

Odalan of Tanjung Bungka. Music and Trance in a Balinese Village

VITO DI BERNARDI AND GIOVANNI GIURIATI

Abstract

This essay comments and reflects on the publication of a re-mastered version of a documentary video made in 1997 by Giuseppe Confessa, Vito Di Bernardi and Giovanni Giuriati on a religious festival that takes place in a Balinese village. In his part of the text Vito Di Bernardi presents his research, that articulates on three levels (mythic-religious, psychologic-theatrical, sociological). Based on his longstanding inquiry on rite and theatre in Java and Bali, he analyzes the collective and individual processes of building a sacred sphere for the ceremony, and the circularity between dance/theatre and possession. In his part, Giovanni Giuriati presents the different sonic aspects of the rite and highlights how music can play a multiplicity of functions in relation to rite and possession.

Odalan of Tanjung Bungka. Music and Trance in a Balinese Village. *Questo saggio commenta la pubblicazione di una versione rimasterizzata di un video documentario realizzato nel 1997 da Giuseppe Confessa, Vito Di Bernardi e Giovanni Giuriati su una festa religiosa che si svolge in un villaggio balinese e offre delle riflessioni su di essa. Nella sua parte di testo Vito Di Bernardi presenta la sua ricerca, che si articola su tre livelli (mitico-religioso, psicologico-teatrale, sociologico). Sulla base della sua lunga indagine sul rito e sul teatro a Giava e a Bali, Di Bernardi analizza i processi collettivi e individuali di costruzione di una sfera del sacro che caratterizza la cerimonia e la circolarità tra danza/teatro e possessione. Nella sua*

parte, Giovanni Giuriati presenta i diversi aspetti sonori del rito e sottolinea come la musica possa svolgere una molteplicità di funzioni in relazione al rito e alla possessione.

Title: *Odalan of Tanjung Bungka. Music and Trance in a Balinese Village*, by Giuseppe Confessa, Vito Di Bernardi, Giovanni Giuriati, 40'41", 1997.

Link: <https://www.soundethnographies.it/aiovg_videos/1-giuseppe-confessa-vito-di-bernardi-giovanni-giuriati-odalan-of-tanjung-bungka/>

In this issue of the journal we are publishing a video made over 25 years ago during research conducted in Bali as part of a CNR project on “Spazio sacro e spazio profano in Eurasia” directed by the late, and sorely missed, Romano Mastromattei. At that time, within the framework of that research, we decided to bring different interests together: Vito Di Bernardi had long been dealing with the relations between ritual and theater in Java and Bali; Giovanni Giuriati was conducting research on music and altered states of consciousness in Cambodian rituals; Giuseppe Confessa, by then a resident of Bali for many years – and an Italian honorary consul – was continuing to cultivate his theatrical interests within the contest in which he was living, with a perspective that combined an external look with an internal one as a member of a Balinese village community. These different approaches converged positively in the documentation of a specific ritual that, in the fall of 1997, was the subject of research by our team in Bali.

After a research period of some months that included fieldwork, interviews, participation in a wide range of rituals, and in dance-theater and musical performances, our attention focused on an annual festival (*Odalan*) that takes place at the *Pura Dalem* temple in the village of Tanjung Bungka. Thus was conceived our documentary *Odalan of Tanjung Bungka. Music and Trance in a Balinese Village*, which was the formalized outcome of that research. The theme of the relationships between ritual, theater, music, and possession in Southeast Asia was later abandoned by us in subsequent years, but the video has remained as a finished object bearing witness to this intense period in the field. Hitherto unpublished and presented only at festivals, conferences or in public screenings in the presence of the authors, we thought it appropriate to digitally restore it for this occasion and make it available, with the intention of contributing to the revival of a debate on these issues that has been developing in recent years in Italy. For this occasion we prepared new English subtitling, with the aim of making this work known to an international audience.

The title of the video refers first and foremost to Tanjung Bungka, a village now encompassed in the outskirts of Denpasar, the capital of Bali, on the road to Sanur, one of the Indonesian island's most popular tourist resorts. The people you see in the images are engineers, plumbers, gas station attendants and laborers, as well as clerks and civil servants. It is not a remote rural setting, but an urban space entirely part of contemporary modernity, in a Bali affected mainly by tourism development. However, it is still a space untouched by tourists, where, apart from the village community and their friends

and relatives, only we were present as a non-local element, and in which life ran parallel to the one these same people lead in contact with foreigners and the tourism industry.

Odalan in Bali is a religious festival that involves the entire temple community and can vary in duration, depending on the importance of the temple, the devotion of the worshippers, and the availability of funds. There are some festivals that last one or two days and others, at the most important temples, that extend for more than two weeks. At *Pura Dalem*, the main temple in Tanjung Bungka, the *Odalan* lasts for about a week with the core taking place over three days, summarized in this video. *Odalan* is held every 210 days, the duration of the Balinese year based on a lunar calendar. It is therefore celebrated once a year, and 233 families of the Tanjung Bungka village collectively work together to prepare the temple and manage the various aspects of this elaborate ceremony. The main purpose of the festival is to invoke, receive, entertain, and bid farewell to the gods.

