed scholars to understand the poet's expression, through a philological procedure of textual reconstruction that culminated in what Zoetmulder (1974:51) described as a 'neoplatonic process of descent and reascent'.

As such, 'the Old Javanese text' surfaced as a classically articulated substance. That is to say, it was represented as the foundational ground underpinning the unity of the otherwise unrelated moments in its own historical emergence. In this regard, 'the Old Javanese text' emerged as a theoretical entity that necessarily preceded the occasions on which it was observed, while historical events (that is, moments in its 'transmission') were cast as extrinsic to its true nature as an object of knowledge. As a substantialist mode of thought, this approach to text was not only, in Collingwood's terms (1993:42), ahistorical; in the final analysis, it was circular.⁵ A knowledge of the text was required to recognize its manuscripts as such; and the manuscripts themselves were the sole avenue to a knowledge of the text. The circularity of this endeavour was, at least in part, recognized by Zoetmulder (see, for example, 1974:60); however, the full implications of this circularity were – at least to my knowledge – never properly addressed by scholars of Old Javanese language and literature.

In addition to such philosophical difficulties, I noted that further problems arise in considering the relationship between textual substantialism and the study of religion in contemporary Bali. One might argue (and many implicitly have) that, insofar as Old Javanese texts have been cast as representative of religion in contemporary Bali, one's claim to comment authoritatively on that religion would defer to and depend upon one's claim to a knowledge of those religion-bearing texts. The problem was that, presupposing such a substantialist state of religio-textual affairs, one is likely to concur with an unnamed Balinese commentator cited by Goris (1960:71), who suggested that 'the ordinary people of Bali do not know well enough the essential traits of their own religion'. In other words, such a contention of Balinese ignorance is a most likely conclusion should one's analysis be based upon the textual substantialism characteristic of traditional Old Javanese philology.

⁵ I should note that, unless explicitly indicated otherwise, I use the terms 'history', 'historical', and 'historically' (as well as 'ahistorical' and 'ahistorically') exclusively in their Collingwoodian sense. It is worth emphasizing that Collingwood's use (1993) of the term 'history' is not simply a permutation of the colloquial notion of information on 'facts' and dates. In fact, it is arguably incompatible with most colloquial uses of the term 'history'. I return below to discuss the Collingwoodian notion of history, and address specifically its incompatibility with substantialist thought.

One of the questions I address in this article is whether there is a viable alternative to this configuration of critical inquiry. The appearance of a special issue of *BKI* (Van der Molen and Creese 2001) suggested that the study of Old Javanese texts has undergone significant changes in recent years. So, I shall first examine several recent developments in Old Javanese studies in order to evaluate their implications for the critical analysis of religion in contemporary Bali. On the basis of this analysis, I shall argue that, while a younger generation of Kawi scholars⁶ has made progress in formulating a Bali-centric approach to *kakawin*, they have yet to make a radical break from their predecessors.⁷ I shall further suggest that the frequent invocation of 'religion', in relation to Balinese literary practices, not only lacks critical qualification, but also seems to add little to the more nuanced observations elsewhere present in their analyses. I shall conclude by proposing, as an alternative, a pragmatic approach to the study of religion in Bali, through analogy to Judith Butler's performative critique of gender.⁸

Recent developments

In her editorial review article for the special issue of *BKI*, Helen Creese (2001:7) summarized recent developments in Old Javanese studies, examining both 'the traditional [...] philological, linguistic, and manuscript bases of the field' as well as 'discipline-based studies in a variety of fields in which Old-Javanese-language sources are the "tools of the trade"'.⁹ On a critical reading, four general trends emerge from her account; and I shall address

⁶ The Balinese word 'Kawi', from the Sanskrit *kavi*- ('poet'), is used to refer to ancient, literary language and texts (for instance, *kakawin*) – usually what scholars have dubbed 'Old Javanese', but sometimes a literary form of Balinese. In using the phrase 'Kawi scholars', I am referring generally to those interested in Old Javanese language and literature. Although the term Kawi was used occasionally by those scholars whose work I addressed in my 2003 article (for instance, Zoetmulder 1957; Robson 1972), I believe its increased prominence (often in place of 'Old Javanese') is related to a shift in critical emphasis away from Javanese provenance toward aspects of 'the Balinese tradition' (see below).

⁷ I use the term 'radical' in a technical sense, referring here to the metaphysical (Collingwood 1972) roots underpinning practices of knowing and commenting on Old Javanese texts.

⁸ Butler 1999. I use the term 'pragmatic' in reference to the idea of practice as a critical frame of reference.

⁹ Creese (2001:5-6) took the publication of Zoetmulder's *Kalangwan* as her point of departure: 'In this short essay, I cannot hope to cover the field in its entirety or comprehensively. As a useful starting point, I have taken the publication, in 1974, of Zoetmulder's seminal work, *Kalangwan: A survey of Old Javanese literature*. Zoetmulder (1906-1995) was undoubtedly the most significant contributor to Old Javanese studies in the twentieth century.' For a discussion of Zoetmulder's *Kalangwan* (1974), see Fox 2003.

each in turn, in order to consider their implications for an analysis of religion in contemporary Bali. The four trends may be paraphrased as follows: 1. the study of Old Javanese language and literature has been situated within a more broadly conceived re-evaluation of Southeast Asia and Southeast Asian studies; 2. an undercurrent of traditional philology persists, with isolated but deliberate moves toward theorizing 'the text'; 3. a new generation of scholars, also working along broadly philological lines, has begun to re-evaluate 'the Balinese tradition', with a not entirely approving eye to their predecessors,¹⁰ and 4. scholarly interest is increasingly being directed toward the contemporary 'performance' and use of texts in Bali.

Re-evaluating Southeast Asia

In her contribution to a special issue of the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Ruth McVey (1995:6-7) argued that 'Southeast Asia itself has changed far more massively and profoundly than have Southeast Asian studies', and that scholarship 'will have to change, and radically, if it is to keep up with the object of its contemplation'. She suggested, for example, that 'the study of diasporas is becoming as real a subject as the study of ethnic minorities' (McVey 1995:8), and further, that we 'can expect that Southeast Asia studies of the future will devote more attention to the urban sector, to labour as well as industry, to the media and modern culture'.¹¹ The question is how the study of Old Javanese language and literature might fit within such a radically revamped paradigm for Southeast Asian studies.

Citing McVey, among others, Creese (2001:3) indicated the extent to which, 'in the field of Southeast Asian studies as a whole, issues of modern state formation and development have dominated the interest of scholars

¹⁰ In noting this tendency, I should emphasize that, while more recent scholarship has tended to cast the problem (that is, regarding the marginalized position of Bali in traditionally philological studies of *kakawin*) in terms of replacing the search for Javanese provenance with an appreciation of 'the Balinese tradition', I do not believe such a shift is capable of accomplishing its aim. As I shall argue, this approach moves Bali into the position previously occupied by Java, leaving some of the most problematic aspects of the philological episteme firmly in place. In short, I do not think that it is terribly useful to see the problem facing Old Javanese philology in terms of an emphasis on either Java or Bali.

¹¹ McVey 1995:8. In this connection, it is relevant to note Creese's concluding remarks (1997:24) to her essay on Majapahit and 'the transformation of Balinese identities': 'Night after night Balinese are presented with a bewildering array of visual images of their past through dance dramas and tele-movies, documentaries and religious commentaries, sometimes in Indonesian language but more often in Balinese, and thus specifically Balinese rather than nationalist. The memory of the characters, events, topography and physical setting of Majapahit thus perhaps more than ever continue[s] to revolve before the Balinese consciousness.' (Compare Wiener 1995:381, note 8.)

In my doctoral dissertation (Fox 2002), I analysed the televised articulation of religion in contemporary Bali.

and commentators'. However, she went on to explain that 'in the last decade there has been a recognition of the importance of earlier social, cultural and religious values for understanding contemporary culture in Southeast Asia' (Creese 2001:3). On this account, it would appear that an appreciation of the past – its 'social, cultural and religious values' – was thought to contribute to an understanding of the contemporary scene; and, with regard to Indonesia, Creese (2001:3) suggested that 'Old Javanese studies has a significant role to play in this area'. Unfortunately, there was little detail offered regarding what this role might be. A useful question, in this connection, could be phrased in terms of the presumed relationship between Old Javanese texts and contemporary life in Indonesia. One might plausibly inquire, for instance, into the ways in which present-day Indonesians imagine the Old Javanese past.¹² Or, perhaps more problematically, one might ask how the Old Javanese past has affected (or effected?) the Indonesian present.¹³

With regard to Bali in particular, Creese (1997:23) argued elsewhere that 'the layers of Bali's evolving identities preserved in the Balinese textual record provide the cultural foundation on which contemporary images are built'.¹⁴ In a similar manner, Rubinstein (2000:86) observed that, for high-caste Balinese (*triwangsa*), the Javanese *kakawin* are considered 'to be the source of their present culture'.¹⁵ So, one might argue that, within the newly reconfigured field of Southeast Asian studies, Old Javanese texts might be taken as a point of access to the 'earlier social, cultural and religious values' required for 'understanding' contemporary Balinese practices. On reflection, however, this understanding of the 'significant role' for the study of Old Javanese texts, within the new paradigm for Southeast Asian studies, looks strikingly similar to traditional Old Javanese philology. Rooting contemporary Balinese practices in Old Javanese textual 'foundations' and 'sources' seems, for instance, to imply precisely the sort of substantialist metaphysics¹⁶ exemplified by Teeuw and Robson's contention (1981:9-10) regarding (four-

¹² In certain respects, Creese (1997) has followed this line of inquiry (see note 11).