It is worth mentioning that Bali is a Hindu island in the Indonesian archipelago, which encompasses several thousand islands with some two hundred million inhabitants, ninety percent of whom are Muslim. In addition to Hindu deities, a number of local spirits are “invited” to this festival. There is no contradiction or conflict in this, because Hinduism is a polytheistic religious culture. Therefore, this co-habitation of Shiva and the spirit of a mountain, or of a tree at the edge of the village, is not seen in conflictual terms. All deities are welcomed into an assembly led by *Bathara Dalem* (possessed, in this specific case, by a woman), a manifestation of Shiva who presides over this assembly of possession. In fact, in the *Odalan* of the southern part of the island of Bali the gods, once they are summoned and revered on the altars, move inside the bodies of the *sadeg*, the medium priests. The collective management of time and space is a very important aspect of this ceremony, as is a set of purification rituals that take place in a private, domestic dimension in the days leading up to the festival.

The video was made with two semi-professional video cameras and sound recordings using a DAT. It did not come about as a result of a specific film project. The initial intention was to use the cameras primarily to take visual notes that, when viewed after the ceremony, would allow for a better understanding of the dynamics, relationships, gestures, sounds, symbols and meanings connected to this long and complex ritual. The interest and originality of the footage led us to create a finished product with video and audio editing, accompanied by on screen texts and subtitles, despite the technical limitations of the footage.

Among the several significant aspects of the *Odalan* at the *Pura Dalem* temple in Tanjung Bungka, the video focuses on the mythical dimension, to be inscribed in a perspective related to Tantric Shivaism, and on the complex unfolding of the ritual, which involves numerous moments of possession and trance in which dance, performance, and music play a multiplicity of roles. Indeed, trances are frequent and of different types during the *Odalan*, while music is omnipresent and, more generally, sound, which plays an important role in the unfolding of the ritual, especially in the most important mo-

ments of meeting and communion with the gods. The interdisciplinary and collaborative perspective, which also includes the crucial role of mediation, translation and observation from the inside played by Giuseppe Confessa, therefore proved necessary in order to be able to attempt to understand and narrate this complex ceremony.

Bali, October 1997: *Odalan of Tanjung Bungka*

VITO DI BERNARDI

1.

Returning to reflect on *Odalan of Tanjung Bungka* after 25 years really is difficult for me. It is almost paralyzing. I have not been back to Tanjung Bungka since 1997, and on the rare occasions when I have been back to Bali, even though I was crossing that increasingly urbanized and chaotic area between Denpasar and Sanur by motorcycle or car, I never even looked for the temple where the religious festival that was the focus of the documentary was celebrated. Paralyzing, therefore, because of my present distance from the events documented and narrated? Paralyzing perhaps because of the intimate awareness of a quest that at some point stopped to follow other paths? That, for example, of India's Kutiyattam and its actor-priests; of Virgilio Sieni's contemporary dance; of Vaclav Nizinsky's prophetic creativity; of the bare puppet (*marionetta-ossatura*) animated by Mimmo Cuticchio in *Nudità*. But beyond these "other paths," which are perhaps variants of a single quest founded on finding evidence and traces of the beauty and necessity of theater, wherever they occur, my paralysis arises elsewhere. It originates in the realization that I would now have nothing to add to what the documentary shows and tells in its forty minutes.

This might seem like an act of pride, that of a researcher who refers to one of his products as an object that contains an accomplished meaning. Perhaps still fertile or perhaps now completely depleted and out of date. But it is so: Tanjung Bungka's Odalan is one of the most important points of arrival in my interpretive work on Balinese theatrical culture, work that began in 1980 with a Master's thesis and continued with critical work based on many literary sources tracked down in Dutch university libraries (Bali was part of the *Nederlands-Indië*) and oral sources collected in the field. I can then make technical remarks about the poor quality of the video technology used, namely the use of analog cameras at a low to medium level of resolution. I can criticize the instability of some of my video footage during the possessions; or recall the "dramatic" moment when we realized that the batteries of one of our two cameras would run out at perhaps the most theatrical moment of the ritual, that of the "entrance on stage" of *Rangda's* terrifying mask. Something that then, half seriously, half jokingly, seemed to us to be witchcraft, magical sabotage. I can also doubt that during the festive days of the *Pura Dalem*, the cemeterial temple, our presence was really irrelevant to the assembled people who constructed their rituals without apparently caring about us. And this only because one of the authors, Pino

Confessa, who was filming with one of the two cameras, had been a resident of the island for more than fifteen years, was married to a Balinese woman, and was an internal member of the community celebrating the festival. I can also linger on methodological reflections around the relationship between the researchers and the subjects observed and studied. I can question myself about the modes and meaning of a work that was intentionally inspired by philological rigor (textual, performative, musicological), problematizing it from a deconstructivist perspective, thus first and foremost bringing into play and questioning our identity and political role as researchers, the narrating subjects.

I can do that, but what essentially remains, by simply watching the documentary as an author, is that *Odalan of Tanjung Bungka* attempts to relate at least three levels of meaning, or rather of the forces in play: the relationship existing between the ritual actions performed during the festival and the religious myths and ideas to which they refer (animism, shamanism, tantrism); the relationship between the subjective experience of possession (illness, vocation, role inheritance) and the public manifestation of divinity in codified terms (iconic, performative, and musical); and the relationship of exchange and circulation of spiritual and material goods among the different territorial communities involved in the cemetery temple festival. These three levels (religious, psychological-theatrical, and sociological) are the fundamental issues underlying my research and personal contribution to the filmic narration.

2.

Odalan is the Hindu temple festival in Bali that is celebrated, following the lunar year, every two hundred and ten days. During the festival, the Balinese temple space, which for the rest of the year appears empty and sparsely attended, is transformed into a place crowded with worshippers, adorned with colorful fabrics, floral decorations and fruit offerings, a space bathed in the smell of fragrant incense, enlivened by dance and music coming mostly from the repertoires of ancient court performances. It is in this “baroque” space, redundant with religious symbols and images, overloaded with sensory stimuli, that the *sadeg*, the temple mediums, are possessed, at the moment required by the liturgy, late at night, by the gods who protect the sacred space and its worshippers. There is an energetic relationship, a synchrony, between the more outward time of preparation for the festival by the worshippers and the more intimate and private time of preparation for their own possession by individual *sadeg*. These are two preliminary activities that are both necessary and move toward a single outcome, that of the manifestation of the divine on the festive occasion; two ways that concur in that “construction of God” of which Bruce Chatwin wrote about oriental mystics.

On the one hand in the *Odalan* of Bali there is the collective work, that of the devotees, and on the other there are the “personal techniques” mentioned by Grotowski in *Tecniche originarie dell'attore* (Grotowski 1982) that each medium will use to prepare him/herself for possession. While the group of worshippers transforms the empty space of the temple into a space filled with signs and symbols of the sacred, the *sadeg* seems to do the opposite work, to move in the reverse direction from the collective: he/she will focus on the inner

space of his/her own consciousness not for the purpose of enriching it with images, fantasies, ideas, thoughts related to the possessing god, but to empty it completely, to make it a *palinggihan*, an “empty throne” where the god, if he wishes, will come to sit.

It is very important to once again stress that the two processes of preparation, of “building” the sacred, the collective and the personal, do not develop separately, at different times or places, but are, on the contrary, in strong interaction. Mediums do not experience a situation of segregation, nor do they seek it. Rather, they share with other worshippers the moments of preparation for the feast, the colorful decorating of the temple, the offerings to the altars whose tabernacles are opened to display and exhibit in their full splendor the idols, masks, weapons, and magical banners kept in them. At the same time, each in their own way, the *sadeg* seek moments of inner concentration. For example, they recite special mantras, go for a purifying bath, prepare special offerings.

For the *sadeg*, unlike other worshippers, it is a matter of performing small, additional, solitary actions for the purpose of creating the state of mental emptiness that is the prerequisite for the arrival of the divinity. Unlike many African or African-American possession cultures, where the segregation of the possessed is institutionalized, in Bali the absence of segregation not only promotes trance but also de-dramatizes its manifestation. This is also because possession is only one part of the celebration. The latter is not identified with the former, and possession, as the American anthropologist Jane Belo already noted in the 1930s (Belo 1960), is not even the necessary dramatic climax of the entire festive event. Indeed, there is no climax to be reached in the *Odalan* because the gods arrive in the temple in any case, even without the possessions of the *sadeg*. The *dewa*, the divinities, have several “empty thrones” to fill; there are not only human mediums but they can also choose consecrated masks and statues, other magical and ancient objects kept in the temples, weapons, musical instruments, and the altars themselves. Balinese Hinduism, the *Agama Hindu Bali*, is polycentric, polymorphic, polytheistic. Sacredness is spread horizontally, embodied in things, plants, animals, the water of lakes and rivers, the five elements of nature (*Pancha Maha-Buta*). The intense experience of the divine is thus not the exclusive privilege of a group of initiates, be they Brahmin priests, possessed mediums or ascetic yogis.

The *sadeg*, by sharing the work of preparing the *Odalan* with the community, achieve in a very natural way a relaxed psychophysical condition; they distance and separate themselves without trauma from their daily thoughts, without the external induction of a religious authority, but by performing simple actions, fulfilling small duties to be performed collectively. This activity is already a premise for trance, a gentle induction, a form of de-possession of the Self achieved in an atmosphere of relaxed sociality. It is the opposite of initiatic segregation.