¹³ It should be emphasized that these are very different kinds of questions. The former would be a matter of examining situated practices of history-making, while the latter line of questioning would be, at best, teleological (events in the past would be explained in terms of their contribution to the current state of affairs), and, most probably, reliant on the sort of textual substantialism mentioned above and addressed at length in Fox 2003 (that is to say, such-and-such an aspect of contemporary Southeast Asian life would be represented as a manifestation of an ahistorically textual precedent).

¹⁴ Compare: 'In Bali, a strong interest in the religious and moral principles contained in the ancient literature has emerged' (Creese 2001:14).

¹⁵ One might also compare Vickers's remark (1990:159) on the manner in which Balinese texts 'were and still are texts of Balinese society in the broadest possible sense'.

¹⁶ Here, as elsewhere, I have used the term 'metaphysics' in its Collingwoodian sense (1972:17, 1978:65-7).

teenth-century) 'Majapahit Śiwa-Buddha religion' and 'its direct continuation in present-day Bali'. On such an account, contemporary practice can only emerge as additive in relation to the necessarily a priori substance that comprises its ahistorical foundation. So, if this is the new role for Old Javanese studies, it would appear that, in addition to significant changes, at least some things have remained the same.

Theorizing traditional philology

In examining these more recent studies, one finds the persistence of many of the traditional philological concerns addressed at some length in my previous article in *BKI* (Fox 2003). In this connection, Creese (2001:13) has cited studies by J.G. de Casparis (1988) on words of Indian origin in Old Javanese, Supomo (1995) on the early development of Sanskrit influence on Java, and a number of studies by scholars of India who have sought to clarify links between Sanskrit traditions and specific Old Javanese works.

However, alongside such traditional philological work, there have been isolated, if deliberate, moves toward theorizing textual research in Old Javanese studies. In an essay on 'translation, transformation and Indonesian literary history', Teeuw (1986:193) remarked on 'the very absence of an adequate theoretical framework' for textual studies in Indonesia. He went on to explain that this 'absence of a theory has prevented us from asking the proper questions with respect to the study of literary texts' (Teeuw 1986:193). Very much in line with this concern, the late 1980s saw the publication of several articles aiming to contribute to the formulation of a 'theoretical framework' for Old Javanese studies.

In her editorial 'review of the field', Creese (2001:12) cited Robson (1983, 1988) in particular as having 'contributed to the wider debates on textual practice in Indonesian studies'. I addressed (Fox 2003) the earlier of Robson's two articles (1983) at some length, and I would argue that what I said there largely holds for the latter, more comprehensive piece.¹⁷ However, there is one significant difference that is relevant in this connection: the explicit invo-

¹⁷ Robson 1988. While the former piece (Robson 1983) addressed *kakawin* in particular, the latter (Robson 1988) laid out 'Principles of Indonesian philology' more generally. Nevertheless, the same set of critical principles was deployed in both instances. Familiar examples (see Fox 2003, for comparison) found in the later essay include: the text and its manuscripts (Robson 1988:12-4, 17-21, 23, 34), their preservation, survival and loss (Robson 1988:2, 4, 7, 13, 44), textual corruption (Robson 1988:14, 20, 29), an emphasis on the author (Robson 1988:7, 9, 13, 15, 18, 24, 26, 28, 30-1, 39, 41) and his creativity or originality (Robson 1988:1, 7, 13, 31, 39) – as opposed to artificiality (Robson 1988:41) – as the defining characteristic of literature (Robson 1988:1, 3, 6, 44) and art (Robson 1988:13); one also finds a marked predilection for juridical metaphors for scholarly inquiry (Robson 1988:4, 14, 18-9, 26, 29) and visual metaphors for knowledge (Robson 1988:4, 6, 11, 25, 34, 40, 42, 44, 45).

cation of 'structuralism' under the aegis of 'theory'. For Robson (1988:32), 'structuralism' was to underwrite his previously discussed – though less explicitly 'theorized' – insistence on the organic unity of the text which, having cited Aristotle on the unity of dramatic plot, led him to declare: 'So in fact "structuralism" is as old as Aristotle'.¹⁸ If in fact 'structuralism' can – in any serious sense – be reduced to a model of 'organic unity', and if this model of organic unity can be exported unproblematically to Indonesian texts, then perhaps Robson's articulation of 'structuralism' would be a constructive step toward redressing the 'absence of an adequate theoretical framework' as noted by Teeuw. But neither of these assumptions is self-evidently tenable.¹⁹

It should be noted, in this connection, that Robson was not entirely alone in his rather unusual articulation of structuralist criticism. According to Teeuw (1986:192), for example,

[the] basic problem is how to integrate what is valuable in the structuralist approach, i.e. the attention for the text as a coherent, meaningful, structural whole, into a historical approach which synchronically and diachronically deals with literature as a system and which puts the literary work at the centre, without detaching it from its socio-cultural setting.

From the outset, it should be recognized that Teeuw's 'structuralism' seems to offer something beyond Robson's invocation of Aristotelian poetics. However, of equal importance is the fact that his reference to the 'meaningful' character of the text as a 'literary work' distinguishes his 'structuralism' from its various permutations associated with the prominent anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss (for example, 1964). As Sperber (1975:51-2) noted, the novelty of Lévi-Strauss's model of structural analysis was that its symbols 'work without meaning'. As opposed to the Saussurian notion of a sign com-

¹⁸ Robson (1983) made a similar remark in '*Kakawin reconsidered*', but the reference to 'structuralism' was neither as explicit, nor quite as overtly 'theoretical'. The key passage runs as follows: 'The structural analysis of poetical texts in Javanese (or any other language) has to take account of the organic unity of the text – an idea in fact as old as Aristotle' (Robson 1983:300).

¹⁹ As Vickers (1984:79) pointed out, there 'are a number of factors which influence this view of "whole" texts. The most important of these, one firmly rooted in western epistemology, is the idea that texts should be organic wholes. In this view, all the elements should contribute to a central theme. In many ways this central theme is an abstractable or ideal form of the text, its essence. Yet Balinese manuscripts, in particular those of the *Malat*, are more often than not fragmentary rather than complete.' (Compare Vickers 1984:74.)

The point is not simply that Balinese interpretations of 'the text' should be taken more seriously. Rather, I am arguing for the very real possibility of a radical disjuncture between Balinese and broadly western notions of what counts as a text in the first place. It is only through a sort of discursive violence that the former may be reduced to a permutation of the latter. Of further interest is the fact that a decidedly pertinent piece by A.L. Becker (1979), contrasting Aristotelian poetics and Javanese aesthetics in shadow theatre, was not cited in either of Robson's essays.

posed of a signifier and its signified,²⁰ the Lévi-Straussian symbol was only taken as 'significant' through its oppositional relationships to other symbols – that is to say, without 'external' reference to a signified entity (be it 'conceptual', in De Saussure's sense, or otherwise).

By way of contrast, Teeuw's notion of 'a historical approach' seems to require a decidedly non-Lévi-Straussian commitment to a fixed signified of sorts, as exemplified by his desire to avoid 'detaching' the 'literary work', as 'a coherent, meaningful, structural whole', from the ground of 'its socio-cultural setting'. The question is whether aspects of a 'structuralist' approach can really be 'integrated' coherently into such a classically philological model of the 'meaningful' text. In other words, apart from novel terminology, it is not altogether clear what distinguishes this Old Javanese 'structuralism' from its pre- or non-structuralist predecessors.

In this connection, it may be noted that both Teeuw (1986:191-2) and Uhlenbeck (1993:327) cited the Prague school in qualifying their respective 'structuralisms'.²¹ Teeuw (1986:192) invoked a literary permutation of the six aspects of language often associated with the Prague school,²² explaining that 'The signification of a literary work comes about in a permanent tension between the text as a constant and the reader as a variable'. That is: first there is 'the text', which is fixed, and then there are the various (and 'variable') transformations it is made to undergo. In this particular article, Teeuw (1986:193-4) sets out to

²⁰ For De Saussure (1966:66), 'The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image'. He continued, 'I propose to retain the word *sign* [*signe*] to designate the whole and to replace *concept* and *sound-image* respectively by *signified* [*signifié*] and *signifier* [*signifiant*]' (De Saussure 1966:67).