Hindus call *puja* the worship of a god. It is the *puja* of the onlookers that can create the conditions for the manifestation of the divine. This is not a mechanical, automatic rituality: instead, the *puja* is close to the creative processes of performance, processes that are codified but organic and open to chance, to the unexpected. During a seminar at the Teatro Ateneo of the University of Rome Peter Brook said, «The question the spectator asks when he comes to

the theater is: is something going to happen? Even without putting it into words, he knows that he has come in the expectation of something. If the actor gets ready, if the actor gets excited, afraid, it is because he asks himself: is something going to happen?» One could say, paraphrasing Paul Claudel («Drama is something that happens, *Nō* is someone who comes») that in Bali the worshippers and *sadeg* prepare for someone to come at the moment of the ritual. The religious festival is the time and place of myth in which divinities are manifested with the (sensory and aesthetic) evidence of reality. The invisible, then, becomes visible.

3.

As stated earlier, unlike many other possession rituals, e.g., Haitian *voodoo*, Bahia's *candomblé*, the Ethiopian *zar* cult, in the Balinese ones there is no specific phase characterized by segregation. Nor the presence of initiatory priestly figures who closely manipulate and urge the neophytes with the aim of provoking in them intense nervous crises, sometimes similar in symptomatology to the hysteria studied by Western psychiatry. Jerzy Grotowski called them "wild trances". These are crucial because they produce in the initiate, and signal to the outside world, a sharp break with everyday behavior. The seizures are also the prerequisite for seeking the identity of the possessing spirit. In Bali, however, possession is always a public affair. The technique of trance induction, its very gestural, physical, vocal language can be learned directly by watching how the possessed act. All Balinese at the time of the religious festival witness the three stages that on a phenomenological level characterize possession according to anthropologists: preparation for trance, identification with the god, exit from trance and return to normal identity. Balinese learn from childhood the characteristic gestures of each divinity. Each one of them is characterized by a minimal repertoire of gestures and behavioral tics, an essential score of movements and sounds. Mimicry, gesture, voice, and dance steps are simple but very intense in expression; they appear powerfully experienced. Spectral screams, sometimes cavernous and deep, high-pitched shrieks projected forcefully into space; plastic contortions and shuddering tremors of puppet-bodies, often stiffened, strong but ready to empty themselves of life instantly, after the final paroxysm; dancing and seemingly suicidal leaps, ending with *kris* pressed firmly on one's bare chest: none of these vocal and gestural actions are complex from a sonic or kinetic point of view. Traditional court and village dances and theater bear quite a different formal articulation. Yet in Bali there is a kind of circularity between dance and theater on the one hand, and possession on the other. Indeed, when a possession develops an appreciable kinesic expression it will almost always be danced – albeit in a simplified manner – according to traditional theatrical and choreographic codes. Conversely, the trained dancer, whose model in Balinese culture is a puppet, if he has *taksu*, if he is inspired, reminds one who is possessed: he does not appear to be an actor who has appropriated behavior; rather, someone who is acted out by the role he is dancing (Di Bernardi 1995).

According to the American anthropologists Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, who were active on the small Indonesian island in the 1930s conducting extensive field

research (Bateson and Mead 1942), the Balinese people have a great facility for reproducing the behaviors of other Balinese people because when they look at them, especially during a possession ritual or a traditional theatrical performance, they react and participate in the event in a highly kinesthetic and rhythmic manner. For Mead and Bateson, this was perceptible to the naked eye but was also corroborated and proven by the visual documents they produced using the still camera and a movie camera without sound.

Often during the research that preceded *Odalan of Tanjung Bungka* I had the impression that the *sadegs'* effort, work, and intention focused solely on the moment of preparation for possession: thus, on creating that suspended condition of intense and relaxed concentration that opens the door to the entrance of a divinity. The "lived possession", as Michel Leiris called it to distinguish it from those merely recited, is – if and when it happens – like an inescapable fatality. The *sadeg* is literally transported by that *someone* by whom he feels visited.

4.

Puji, the *sadeg* whom we see in the documentary possessed by the temple's main deity, *Bhatara Dalem*, the Mysterious God, was a small, skinny woman, an outcaste, who owned a poor stall set up along one of the commercial streets of Tanjung Bungka. Possession, coming at an already adult age, had ended a long illness interpreted by Bali's traditional doctors, the *dukun*, as a form of vocation, a call by the god, who, at that moment, was missing a "human throne". In a conversation she had with us during the period we were filming the documentary, Puji described in rich physical and psychological detail what she remembered of her possession. It was a strong but not at all dramatic experience, intimate and marked by a sentimental streak, a form of fondness for the divinity, almost an addiction to be inscribed under the sign of Kama, the Indian god of love. She told us, "Many days before the temple festival I already begin to feel strange, I feel a strong heat inside me. I am different than usual, I often keep quiet, I don't talk to anyone. When the Mysterious God arrives, I feel myself becoming larger and bigger. I feel my arms and my body very, very heavy. I feel myself crushed as if the pavilion of the temple had fallen on me. Then, I do not see a thing, I do not hear. I do not feel my body anymore: What do I become? When the god, after having spoken, leaves me, I am as light as cotton that flies. Then, I feel nostalgia, I am sad for the feeling of lacking something. I remember, I remember the Presence".

On some sonic and musical aspects of the *Odalan in Tanjung Bungka*

GIOVANNI GIURIATI

I, too, take up with much pleasure this topic we dealt with several years ago, and remained somewhat unpublished. To comment on and to help to "read" *Odalan of Tanjung Bungka*, I would like to refer to my part of a paper that – together with Vito Di Bernardi – we

gave several years ago on the occasion of an International Seminar on Ethnomusicology organized by Francesco Giannattasio for the Intercultural Institute of Comparative Music Studies of the Giorgio Cini Foundation in Venice. The theme was “Music and altered states of consciousness: an open question”.¹ I use here part of that paper, which also remained unpublished, with extensive revisions, trying to connect it as much as possible to the images and sounds of the video.

The theme we address in this video is certainly not new. Its very title evokes the work masterfully conducted by Margaret Mead in the 1930s, which resulted in a film she made with Gregory Bateson that is considered one of the cornerstones of visual anthropology and theatrical anthropology, in which the relationship between ritual, music and trance in a Balinese village is presented very effectively.² Their research was part of a field of interest that developed in the crucial decade between 1930 and 1940 in which the book written by Jane Belo with the significant title of *Trance in Bali* (Belo 1960) also stands out. It is an issue of enormous complexity that certainly cannot be adequately presented in a video such as ours, lasting less than an hour, given that it brings into play social relations within the community of participants (but also externally through ritual links with other villages), the complex symbolic dynamics of ritual organization, body techniques, and the managing of ritual and sound space.

In this synthetic contribution presenting the video, given my specific skills and my role in the making of this documentary, I would like to focus above all on some aspects related to the sonic dimension, in order to provide some useful indications for watching and listening to the video from this point of view.

I would like to begin by first commenting on the choices we made about sound in our editing. As you will notice, precisely in order to bring out the sound dimension in the video, we chose to avoid giving the impression that the music was a “soundtrack”. This was done by not using a voice-over, in order to bring out the pervasive presence of sound during all stages of the ceremony in its relationship with the ritual. The necessary explanations are delegated to captions that we tried to make as unobtrusive as possible, while keeping the sound corresponding to the various situations of the ceremony. In this way, we intended clarifying to the viewer (and the listener) the fundamental role of musical sounds in ordering the complexity of a rite that unfolds for three consecutive days once a year.

The sound is sometimes taken from recordings made with a DAT to better render the complexity and density of the music accompanying the ritual, while at other times the camera microphone is used to capture those moments of intimacy and contact between

¹ The VIII International Seminar in Ethnomusicology was held at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini from the 24th to the 26th of January 2002. The title of the paper delivered by Vito Di Bernardi and I was: “Aspetti musicali, liturgici e comportamentali nei riti di possessione a Bali e in Cambogia”

² Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, *Trance and Dance in Bali*, New York University Film Library, 1951. In this film the sound was added by Colin McPhee, foremost specialist of Balinese music who was residing in Bali in the same years as Mead and Bateson. In fact, what is missing in this extraordinary documentation is the relationship between rite and sound.

the human participants and the gods. One may note, however, how music is a fundamental element of this ritual, present throughout the video. Paradoxically, the moments when the music pauses are precisely those in which the deities are present and speak.

The sounds of the rite

In the *Odalan* of Tanjung Bungka, several sources can be identified that produce sounds, sometimes even simultaneously, including more than one instrumental ensemble. This is a characteristic feature of Balinese rituals in general. Indeed, this mode of performance constitutes a typical aspect in various South-East Asian contexts, but in Balinese temples it reaches particularly rich and evident forms: the coexistence of different music in the same space and at the same time, i.e. simultaneously. In the case of the *Pura Dalem* temple in Tanjung Bungka, where the ritual documented by us takes place, the presence of the large *gamelan gong kebyar* arranged in a pavilion located in the innermost circle of the temple, which is played for a large part of the time, can be noted throughout the video. Furthermore, still referring to the presence of *gamelan*, one may also note towards the end of the video the significant appearance of another type of orchestra, called the *gamelan semar pegulingan*. This *gamelan* is brought to the ceremony by members of the community from the nearby village of Panjer to accompany the performance of the battle between *Rangda* and *Barong*, arranged on the third day in an outer courtyard of the temple. The Panjer musicians also accompany the procession of their masks with a *gamelan beleganjur* composed of cymbals and gongs, as well as the drum (*kendhang*), with a sonority based on rhythmic and timbral, rather than melodic, interlocking. In addition to the *gamelan gong kebyar*, in the temple's inner courtyard there is also a pair of metallophones called *gender wayang*, used to accompany shadow theatre performances. On this occasion, this small ensemble is also intended to entertain the gods, as can be clearly seen at the very end of the video. At least two vocal groups must then be added to all this instrumental music, one male and one female, which recite the sacred chants called *kidung*. The importance of the *kidung*, resounding throughout the ceremony, must be emphasized. A non-ordinary language is used for these chants: the ancient Balinese language not immediately comprehensible to those who sing them, through which one speaks to the divinities. The texts/prayers of the *kidung* have precisely the function of welcoming and bidding farewell to the gods, of entertaining them, to establish a dialogue with them during their presence. One of the musicians states: "The *kidung* are sung to receive, to stay together, to delight, to protect us, to look after us and to accompany the gods on their return to their place and to testify to their presence that gives us protection and good wishes".