²¹ Teeuw (1986:192) explained, 'Whatever the positive contributions of the structural approach to literary texts, it is obvious that this method was not favourable to the development of the study of literary history. Meanwhile it should be observed, to be fair, that at least one school of structuralists very early recognized these weaknesses and started to develop a methodological framework for the study of literary history along structuralist lines; I am referring to the Prague school.' Rather surprisingly, Teeuw (1986:192) did not cite Jakobson but, rather, referred 'in particular to Mukařovský and his pupil Vodička'.

²² See, for instance, Hawkes 1997:74-5. The 'six major aspects of the literary work' were listed by Teeuw (1986:192-3) as follows:

- a the literary work as a linguistic structure, meaningful, coherent, many-layered;
- b the literary work in its synchronic setting: as part of a literary system;
- c the literary work in its diachronic setting: its place in the 'historical row', its intertextual relation with predecessors and successors;
- d the literary work and its reader: its reception, in different surroundings and during the course of time, as part of literary history;
- e the literary work in its social context: the complex and interdependent relationship between social change and literary development;
- f the text as a work of art: no literary history can ultimately circumvent the problem of aesthetic value, including the position of the researcher himself.

make a modest contribution to the development of a theoretical framework, in particular with respect to texts or literary genres which are known or assumed to be of foreign origin, and to try and formulate the questions which should be answered in order to develop gradually a real Indonesian literary history, and to assign individual texts their place in it.

Teeuw (1986:194-5) casts his 'contribution to the development of a theoretical framework' in terms of four questions, as follows:

- a. Why was a particular text chosen for translation or transformation in an Indonesian language? In answering this question one should distinguish literary and socio-cultural reasons.
- b. What happened to the text in the process of translation: how and to what extent was it changed, adapted, transformed, both again in its literary form and in its social function?
- c. What did such a translated text do to Indonesian literature, what was its impact: did it affect the literary system concerned? Did it create a new genre? Did it influence literary conventions and norms, did it break through what Jausz would call the horizon of expectations of contemporary readers? And what were its social effects or repercussions (intended or unintended)?
- d. What did Indonesian literature do with such a text? How was it subsequently received, further adapted, or perhaps at some point rejected or forgotten? Did it become part and parcel of the literature concerned, or did it live on more or less as a *Fremdkörper*?

In these questions, one may note a movement toward a more historically specific (historically, that is, in the colloquial sense) account of literary practices. And, to be fair, Teeuw (1986:201) noted, in closing, that 'Within such a framework traditional concepts, such as influence, borrowing, corruption, imitation and deviation, need revision and rethinking'.

Yet, despite the call for 'revision and rethinking', his desire to 'integrate what is valuable in the structuralist approach' appears to be more additive than 'integrative'. In other words, on this account of 'literary history', the idea of 'transformation' is metaphysically parasitic on a pre-formulated theory of 'the text' as 'a constant'. Without unsettling the foundational commitment to an originary moment (be it authorial or otherwise), this sort of 'structuralism' would do nothing to undercut the textual substantialism characteristic of traditional Old Javanese philology. Although it would appear that, for Teeuw, aspects of 'the structuralist approach' may be used to cope with what happened 'to the text' subsequent to the authorial act, that originary moment would still comprise the substantially unchanging and ahistorical foundation in opposition to which its transformations could be recognized. That is to say, foreknowledge of 'the text' (as unchanging: 'a constant') is required to provide continuity between the occasions on which it is thought to have

'changed, adapted [and] transformed'. But, as Collingwood (1993:42) put it: 'what is unchanging is not historical. What is historical is the transitory event. The substance to which an event happens, or from whose nature it proceeds, is nothing to the historian.' So, in at least the Collingwoodian sense, Teeuw's notion of 'literary history' is no more historical than, for instance, Zoetmulder's constitutive emphasis (1974:51) on 'the autograph' as 'the finished product of the author's imagination'.²³

'The Balinese tradition' I: the idea of Balinese provenance

If such 'theorizing' of 'the Old Javanese text' is not entirely convincing, the traditional philological approach to *kakawin* has been subjected to more thoroughgoing critique, in recent years, by a younger generation of scholars including Creese (1996, 1997, 1998, 1999), Hinzler (1993), Rubinstein (1996, 2000), Vickers (1982a, 1982b, 1990), and Zurbuchen (1987, 1991). The older and predominantly (though not exclusively) Dutch school of Old Javanese studies has been criticized most prominently by these scholars for its dismissal of 'the Balinese tradition' as derivative and its view of Bali itself as little more than the site of preservation for what was considered an essentially Javanese literary corpus. Although Balinese interpretations have been indispensable to philological work,²⁴ *kakawin* written by Balinese poets – relegated, in Zoetmulder's survey (1974:382-406), to a chapter on 'minor *kakawin* of later times' – were, in effect, dismissed as being of inferior quality.²⁵ Rubinstein (2000:1-2) suggested that this 'philological preoccupation with *kekawin* of Javanese provenance is explicable largely in terms of philology's historical orientation'.²⁶ As Creese (1999:59) noted,

Even now our knowledge of the Javanese and Balinese literary corpus is based largely on the nineteenth-century manuscript collections that found their way into European libraries and catalogues, and thence to the attention of generations of scholars. None of these scholars was specifically interested in Balinese literary activity, let alone in the Balinese *kakawin* tradition. Thus, a considerable

²³ See note 5.

²⁴ For instance, as one of the anonymous reviewers of this article pointed out to me, Van der Tuuk's pioneering *Kawi-Balinesch-Nederlandsch woordenboek* (1897-1912) often had to rely exclusively on Balinese readings for its interpretation of particular Kawi terms.

²⁵ According to Creese (1998:142), 'the role of the Balinese poet or copyist was considered to have been no more than that of preserver and poor imitator of *kakawin* poetry, contrasting sharply with the golden age of Javanese *kakawin* writing which had come to an end by the late fifteenth century'.

²⁶ Rubinstein (2000:2) went on to explain that 'critical text editing has centred upon the quest to reconstruct original *kekawin* texts by tracing the threads of their transmission in copies that have filtered down through the ages. Javanese *kekawin* are believed to be the antecedents of Balinese *kekawin* and are, therefore, held to be more authentic and more pure.' (Compare Zurbuchen 1987:4.)

part of what was collected, and therefore much of what has survived until the late twentieth century, is a reflection less of the totality of the Balinese literary corpus at any given historical point than of the acquisition policies and idiosyncrasies of Europeans in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries [...].

On the basis of this insight, much of the recent scholarly work on Kawi and *kakawin* may be interpreted as an effort to offset this state of philological affairs.

This corrective trend within the study of Old Javanese language and literature is evident in the marked shift in scholarly interest toward *kakawin* of Balinese provenance. In 1982, for example, Vickers (1982b:492) contributed a short piece to *BKI* on 'The writing of *kakawin* and *kidung* on Bali' in which he noted that, at the time Zoetmulder (1974) was writing his survey, 'there was little specific information available on the dating of some of that literature'. At that point, Vickers (1982b:493) concluded that, until 'further research is done on the issue, we cannot date the texts [in question] more accurately'. In 1996, in an article on 'the dating of several *kakawin* from Bali and Lombok', Creese (1996:143) remarked that 'the study of this Balinese *kakawin* tradition has scarcely begun and there is little more than a list of titles and a few brief descriptions of Balinese *kakawin* works'. However, three years later she went on to compile and publish 'a preliminary description and inventory' of the Balinese *kakawin* corpus, in which her 'purpose [was] both to highlight the depth of the Balinese *kakawin* tradition and to demonstrate that the traditional view of *kakawin* literature as a largely Javanese tradition is somewhat distorted' (Creese 1999:61). In a related study, Rubinstein (2000:225) examined practices surrounding literacy in Bali, enabling *kakawin* of Balinese provenance 'to be located and interpreted within the context of the creative tradition to which they belong'.²⁷ However, such assertions of Balinese provenance and tradition may be less straightforward than they appear.

Robson's early discussion (1972:309) of the 'Kawi Classics in Bali' was 'the product of observations made in Bali in the second half of 1971', a stay which notably 'included a ten-day visit to the island of Lombok'. So, what might Lombok have to do with 'Kawi Classics in Bali'? In a related connection, Rubinstein (2000:20) noted that one 'of the most interesting nineteenth-century accounts of literacy among the Balinese is of indigenous origin and comes from the neighbouring island of Lombok'; and, according to Creese (1996:149), for roughly one hundred years beginning in the early eighteenth century, for 'all practical purposes Western Lombok [...] formed part of the Balinese cultural

²⁷ Rubinstein's analysis includes a nuanced account of the presuppositions underpinning literary practices in Bali. I return, below, to consider her analysis in greater detail, with particular reference to her use of the term 'religion'.

and political world'. She went on to explain that, in the Lombok courts, 'new literary centres sprang up. Through their ongoing association with the Balinese courts, or perhaps independently, literary activity flourished in this new setting – old works were preserved, copied and studied, and new works were written.' (Creese 1996:149.) Here it is relevant to note that a large number of manuscripts employed in Creese's 'description and inventory' (1999:66) of 'the Balinese *kakawin* tradition' belong to what is known as 'the Lombok Collection' which was 'taken from the library of the royal palace of Cakranagara, Lombok, at the time of its fall to the Dutch in 1894' – apparently a product of that flourishing 'literary activity'. Elsewhere Creese (1996:151) remarked:

However harshly later history may judge the ethics of this policy [of acquiring palm-leaf manuscripts and other treasures from the defeated court], the result was the preservation of a large collection of manuscripts, known as the Lombok Collection, that is now housed in the library of the University of Leiden.²⁸

The question is how to reconcile the sensibility of the contemporary critique of Java-centrism in Old Javanese studies (see above) with this implicit attribution of 'Balinese' provenance to a series of *kakawin* composed and copied in Lombok.²⁹ For Creese, an implicit assumption regarding the unity of 'tradition' seems to underpin the inclusion of Lombok within the sphere of what is substantially 'Balinese'. Along the lines of Zoetmulder's suggestion (1974:21) that, from the fourteenth century, 'Bali must be considered [...] as belonging to the Hindu-Javanese world', Creese's attribution (1996:149) of Balinese provenance required Western Lombok to be included within 'the Balinese cultural and political world'.

Scholars of Old Javanese language and literature have made a decisive move away from the traditional manner in which Balinese 'creative talents have either been downplayed or dismissed as markedly inferior to those of the poets of pre-Islamic Java' (Creese 1996:144); and this has facilitated a more serious engagement with 'the Balinese contribution to *kakawin* literature' (Creese 1999:46). Yet, considering the manner in which Lombok has figured in these accounts, one wonders whether this 'neighbouring island' has slipped all too easily into an epistemic position only recently vacated by Bali.

²⁸ Creese (1996:152) went on to explain that the 'usefulness of the Lombok collection for the purposes of studying Balinese literary history lies in the fact that its seizure as part of the spoils of war means that the entire collection has been preserved intact and allows a partial snapshot of the literary concerns of a particular court centre at the end of the nineteenth century. In the Lombok collection, we have a window into pre-colonial Balinese literary concerns that is unparalleled by the other public collections.'

Recalling the argument from my 2003 article, it is perhaps not irrelevant to note the predominant use of visual metaphors for knowledge in this excerpt.

²⁹ For instance, the *Khāṇḍawatavanadahana* (see Creese 1996:152).

'The Balinese tradition' II: manuscripts and their copyists

In addition to increased attention to *kakawin* of 'Balinese provenance', there has also been a growing interest among scholars in the process of 'transmission' itself. Although, as I have noted, a privileged position has traditionally been reserved for authorship in the philological study of *kakawin*, it would appear that copyists and the manuscript tradition of Bali have come to share equal attention. Besides a marked change in the scholarly attitude toward scribal 'interpolation',³⁰ a recent spate of articles have taken 'the manuscript' and its production as matters that are, in themselves, worthy of analysis.³¹

Scholarly analyses of the manuscript tradition have cast their object in various manners. Taking a comparatively traditional approach, Marrison's account (1986) of 'literary transmission in Bali', for example, provided little in the way of technical detail.³² However, by way of contrast, Hinzler's later study (1993:439), with its extended glossary of relevant Balinese terms, addressed 'the technical aspects of the processing of leaves; the production of manuscripts; writing, script and spelling; and the copying of manuscripts'. Concluding her essay, Hinzler (1993:466) noted that

in general, more is known about the names of the scribes of Balinese texts and the owners of the manuscripts than about the authors. An author, in particular an author of *kidung* and *geguritan*, was not considered important enough to be mentioned. What counted was the prestige of having a library, ordering a copy and making a copy for someone, not the talent to compose a text.

Three years later, taking up the emphasis on copyists and scribes, Rubinstein's extended essay on the literary activities of the renowned Balinese brahmin

³⁰ See, for example, Uhlenbeck's analysis (1989:34) of 'Interpolation in the Old Javanese *Rāmāyaṇa kakawin*', in which he argued that 'interpolations should not be viewed as simply spurious material from which the text should be freed, but rather as possible elaborations on or even as different recreations of a basic text'. Compare Khanna and Saran's evaluation (1993:3) of the *Kakawin Rāmāyaṇa* as 'no mere display of technical virtuosity but an outstanding work of literature', the product of great 'poetic creativity'.

³¹ I do not wish to suggest that the subject was entirely ignored in the past but, rather, that there has been a new interest in the process of 'copying' itself – that is, not simply as a means to a more exalted, literary end. Consider, for example, the current interest in the material process of copying as against Zoetmulder's following remark (1974:151): 'More important than the techniques of writing and the forms of poetry are the men who employed them, their ideas and aims, and their place in the society of their time'.

³² It should be noted that Marrison remained much within the epistemic framework of traditional Old Javanese philology. We may note the extent to which his account is couched in the language discussed in Fox 2003. For example: on the preservation and survival (Marrison 1986:274, 277, 281, 283, 286-7) of the text in its manuscripts (Marrison 1986:287), the tropes of fidelity (Marrison 1986:276, 283, 286), art (Marrison 1986:283-4), artificiality (Marrison 1986:277), authenticity (Marrison 1986:280, 283), corruption (Marrison 1986:281), influence (Marrison 1986:277, 281, 283, 286, 288), evidence (Marrison 284-5, 288), and expression (Marrison 1986:283).

priest, Ida Pedanda Madé Sideman, illustrated the use of 'Colophons as a tool for mapping the literary history of Bali'.³³ Rubinstein's essay (1996:173) proceeded from the observation that colophons

are an invaluable source of data about the social and historical context of manuscripts, recording such information as the names of poets, authors and scribes, the places and dates of composing and copying and, where recollections and commemorative notes are included, providing a link with events in the real world.

One may note here an important shift toward an emphasis on Bali as the location of literary activity; and yet, despite this shift, a critical examination of Rubinstein's study (1996:182) of this *pedanda's* work as a 'poet, author and scribe' calls into question the radicality of recent critiques in Old Javanese studies.

Not unlike Vickers's representation (1982a) of the Balinese 'artist' who produced an illustrated manuscript of the *Śiwarātrikalpa*, it would appear that, for Rubinstein (2001:1, 225), Ida Pedanda Madé Sideman came to perform an epistemic function not entirely unlike that of 'the author' in those analyses she later argued had both 'proved detrimental to [the] study of the Balinese *kekawin* tradition' and undermined 'the religious beliefs and values upon which *kekawin* composition has been based'. In other words, something akin to what Foucault (1991) called the 'author function' seems once again to have come centre-stage.³⁴

As Roland Barthes (1977:142-3) noted, 'the author is a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English Empiricism, French Rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the "human person"'. As such, a critical question for Old Javanese studies might be posed in terms of the implications that follow from exporting this 'product of our society' to insular Southeast Asia. In this connection, it is worth considering, for instance, whether Balinese assumptions regarding authorship are in fact commensurate with their western, philologically inflected counterparts. Marrison (1986:276), for example, commented on 'the accepted attitude to authorship' in Bali, noting that, in general, 'authorship was anonymous, and there was not a strong feeling of personal property in a text'. Hinzler (1993:466) also commented on the apparent unimportance of the author in

³³ In an article on 'Balinese texts and historiography', Vickers (1990:170) took a similar approach to a particular aspect or component of the colophon, the *pangéling-éling* or 'commemorations'.

³⁴ 'The author is asked to account for the unity of the texts which are placed under his name. He is asked to reveal or at least carry authentication of the hidden meaning which traverses them. He is asked to connect them to his lived experiences, to the real history which saw their birth.' (Foucault 1991:58.)

Balinese literary circles, pointing out that the author treated in her essay is in fact 'known by several names' (Hinzler 1986:217). She explained:

This article will be the first in a series of articles on Balinese authors, their life stories and their literary works. To begin with, we have to define what is meant by a Balinese author. This is a person, male or female, who either was born in Bali of Balinese parents or who originated from another island – for instance Java – but settled in Bali. (Hinzler 1986:216.)

If Hinzler's authorial 'person' was 'known by several names', Rubinstein's study (1996:178) of Ida Pedanda Madé Sideman as 'poet, author and scribe' went further in describing the manner in which the Pedanda

merely alluded to his identity, obscuring it in word play in the classical Kawi language, leaving it to his readers to both detect the presence of a reference to the poet and unravel the fact that it refers to him.