This particularly complex sound configuration involving the simultaneous presence of several musical performances can be considered from different points of view. The first is the local one, for which the co-presence is considered to be of particular value, because the more the offerings – and the music is also considered as a kind of offering – the more pleased and satisfied the gods will be. Still considering the local point of view, one must

also bear in mind that since music is meant to be an offering, any worshipper wishing to play is welcome to join the *gamelan* players. Including myself, as I also was occasionally invited to play with the *gamelan* during the three days of the ceremony. For this reason, there is not always a stable and coordinated group, at times to the detriment of musical quality, which may suffer from this priority given to the act of offering.

In the festive sound context, the simultaneity of sounds from different sources, rather than being aesthetically regarded as “disturbance” or “interference” is, on the contrary, particularly appreciated and sought after. So much so that in Bali there is a term that expresses precisely this abundance of sounds and offerings: *ramè*. The more sounds that are co-present in a temple, in a ceremony, the more welcome and complete the offering to the gods will be. On the sounds of the Balinese *Odalan* Catherine Basset writes:

Le simple mortel aurait de toute manière grand mal à jouir de la musique lors d'une cérémonie balinaise, où plusieurs orchestres de percussions, généralement métalliques, donc bruyants, jouent tous en même temps des répertoires différents. [...] Mais les divinités ont sans doute de meilleures oreilles que les nôtres et ne peuvent qu'être honorées par la multitude de prestations offertes simultanément par leurs fidèles à l'occasion de leur visite annuelle au temple. D'ailleurs le maître mot de l'esthétique balinaise est *ramé*, qui désigne quelque chose d'animé, de chargé; la quantité est synonyme de qualité (Basset 1995: 114).

Thus, the more music and the more confusion there is, the more pleased and happy the gods will be with the offerings. In our European culture, except perhaps for some twentieth-century experiments, if there are several kinds of music coexisting, this is generally considered confusion and takes on negative connotations. In Bali, on the other hand, in open spaces, the different kinds of music do not disturb one another; they all have the same purpose of offering.

Another interesting point of view from which to consider this co-presence of sounds in the same space is that of the researcher who can detect through this example how, especially in open space, there are contexts in which one can hear several simultaneous but uncoordinated musical performances in the same place – and these are more frequent in different parts of the world than may be thought. A number of terms have also been proposed by musicologists for this experience, the most appropriate of which, the result of reflection by some French researchers gathered at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, is that of “polymusic”.³

Apart from the sacred *kidung* chants, the repertoires that are performed do not have any specific religious function or direct references to divinities. Rather, they are songs with a strong ritual character, also used in theatrical performances, which serve a multiplicity of functions, beginning with marking and ordering each moment of the ceremony. Regarding the more specific question of the relationship between sound and altered states

³ See, in this regard, what Dana Rappoport writes (1999; 2013).

of consciousness in a multiplicity of functions, this research – and this video – illustrate a series of emblematic examples that allow us to propose, without any taxonomic claim, a typology of possible roles played by music in relation to this ritual.

Another interesting element in this coexistence of music performances is related to the spatial dimension. The placement of the different sources of music production denotes the sacredness of the place, fills it, passes through it, and is reconfigured according to the different moments of the ceremony. More generally, it can be argued that music and sounds are functional in enabling an orderly unfolding of all phases of this complex ceremony/ritual/festival, while ensuring an effective and fruitful relationship with the supernatural.

The relationship between music and trance

The documentary focuses, among other things, on the relationship between music and trance. This is a multifaceted relationship that has been investigated on different levels: neurophysiological, symbolic, functional, social, psychological and communicative.⁴ In *Odalan of Tanjung Bungka* what seems interesting to detect from the sound images is the coexistence of multiple levels within the ceremony, and not of a single and specific sound strategy. In a framework that reveals a complexity of relationships between sound, ritual, gesture, concepts, and behaviors, sounds throughout the *Odalan* serve and act, along with other elements, to sustain the trance. The advantage of this *Odalan* lies in the enormous complexity of sacred-religious motifs, the great elaboration and diversification of the ritual over the various days, the diversity of trance forms, as well as the diversity of the pervasive presence of music.