But, in thinking about these representations of Balinese 'authorship', it is worth considering more carefully the question of precisely what was presupposed in suggesting that the Pedanda's text 'referred' to him.

Rubinstein (1996:179) explained that his 'use of different names to designate himself as a scribe, poet, and author should not be interpreted as an attempt to confuse his readers, although that is the obvious outcome. Rather, it is a reflection of his brilliant mind and creativity'. Yet, in both Rubinstein's and Hinzler's respective analyses, one may note that 'the author' was presupposed as the foundational subject of literary practice: an 'identity' that is 'obscured' – albeit temporarily – through the use of elliptical language. This may at first seem unproblematic, but I would suggest that it is worth examining more closely the manner in which a Balinese text can be said to refer to its 'author' or 'copyist'. Critically speaking, was 'the Pedanda', as 'scribe, poet and author', prior to the texts in which he was represented as such? Or, perhaps less comfortably, is the disjuncture between broadly western and Balinese notions of literary practice more radical than that?³⁵ Whatever the case may be, both Hinzler and Rubinstein resort to an extra-discursive 'Balinese person' to account for authorship; and, as such, their work lands up – at least in this respect – firmly rooted in a traditionally philological episteme.

On closer inspection, in addition to 'the author', several other tropes that are familiar from the analysis in Fox 2003 emerge from this more recent period of work in Old Javanese studies. Examples include: the relationship between 'the text' and 'its manuscripts'; their 'preservation', 'survival', and

³⁵ Unfortunately, to my knowledge, there has yet to be a critical analysis of the writing subject as articulated through Kawi texts.

'loss'; the Indian provenance of 'ideas' and 'themes' found in *kakawin*; and the author's 'inspiration', 'originality', and 'creativity', as well as his or her various 'influences'. Also noteworthy is the prevalence of juridical and visual metaphors for knowledge and tabular modes of representation.

Figure 1. Page references for traditionally philological tropes occurring in more recent articles in Old Javanese studies

	Vickers (1982a)	Vickers (1990)	Hinzler (1993)	Rubinstein (1996)	Creese (1996)	Creese (1999)
'the text' and 'its manuscripts'	443-4, 445, 446, 447, 456*, 462, 464	(172), 174	446, 450, (452-3), 453, 456, 459, 462	<i>passim</i> , 175, (176), (180)	144, 150, 157, 159, (162), 168	49, 54, (59), 62
'preservation', 'survival', 'loss'	–	–	445*, (446), 457, 466*	174, 191*	143, 149, 151*, 152*, 167, 170*	46*, 49, 51, 51-2, 55, 56, 58, 59, 62, (63)
Indian provenance	159, 175	–	440, 441, 460	–	143, (167)	45, 56
'inspiration'	–	–	464	185	152*	55*, 57
authorial 'originality' and 'creativity'	–	177	–	174, 179*	(143)	46, 52, 54, 56
'influence'	–	(159), 163 n. 15, (169), (174), 175	440, 441, (443)	(190)	(159)	46, 49, 57, 59, 60, (63)
juridical metaphors for scholarly inquiry	444, 452, 462*, 464, 466	164, (168), (177)	–	184, 190, 191	144, 146, 149, 150, 153?, 157, 161, 166, 167, (169), 171	46, 47, 51, 52, 53, 54, 56
visual tropes ³⁶	464	160, 163, 165, 170, 175, 176, (177), 178	–	175, 176, 185, (190), 191	144, 146, 148, 149*, 150, 151, 152, 161, 162, 164, 166, 167, 168, (169), 171	51, 53, 56, (57), 58, 59, 60, 61*, 62, 63, 64
Kawi texts and Bali's/ Java's/ Indonesia's past	492-3	<i>passim</i> 162	–	174	143, 148, (154-5)	<i>passim</i>
tabular representation	447, 448*	–	–	182	(156), 171	48, 63

³⁶ See Fox 2003:88-92 for a discussion of visualism.

Numbers in the table refer to the pages in articles (listed along the top) on which the trope in question (listed down the left) occurs. References marked with an asterisk* indicate a particularly strong resemblance to the tendencies discussed in Fox 2003, while references in parentheses are less overtly similar. The placement of the ‘–’ symbol in an article’s column indicates that the particular trope for that row does not occur in the article in question.³⁷

So, under what conditions – and at what cost – have scholars come to their appreciation of ‘the Balinese contribution to *kakawin* literature’? In short, with Lombok playing the familiar role of Bali, and copyists that of authors, it would appear that Bali has simply taken the place of Java in an otherwise traditionally philological articulation of ‘the Old Javanese text’.³⁸

On performance and the appearance of substance

Alongside the reconfiguration of philological inquiry in terms of ‘the Balinese tradition’, there has also been a growing interest among scholars in the performative use of Old Javanese texts in Bali, based at least in part on the recognition that ‘Old Javanese traditions remain integral to most contemporary Balinese performing arts’.³⁹ In his essay on *Principles of Indonesian philology*, for instance, Robson (1988:38) noted that

recently students of Indonesian literatures have not been backward in acknowledging the importance of performance, so it is unfair to claim that philologists are interested exclusively in the written word.

³⁷ Here, it is worth pointing out that, in examining philological work, I have deployed many of the same ‘textualizing’ mechanisms – for example, the author as an ordering principle, tabular representation – that I have critiqued. In this connection, I seem to be driven toward what John Hartley (1992:5) called ‘intervention analysis’, insofar as ‘integral to it is the contribution its individual parts might make to the field of study that they have helped to constitute. Intervention analysis seeks not only to describe and explain existing dispositions of knowledge, but also to change them.’ That is to say, in my critique of philology, I am primarily interested in examining the discursive mechanisms to which a particular kind of Balinese knowledge has been subjugated. If, as a result of my deployment of some of these same mechanisms, philological knowledge loses a degree of its hegemonic grip on ‘the Old Javanese text’ (and, thereby, on ‘Balinese religion’), I would consider one of the central aims of my critical representation to have been accomplished.

³⁸ As but one example – recalling Zoetmulder (1974:151) on the poets’ ‘ideas and aims, and their place in the society of their time’, or Robson’s interest (1983:292) in uncovering the Kawi’s ‘hopes, ideals, and even fears’ – we may note Rubinstein’s suggestion (1996:183) that from ‘the dating in the colophons, the order in which Pedanda Made composed and copied can be reconstructed and his extraordinary intellectual life charted’.

³⁹ Creese 2001:6. As Marrison (1986:276) noted, ‘The literary heritage of the Balinese is known to the people not only through writings, but also through the chanting and singing of poems, through the shadow-play and the dance-drama, and through drawing and painting’.

And, to his credit – aside from a piece published in Dutch by a Balinese scholar in the late 1930s (Bhadra 1937) – Robson’s above-cited article (1972) on ‘The Kawi Classics in Bali’ was, to my knowledge, the first scholarly attempt to engage with *kakawin*-related reading practices in Bali.⁴⁰ However, considering the fact that Robson’s remarks on ‘the importance of performance’ were made within a chapter entitled ‘An added dimension’,⁴¹ it is worth a closer look at the position of performance in relation to ‘the written word’. Perhaps the easiest way to approach Robson’s notion (1988:38-9) of performance is by citing him at length on the nature of this ‘added dimension’:

In order to bring out the true nature of the text [the philologist] will want to preserve the original punctuation because of the function that this may have had in marking metrical units, for example. However, in order to bring the text to life ideally we should realize that the words on the page are not complete in themselves, no matter how absorbing the story may be and no matter how striking the images. For the text has an added dimension, its music. By ‘music’ we mean here the oral presentation of a text, whether melodic or not, including verbal embellishments and vocal techniques. If a text is meant to ‘sound’, let us give it sound. But to do this will require much more research than has been done to date, not to mention more skill than the average philologist possesses; but even if the performance itself has to be postponed, at least let us draw attention to the need and begin with collecting whatever relevant information is to be found. If we fail to acknowledge this aspect of textual study we have failed to do justice to the literature; we have deliberately thrown away an important part of the aesthetic whole, with the result that the mutilated remainder will lack the directness of appeal it once had.

Here, Robson’s interest in performance was cast in the familiar framework of ‘doing justice to the literature’ (Fox 2003:92-4). On his account, ‘the true nature of the text’, as an ‘aesthetic whole’, would be ‘mutilated’ without attention to this ‘added dimension’. As such, ‘the text’ itself was attributed with a performative aspect – its ‘music’ – without which it ‘will lack the directness of appeal it once had’. However, it should be noted that the references to how the text is meant to ‘sound’ and ‘the appeal it once had’ appear to indicate that Robson’s notion of ‘acknowledging the importance of performance’ had less to do with particular performative occasions in Bali than with the more

⁴⁰ Citing himself, Robson (1988:37) later remarked: ‘Following up these ideas with observation of actual practice in Bali, the musical aspect of both *kakawin* and *kidung* could be confirmed, and Wayan Bhadra’s long neglected remarks (1937) on the reading and translating of texts in *mabasan* could be shown to be founded on fact (Robson 1972)’.