The documentary presents what the mediums who fall into trance during the ceremony think about their relationship with sounds and music, highlighted through captions as well as through interviews with the protagonists, which do not appear in the subtitles. In one interview, for example, I Wayan Suarjaya, leader of the chanting group and also a kind of master of ceremonies of this *Odalan*, commenting on the initial stage of the ceremony, when the people of Tanjung Bungka arrive at the temple, states, «When we go to the temple for *Odalan* and we all perform the various ceremonies and rituals, it is necessary that there be music, that it be soft enough and that it makes us all feel good and in harmony, so that the harmony is pleasant for us and that the same confusion is pleasant for everyone». This consideration is applied, in the interview, to the arrival of the participants, but it can be extended to the whole course of the festival, and explicitly refers to how the presence of the different music in the ritual space is considered in a relationship with the divine and how this contributes to the creation of a propitious context. Therefore, a primary role of the music that seems to me to be most important is to create harmony and make confusion pleasant (for humans and for gods).

⁴ The literature on this subject is very broad. It is sufficient here to mention at least two seminal volumes by Rouget (1980) and Becker (2004).

Suarjaja makes another comment about the music for *ngurèk*, which is the moment when mediums turn the *kris* against themselves. He claims that it is exciting music, referring to the title of the piece of music performed in that circumstance, *gilak*, which in Balinese means “cheerful”. These are pieces that are found almost alike in the theater with different functions, such as *gilak keras*, a piece for dance characterized by an energetic and aggressive style. *Gilak* for *ngurèk*, Suarjaja argues, is identical to *gilak keras*, which is a fierce, aggressive theatrical piece, and enhances the euphoric excitement of those who are to perform *ngurèk*. In this case it seems almost to suggest the use of music for exaltation by fostering the onset of an altered state of consciousness that allows mediums to stab themselves without injury. A question emerges here that pervades the ritual, namely which is the agent that determines the changes: is it the musicians who change the rhythm and melody so as to induce trance, or does the reverse occur, and the mediums/dancers, by their actions, suggest to the musicians the change of rhythmic-melodic patterns?

Furthermore, regarding this same music, Suarjaja states that when there is *ngurèk*, the musicians, automatically change the rhythm and follow the *ngurèk* by performing *gilak*, integrating what he argued above by claiming that it is also the musicians, in turn, who follow and go along with the dance, the act of trance. This is one of the richest and most interesting aspects of this ceremony, that recurs in so many different moments in which trance and possession occur over the course of the three days. There are no univocal answers that allow us to identify whether the signal for the induction of the trance comes from the sounds or whether the sounds emphasize and make evident the moments when trance is induced regardless of the music. Both in our observation and through the interviews, it can be noted that the relationship is very complex. It seems almost as if, within the framework of a well-known and shared canvas by the participants, there is a relationship of interaction that can provide different solutions, different outcomes. This may take place at different times and in a variety of situations and can be prompted as much by sounds as by other factors, such as gesture or speech, as well as by a deep personal spirituality. The use in these rituals of musical compositions, body techniques, signals, songs, and formal models that are found in the theater is also striking, with a kind of continuity suggesting that there is a deep ritual character in the theatrical and choreographic forms and that, conversely, the musical, dramaturgical and choreographic models of the theater also permeate the ritual context in a relevant way.⁵

A final aspect I would like to highlight about the relationship between sounds and trance that emerges in the documentary, especially through the interviews, is that of the subjective perception of the mediums, made emblematic for example by Kacung, the one who will be possessed by the *Naga Basuki* (Great Snake), who states that when the time of his trance has come, he will wait near the musicians because he believes that the gods will see him better that way. Kacung says: «After having prayed, I sit next to the

⁵ In relation to this, see what are stating Di Bernardi and Lujidjens in their *Giava-Bali. Rito e spettacolo* (1985).

orchestra, because I know that the god that is arriving can see me. Afterwards, I do not hear the music anymore, it is as if I am deaf, distant, absent».

Some emblematic moments from the video in which the sound/rite relationship emerges

In the course of the documentary there are a few moments when one of the multiple possibilities of the relationship between sound and ritual clearly appears. Without any claim to systematicity, I would like to highlight some of them, in order to better illustrate the nature of this complex relationship between music and the phases of ritual.

The signal for attack

A first, quite apparent example can be seen (and heard) at minute 37'13" of the video, when the warrior followers of the *Barong* wait in trance wielding their dagger (*kris*) for a signal for the assault on *Rangda*. As noted in the caption of the video, as the trance mediums prepare for the attack by standing up and taking their daggers assisted by bystanders who support and help them, two small gongs can be heard keeping time, the only musical element remaining after a long part of the confrontation ritual between *Barong* and *Rangda* in which the entire *gamelan* played. This long preparatory phase finally comes to an end when, once all the warriors are ready on their feet, the drum gives the armed men the signal for the attack. One can clearly perceive in the video a formula of the drum that contextually initiates the performance of the *gamelan* as well as the assault of the mediums on *Rangda*. It is in this case a literal (musical) sound signal that – within a pre-determined course of the ritual, and well known to all participants, right at the moment when everything is ready and arranged – has the function of determining the transition from one moment to another of the ritual and of coordinating the participants' action.