⁴¹ In a later piece, Schumacher (1995:488-9) commented briefly on Robson’s chapter as follows: ‘Philologists, being traditionally inclined towards the study of written documents, have accepted the study of oral performance of *kakawin* as an “added dimension” (Robson 1988:37), understanding this process as the realization of an ancient poem in a current (real-time) performing communication process between a reciter, representing the absent author, and his audience’.

traditionally philological concern with the character of an idealized authorial moment. This general orientation is evident in Robson's earlier remarks (1983:316) on Zoetmulder's survey (1974) of Old Javanese literature:

nowhere [in Zoetmulder's survey] is it said that Old Javanese poetry is intended for performance. This does not do justice to the nature of poetry as something more than poetic prose arranged according to a rigid pattern of long and short syllables. The effect of Old Javanese poetry should depend not just on what is being told and how it is told but also on the way it impinges on the ear. If this is so, it seems likely that the poet will consciously have striven to use words which in particular were pleasing and in general were fitting to the genre. Poets tried to achieve effects by means of alliteration, and sometimes were successful.

On this account, attention to performance was cast explicitly in terms of the poet's intentions. It would appear that, as such an 'added dimension' to the philological enterprise, an interest in performance surfaced primarily as part of the drive for a more comprehensive appreciation of the text's originary moment. So, whether 'backward' or not, Robson's acknowledgement of 'the importance of performance' occurred within the bounds of an otherwise unreconstructed philological episteme.

Four years prior to the publication of Robson's extended essay (1988), however, Vickers (1984:81, 83) had argued that, through a careful critique of traditional philology, 'more radical possibilities of defining the text as a dynamic process involving elements from many media emerge', including, for example, 'recordings and documentation of various types of oral, sung and dramatic performances of the text, as well as [...] painted works'.

While Vickers's 1984 argument was addressed to *kidung* in particular,⁴² one finds that, in more recent years, a series of articles have appeared on *kakawin*-related performance in Bali. These include, for example, studies on *mabasan* (or *pěpaosan*) by Rubinstein (1993) and Schumacher (1995), extended remarks in Zurbuchen's book (1987:87) on *The language of the Balinese shadow theater* as well as a chapter on 'Kawi in the context of *mabasan*' in Hunter's unpublished doctoral dissertation.⁴³ The general tendency, in these studies, has been to expand the textual frame of reference by casting the performance itself as 'a text'.⁴⁴ According to Hunter (1988:330), for instance,

⁴² In 'When is a text not a text?', Vickers (1984) dealt specifically with the *Kidung Panji Malat Rasmī*.

⁴³ Hunter 1988. Additionally, brief remarks made on *mabasan* and *pěpaosan* can be found in the work of Creese (1998:13, 20, 48, 56, 62, 69, 74, 1999:51, 60-1); Hooykaas (1975:484, 1976:179); Khanna and Saran (1993:243); Marrison (1986:283); Robson (1979:303, 1983:316-7); Rubinstein (1996:180, 2000:2, 24-5, 28-9, 37-8, 62, 64, 86, 135, 144-5, 148, 169, 192-3, 219); Schoterman (1981:439, note 12); Teeuw (1986:198); Vickers (1982b:493); Zoetmulder (1974:50, 147).

⁴⁴ Robson (1988:39) made an isolated remark along these lines when he referred to performances in which the text 'is in the process of being created on the spot'.

'the *mabasan* text is thus at once a translation and a "localization" of the Old Javanese text, a record of the past, but also a re-interpretation in terms of contemporary institutions'.⁴⁵ Zurbuchen (1991:129) referred more explicitly to the manner in which, in *mabasan* reading, 'the entire performance creates a text that combines old with modern language, song with speech, and manuscript literacy with some aspects of oral tradition'.⁴⁶ But it is worth considering more closely what is presupposed in representing a 'performance' in such 'textual' terms. If, as for Robson, the idea of performance was parasitic on a pre-formulated theory of text-as-authorial-creation,⁴⁷ it is not entirely clear what critical work is accomplished in these latter accounts by 'textualizing' the performance itself.

The shift in emphasis from authorship to the performative event has a certain allure insofar as it offers a potential displacement of the originary moment as the ordering principle in studies of Balinese literary practices. (And this, of course, would have a knock-on effect for textually oriented accounts of religion.) However, there is also the possibility that such an approach would simply defer the constitution of the object of study in terms of a foundational substance. That is to say, if the author's artistic expression comprised the substantial underpinnings for traditionally philological accounts of 'the Old Javanese text', there is nothing preventing 'performance' from taking up its place within the same epistemic orientation (in, for instance, a position analogous to 'the manuscript'), much as Lombok took the place of Bali in more recent accounts of 'the Balinese tradition'.

In the passages cited above from both Hunter and Zurbuchen, the performative situation was cast in terms of a relationship between a textual tradition and its occasion of performance ('past' and 'contemporary' for Hunter; 'old' and 'modern' for Zurbuchen). However, if Robson was quite clear in stating the (supplementary) nature of his interest in performance, others have been less explicit in accounting critically for their understanding of the performative moment. To my knowledge, a serious move within Old Javanese studies has yet to be made toward – to use Vickers's phrase – more 'radical possibilities'.

Unfortunately, the serious philosophical problems inherent in substantialist thought – to say nothing of the ethical issues that arise in this particular case – will not simply go away if we ignore them. As long as 'the Old Javanese text'

⁴⁵ Reading Hunter's account of *mabasan* reading, one is reminded of Teeuw's above-cited reference (1986:92) to 'the text as a constant and the reader as a variable'.

⁴⁶ Here, we may compare Young's 'text and translation of a village drama performance in Bali' (1982), as well as Zurbuchen's transcription and translation (1989) of a commercial cassette recording of a Balinese performance of the *Geguritan Basur*.

⁴⁷ That is to say, on Robson's account, 'the importance of performance' emerged as an 'added dimension' in the pursuit of an otherwise classically philological substance.

retains its foundational status, and religion remains articulated to its 'content', it is hard to imagine a philosophically rigorous way to avoid Goris's conclusion (1960:71) that the 'ordinary people of Bali do not know well enough the essential traits of their own religion'.⁴⁸ I believe the problem is surmountable, and in the following section I would like to propose a tentative solution.

Religion?

Above, I addressed the manner in which a new generation of scholars began to re-evaluate 'the Balinese tradition'. Religion has figured in various ways in this re-evaluation. Commenting, for instance, on the 'renewed tendency among the elderly Balinese to copy texts written on paper onto palm leaf', Hinzler (1993:458) observed that

These elderly gentlemen copy texts in order to earn a proper seat in heaven, which can only be realized by leading a proper life, by the proper religious conduct. Thus, they have a tendency to turn to a more traditional, conventional life-style in which much time is devoted to religious practices: prayer, meditation, visits to temples and religious festivals and the study of literary and religious texts.

Further, according to Creese (1999:54), a 'significant number of Balinese *kakawin* have [...] religious precepts and speculation as their themes', and the 'religious yoga that inspired generations of Javanese and Balinese poets in the practice of their craft is perhaps reflected in these thematic concerns'. Similarly, in his remarks on 'A Balinese illustrated manuscript of the *Kakawin Śiwarātrikalpa*', Vickers (1982a:458) suggested that 'what lies at the heart of the *kakawin*, and what emerges as the artist's interest [...] is the religious meaning of the Night of *ḍiwa*'. On these accounts, it would appear that, once again, religion and text have been intimately linked – albeit in somewhat different ways. I previously noted the manner in which *kakawin* of 'Balinese' provenance came to the fore in Old Javanese studies, together with their authors and copyists; and, at the outset of this article, I cite a passage from Rubinstein's analysis of *kekawin* composition in Bali. In the latter study, she argued that

For an understanding of the Balinese tradition of *kekawin* composition, it has been necessary to move beyond the study of individual *kekawin* created in Bali and examine the relationship between *kekawin* composition and religion.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Passage cited in Fox 2003:68.

⁴⁹ Rubinstein 2000:225. Commenting on an earlier unpublished version of Rubinstein's 2000 study, Creese (1998:31) noted that her analysis 'also highlights the religious nature of *kakawin* composition and its esoteric and mysterious nature in contemporary Balinese literary circles'.

So, what is this thing called ‘religion’?⁵⁰ And, if it is to be deployed for ‘an understanding of the Balinese tradition of *kekawin* composition’, where is it to be sought? Considering the import of the above-cited passages from Vickers and Creese, can we assume that ‘religion’ is to be found in the very texts for which it is meant to provide ‘an understanding’? And, if so, is this mode of inquiry as circular as it appears?

Religious invocations

For Rubinstein (2000:17, 268), the circle was broken by a shift in genre: the ‘religion’ underpinning *kakawin* composition was ‘understood’ through recourse to *tutur* texts, which she glossed as ‘mystical, speculative treatises’. She argued that, ‘through the use of direct statements and metaphoric language’, these treatises ‘associate the techniques of *kekawin* composition with a religious ritual, consolidating the notion that *kekawin* composition is a yogic act’ (Rubinstein 2000:130). She went on to explain:

The conventions prescribed in the treatises emphasize that the Balinese do not conceive of the actual writing of *kekawin* as a secular activity, as merely a means to achieve the skilful and aesthetic utilization of words for the religious ends of worshipping, enshrining and attaining mystical union with the Divine. Rather, they emphasize that the process of writing is itself a religious act that entails careful manipulation of supernaturally charged letters in the shape of words, and the fashioning of those words into a sacred, metrical form that is imbued with aesthetic elements inspired by features of a religious geography. (Rubinstein 2000:130.)

Rubinstein (2000:4) examined several such *tutur* treatises, putting them forward as ‘a source of Balinese conceptions about *kekawin* composition’. On the basis of these ‘sources’, she produced an elegant metaphysical analysis of the assumptions underpinning literary practices in Bali,⁵¹ addressing a series of Balinese categories for ‘apprehending [...] and defining experience’ (Rubinstein 2000:225), including, for example, *sakti* (Rubinstein 2000:35), *tenget* (Rubinstein 2000:103), *pingit* (Rubinstein 2000:105) and ‘the *nişkala-sekala* duality’ (Rubinstein 2000:49).

It is interesting to note, however, that Rubinstein often glossed these latter terms, which she used to characterize Balinese literary practices, with the seemingly catch-all category of ‘religion’, a word which, on my reading, was never critically qualified in her analysis.⁵² For instance:

⁵⁰ I have borrowed the phrasing of this question from the title of Chalmers’s introduction (1978) to the philosophy and history of the natural sciences: *What is this thing called science?*

⁵¹ Although I use the term ‘metaphysical’ (Collingwood 1972) in reference to the nature of Rubinstein’s analysis, it is not, to my knowledge, a term she has used herself in this manner.

⁵² Although further analysis would take me too far afield, I would suggest the possibility that Rubinstein’s deployment of ‘yoga’ and ‘Tantrism’ are equally problematic vis-à-vis an account of

A number of practices for handling *lontar* are influenced by religion (Rubinstein 2000:63).

[The *Tutur Aji Saraswat* and the *Swarawyañjana Tutur*] furnish valuable information about religious beliefs and practices that underpin the concept of Bali as a society of religious literacy [...]. These beliefs and practices shed light on the religious context of literate activity in Bali. More importantly for this study, they indicate that *kekawin* composition is a highly-skilled, religious activity. (Rubinstein 2000:64-5.)

[A]lthough the composition of *kekawin* is considered to be a human activity, the Balinese conceive of it as an activity governed by religion, as a religious ritual (Rubinstein 2000:69).

[L]iterary creativity, especially the composition of *kekawin*, is not a secular but a religious activity and, hence, it befits only those who have attained a certain level of mastery of religious and mystical knowledge (Rubinstein 2000:92).

The Balinese conception [of *kekawin* composition] emphasizes the religious office and the magical powers of poets (Rubinstein 2000:126).

The question is whether this invocation of 'religion' and the 'religious' character of 'the Balinese tradition of *kekawin* composition' adds anything to the more nuanced discussion of what is, in effect, indigenous terminology (*sakti* and so on).

If Rubinstein's 'religious' gloss adds little to her otherwise sophisticated analysis of Balinese literary metaphysics, her oppositional articulation of 'the secular' ('the Balinese do not conceive of the actual writing of *kekawin* as a secular activity', above) indicates a seam in her analysis that warrants closer examination. On this account, it would appear that Balinese *kakawin* composition is not what a western philologist would consider 'secular'. But, does that necessarily make it 'religious'?⁵³ In this connection, it is important to note that Rubinstein (2000:3) limited her study to what she called 'traditional Bali',⁵⁴ explaining,

Balinese literary practices. On 'yoga' see Rubinstein 2000:3, 60, 69, 80, 90-2, 100, 105-6, 108-9, 118-9, 122-3, 125-6, 130, 135, 149-52, 171, 173, 176, 180-1, 189, 194, 215-6, 222-3, 257-62. On 'Tantra' and 'Tantrism', see Rubinstein 2000:9, 35, 43, 47-9, 51-2, 55, 57, 60, 99, 105-9, 121-2, 125-6, 151, 224.

⁵³ Talal Asad's most recent book (2003) addresses the specificity of various notions of 'the secular', and the nature of their relationship to particular configurations of religion. He argued, 'it is common knowledge that religion and the secular are closely linked, both in our thought and in the way they have emerged historically. Any discipline that seeks to understand "religion" must also try to understand its other.' (Talal Asad 2003:22.)

⁵⁴ 'The period of reference of this study is "traditional" Bali' (Rubinstein 2000:3).

Traditional Bali is, for me, dominated by a set of nineteenth-century or earlier cultural values, including values pertaining to literacy. It cannot be delimited by dates, for strong pockets of traditional Bali exist alongside 'modern Bali', and resist the influence of 'modern Bali', the period that commenced when the Dutch succeeded in colonizing Bali – North Bali in 1849, and South Bali from 1906 to 1908.

She further suggested that in Bali, during this 'traditional' period, 'the rift between the sacred and secular had not yet occurred, where religion suffused all aspects of life' (Rubinstein 2000:26). Yet, despite the ostensibly 'traditional' character of this 'period', in the absence of 'the secular' (recall: 'the rift [...] had not yet occurred'), it is hard to imagine the critical utility of a term defined in opposition to it – namely, 'religion'. As such, I would suggest that, without critical qualification, Rubinstein's invocation of 'religion' adds little to her analysis of Balinese literary practices and that, furthermore, it may actually detract from the more sophisticated and locally sensitive observations already present in her study. That is to say, it neither adds to the analysis of indigenous terminology, nor does it make sense in relation to her suggestion that, in the period under examination, there is no differentiation between 'the secular' and 'the religious'. At this juncture, I would suggest that the critical invocation of 'religion' might require a more cautious approach.

In his frequently cited critique of Clifford Geertz's model (1973) of 'Religion as a cultural system', Talal Asad (1993:29) noted that, in studying religion, what the scholar is confronted with

is not merely an arbitrary collection of elements and processes that we happen to call 'religion'. For the entire phenomenon is to be seen in large measure in the context of Christian attempts to achieve a coherence in doctrines and practices, rules and regulations, even if that state was never fully attained.

On Asad's account, the idea of religion emerges as the product of a particular sort of intellectual work characteristic of a western and predominantly Christian world.

From this observation, Asad (1993:29) went on to argue that 'there cannot be a universal definition of religion, not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but because that definition is itself the historical product of discursive processes'. That is to say, the 'religious' character of an event is not to be seen as naturally and spontaneously presenting itself to the analyst (and therefore potentially contributing to her or his formulation of a universal definition); but, rather, any such characterization must be considered as the product of a particular mode of analysis. In place of universal definitions of religion, Asad (1993:54) called for historically specific studies of particular 'religious' configurations, or what he referred to

as ‘unpacking the comprehensive concept which [the student of particular religions] translates as “religion” into heterogeneous elements according to its historical character’.⁵⁵ So, as Hildred Geertz (2000) put it, ‘how can we speak about Balinese religion?’

Setting aside the notion of ‘traditional Bali’ for the moment, it should be noted in the first instance that a thoroughgoing account of religion in contemporary Bali would be anything but homogeneous. As observed in Leo Howe’s book (2001), *Hinduism and hierarchy in Bali*, Hare Krishnas and devotees of Sai Baba – not to mention various Muslim communities around the island – have long lived in close proximity with more ‘traditional’ adherents to the state-sanctioned ‘Hindu religion’ (*agama Hindu*). The former are perhaps less readily visible to most tourists and scholars, but from a critical perspective this makes them no less legitimately part of the Balinese ‘religious’ scene. When contemplating the ceremonies and other events for which Bali is so well known, it should perhaps be remembered that what tends to be articulated in terms of ‘Hindu religion’ and Balinese ‘tradition’ (*tradisi*) is arguably as much rooted in New Order (Orde Baru) state ideology as it is in the sedimented practices of the island’s ‘pre-modern’ past.