The signal for exiting possession

Another clear signaling function can be identified at minute 16'39" of the video, at the moment when Ibu Puji, possessed by *Bhatara Dalem*, has finished her phase of divination, declared that the offerings accomplished are fine, and literally says "I am leaving", signaling the exit of trance for her and all her followers who are with her on the pavilion. At that point the *kidung* and *gamelan* accompany her coming out of trance. In this example the matter is more difficult to decipher. As in the previous case, this is a moment when the ritual has reached a significant point in its unfolding, when the possession is statedly coming to an end, as can be heard from the medium's own words while in trance.

A communicative role of the music emerges clearly here, that of letting all onlookers know about the unfolding of a crucial stage of the ritual, which is not immediately visible and perceptible to all in the vast open space of the temple. The beginning of the music therefore communicates to everyone the end of the divinatory phase of Puji's trance on the central pavilion and the transition to a later phase of the rite. At the same time, there

is also a more internal role that needs to be kept in mind, since the moment of coming out of trance needs its own music. When the mediums are ready to end their trance, some of the non-possessed women who are also in the pavilion helping the mediums and observing the scene begin a chant that is the trance exit chant, a *kidung* with a parting text. At the same time the *gamelan* music also starts.

However, at the same time we can also detect deeper relationships associated with a role of music closely related to the success of the ritual and of the trance. In fact, given that the duration and timing of coming out of trance can vary, even considerably, in one case, not documented in the video, the musicians stopped playing quite quickly after having signaled the moment of the end of the trance. But the women from the pavilion started making excited gestures to the musicians asking them to resume playing since the exit phase was not yet completed, revealing how music was necessary and functional for a proper and orderly coming out of trance. Its absence was considered a risk factor. In this case, the relationship between music and possession is not merely communicative but is on a more intense and deeper level of true necessity. This example, once again, highlights the richness of this ritual that allows us to reflect on the relationship between music and trance in complex and non-deterministic terms by clearly bringing out the music's multiplicity of functions in relation to the ceremony.

The rhythmic-dynamic intensification that precedes and accompanies the onset of trance

This is a phase that lasts approximately a couple of hours and is condensed in the documentary into just under a minute and a half (11'28" to 13'52"). It is the part of the ritual that prepares for the entry into trance of all mediums, including Ibu Puji, thus *Batahara Dalem*, on the large central pavilion. During this phase, offerings are made, incense is widely used, the priest recites mantras, and *gamelan* music is also present as a form of offering. In this example, while we certainly cannot state that the musical component constitutes a direct element for the induction of trance, we can note how it contributes, through a sonic strategy, to fostering entrance into trance through a series of musical procedures that progress toward an intensification of rhythm and a rarefaction of the melody.

It begins with a slow tempo, and a wide arc of the rhythmic cycle that can be heard in the documentary at the beginning of the sequence. It is a melody that is repeated at length for more than forty-five minutes and, because of these dilated tempos, takes on a character that could be described as hypnotic. While it is not possible to render this dilated time dimension in the video, it is important to note this aspect inherent in the performance of the ritual, which requires long time frames and extensive repetition.

The transition from a slower to a faster tempo is not a sudden one. Such transition gradually brings the orchestra to double the speed of the pulse, through drum signals. The tempo continues to be stretched but now we have entered another phase where the

offerings are being fulfilled. The *gamelan* pavilion is not very close to that where the trances take place, but there is a control system, so the musicians are able to follow what is happening on the main pavilion. Suarjaja says: «We watch what is happening on stage and stay awake and alert». The rhythmic cycle gradually further contracts from thirty-two beats down to eight, and at the same time the melody is reduced in range and elaboration until the moment of *gilak*, which is based on just two alternating sounds and a continuously repeated pulse. Such melodic rarefaction corresponds to the moments of greatest emotional intensity and excitement in the ritual as well as in theatrical performances.

This phrase, melodically rarefied, rhythmically intense, and fast, coincides with the onset of trance. There is no evidence to argue that it causes it, induces it, but there is nevertheless a profound relationship between the two elements. In the case documented in the video, the transition is performed a first time, but the trance does not occur, perhaps because there is insufficient coordination and energy on the part of the musicians. Then the music returns to the stage immediately preceding the *gilak* to repeat the transition, which this time coincides with the entrance into trance. While it is entirely problematic to identify a cause-and-effect relationship, a close relationship is evident in which music, although not determinant, is necessary and contributes to the arrival of an altered state of consciousness.

The silence of when the gods speak

As noted above, even the (rare) moments of the absence of sound have their own importance and significance. The music is very often interrupted when the divinities are present and speaking. This is the case, for example, of Ibu Puji's possession in the central pavilion. During her divination all forms of music are interrupted so that her words can be well understood. The same occurs during her possession in front of the altar of *Bathara Dalem*.

These are just a few examples and interpretive keys to a relationship between music and ritual that the documentary sought to narrate and highlight within a ritual that reveals all its symbolic, ceremonial, and emotional complexity by means of strategies that place theatrical and musical aspects at the center of the ritual space in a multiplicity of relationships that deserve further investigation.

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Video Contents