Although in this essay I am concerned primarily with philological modes of representation, it should also be noted that the study of religion in Bali has long attracted scholars from numerous other disciplines including anthropology, history, and even psychiatry. However, as varied as their approaches may be, scholarship remains but one of several modes of articulating religion in Bali. Based in part on my own ethnographic and archival research on Indonesian mass media, I would argue that ‘religious’ discourse in Bali is characterized by what the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin has called heteroglossia: the ‘messiness [that] is the result of the complexities of daily living, with all its unforeseen, small, prosaic purposes and shifts in mood and evaluation, which are not reducible to a system’.⁵⁶ Priests, tourists, mass media, and state officials are among the many who articulate, and are articulated through, the plurality of competing registers that have surfaced in the discursive ‘messiness’ of present-day Bali. The latter include a range of practices represented in terms of categories such as *agama*, *sakti*, *religius*, *paranormal*, *sakral* and *mistik*, none of which can in any obvious way be reduced critically to one or more of the others. Philology, of course, also accounts for at least one of these many voices.

⁵⁵ This excerpt has been cited subsequently by scholars of religion on several occasions including, for instance, Joy (2000:137) and Nye (2000:5).

⁵⁶ Morson and Emerson 1990:139. I owe my use of the term ‘heteroglossia’ in this connection to recent correspondence with Hildred Geertz.

Performing religion

This article opens with three short excerpts from relatively recent scholarly accounts of Balinese literary practices.⁵⁷ I cite Vickers's recognition (1984:74-5) of a certain disjuncture between, on the one hand, the idea of 'philology as a scientific method for establishing the "original" text' and, on the other, the fact that 'the text changes', and that this is the result of people 'consciously changing the text'. In part, I want this first passage to act as a reminder of the critique of traditional philology presented in Fox 2003. I then quote Schumacher's more specific remark (1995:488) on the manner in which 'the *kakawin* poetry of ancient Java acquires its character as a meaningful literary text for present-day Balinese only through oral performance'. Despite the fact that Schumacher's analysis itself is, on the whole, very much in line with the traditionally philological episteme under consideration there, I cite this passage to emphasize the manner in which the problem raised by Vickers applies specifically to the contemporary Balinese scene. Finally, I cite Rubinstein's evaluation (2000:225) of the impact of this disjuncture between philological and Balinese practices, namely that '*kekawin* philology as practised to date undermines the religious beliefs and values upon which *kekawin* composition has been based'.

Discussing at some length the abiding scholarly association of religion in Bali with Old Javanese texts (Fox 2003), the bulk of this second article for *BKI* is devoted to an evaluation of recent developments in Old Javanese studies, with a special emphasis on the four general trends that emerge from a critical reading of Creese's recent editorial review (2001) of the field. Creese suggested that the study of Old Javanese language and literature had been resituated within a more broadly conceived re-evaluation of Southeast Asia and Southeast Asian studies. However, on closer inspection, it seems that, despite significant changes in what might broadly be considered the scholarly attitude toward Bali and the Balinese, the principle features of the traditional philological episteme examined in Fox 2003 have remained firmly in place. Although there have been isolated attempts to 'theorize' the philological enterprise, it seems these 'theorizations' are, at best, simply strapped onto an otherwise unreconstructed model of 'the Old Javanese text' as a literary substance par excellence.

The entrenchment of this substantialist episteme is further evident in the recent shift in Old Javanese philological circles toward an appreciation of 'the Balinese tradition'. In this connection, it appears that, with Lombok playing the familiar role of Bali, and copyists that of authors, Bali has been made to

⁵⁷ The first of these accounts (Vickers 1984) is not as recent as the others, but it was published after the period of scholarship addressed in Fox 2003. Further, and perhaps more importantly, I would argue that Vickers's early work is similar in tenor to that of the other scholars addressed in this article (for instance, Creese and Rubinstein).

take the place of Java in an otherwise traditionally philological articulation of poetic inspiration, expression, and transmission. I argue that characterizing Balinese literary practices as 'religious' neither adds much to otherwise sophisticated and locally sensitive analyses of indigenous terminology, nor does it make much sense within the framework of 'traditional Bali' where we are told there was no differentiation between 'the secular' and 'the religious'.

Examining scholarly work on the contemporary uses of Old Javanese texts in Bali, I suggest here that, in addition to Robson's interest in the idea of performance as 'an added dimension', there might be (to use Vickers's phrase) a more 'radical possibility'. Although approaches to *kakawin*-related performance seem to have been largely parasitic on a foundational theory of 'the text', I would like to propose that a critical solution to the problem of literary practices and their relation to 'religion' might be found through analogy to Judith Butler's performative analysis of gender. In her now classic study entitled *Gender trouble*, she 'sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body' (Butler 1999: xv).⁵⁸ Taking Derrida's reading (1987) of Kafka's 'Before the law' as a point of departure,⁵⁹ Butler (1999:xiv) observed the manner in which the 'anticipation of an authoritative disclosure of meaning is the means by which that authority is attributed and installed: the anticipation conjures its object'. She argued that

In the first instance [...] the performativity of gender revolves around this metalepsis, the way in which the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself. Secondly, performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration. (Butler 1999:xiv-xv.)

Through this performative reframing, gender emerges as contingent on each of its successive re-enactments through time. Along similar lines, I believe philological practice might be reinterpreted in terms of repetitive perform-

⁵⁸ Many of the issues addressed by Butler were also raised by Johannes Fabian (1990) in his study of an experimental theatrical production in Shaba, Zaire. While, in many respects, Fabian's and Butler's respective accounts of performance share a common *pragmatic* orientation, I choose to cite Butler in this connection, as her critique was cast explicitly in terms of the philosophical problem of substance. On the subject of performance, one might also consider the work of Victor Turner (for example, 1982) and Clifford Geertz (especially 1980). However, both Turner and Geertz were interested expressly in dramaturgical performance, which, for the latter, emerged as a constitutive factor in his approach. For this and other reasons, I decided that Butler offered a more appropriate solution to the problem at hand.

⁵⁹ 'There the one who waits for the law, sits before the door of the law, attributes a certain force to the law for which one waits' (Butler 1999:xiv).

ance. Such a shift in the critical frame of reference potentially has significant implications for the study of religion in Bali.⁶⁰

In the course of my analysis, 'the Old Javanese text' emerges as a classically articulated substance, perhaps not entirely unlike the gendered 'identities' addressed by Butler. She argued that, 'if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief' (Butler 1999:179). This dissolution of substance into a series of performative occasions effects two critical changes: firstly, it undermines the necessity of any given representation; and, secondly, it offers as a result the potential for transformation. In other words, on Butler's account, if the foundational ground thought to determine a given gendered 'identity' is itself ultimately groundless, that gendered 'identity' could in fact be other than it is. Critically speaking, the latter only gains a semblance of naturalness or inevitability through its repeated performative accomplishment.⁶¹

By recasting philological work in terms of such a stylized repetition of acts, 'the Old Javanese text' undergoes an important shift in onto-epistemological status. The philological representation of any particular text may appear to justify itself through reference to a foundational ground – for example, Teeuw's 'text as a constant' vis-à-vis 'the reader as a variable' (1986:192) – but, as Butler (1999:179) put it, 'the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment'. That is to say, the privileged status of philological knowledge can no longer be explained by invoking its correspondence – 'scientific' or otherwise – to a unitary and determinate world of 'texts'. Rather, it must be recognized that, as but one way of engaging with the world, philology has achieved its primacy as a mode of textual knowledge through the sedimentation of its performative accomplishments. The knock-on effect for religion is to recast scholarly attempts to locate 'Balinese religion' in ancient texts as equally performative and, as

⁶⁰ In her '1999 preface' to the tenth anniversary edition of *Gender trouble*, Butler (1999:xvi) noted that 'The question of whether or not the theory of performativity can be transposed onto matters of race has been explored by several scholars', and went on to 'suggest that the question to ask is not whether the theory of performativity is transposable onto race, but what happens to the theory when it tries to come to grips with race'. Here, I am concerned both with the question of what happens to the theory when it tries to come to grips with religion, and – perhaps more to the point – what happens to 'religion' when it is cast in terms of Butler's theory of performativity.

⁶¹ Butler (1999:179) explained, 'The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction'.

such, equally contingent. With the foundational rug pulled out from beneath the idea of 'religion in Bali' (or 'Balinese religion'), one can shift the critical frame of reference away from a classically formulated question of 'what is religion in Bali?' toward the pragmatically oriented (and, ethnographically, perhaps more helpful) 'when is religion in Bali?'⁶² In other words, the object of study may be reconfigured in terms of the practices through which Bali, the Balinese, and their 'religiosity' are represented – by scholars, tourists, and perhaps especially by Balinese themselves. On such an approach – and not a moment too soon – the scholarly notion that the 'ordinary people of Bali do not know well enough the essential traits of their own religion' would begin to look rather odd indeed.

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⁶² This shift follows Nelson Goodman's approach (1978:57) to 'Art' in *Ways of worldmaking*.

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