Mysticism Reconsidered
PART TWO
Mysticism Reconsidered—
Introduction to Part Two

We appreciate the opportunity to continue the theme of Mysticism Reconsidered in ReVision. The papers in this issue consider both theory and practice, philosophy and psychology, individual and social dimensions.

Ever since William James, one of the key issues in mysticism has been the question of whether such experiences are universal, or at least very similar, across cultures and traditions. In recent years, this debate has intensified in response to arguments by Steven Katz and others that all experiences, including mystical ones, must be mediated and modified by conditioned, personal, and cultural factors. In other words, these critics start from a presupposition directly opposite to that of mystics, who for centuries have argued for the possibility and importance of unconditioned, transpersonal, transcultural experiences. These experiences have traditionally been regarded as the summum bonum of human existence and capable of liberating humans from the trials and suffering of existence. The stakes here are, therefore, obviously high.

Donald Rothberg presents a careful analysis of unacknowledged presuppositions and limitations embedded in the epistemology and arguments of Katz and his colleagues. In doing so, he seriously undermines their claim that mystics must be mistaken in assuming that they sometimes access universal experiences. Rothberg’s paper provides an excellent introduction and overview of the current status of this area of philosophical debate about mysticism.

Frances Vaughan’s paper complements this by offering a summary of some of the apparently transcultural characteristics of mysticism. Drawing on classic authors and descriptions, she provides a concise summary of the major features that mystics have described across centuries and cultures.

Most studies of mysticism have focused on practitioners in cultures such as India, China, and the West. However, in their papers, Roger Walsh and Deane Shapiro analyze practices in tribal cultures, namely, in shamanic and Balinese cultures, respectively.

There has been debate about whether shamanism can properly be called a form of mysticism, but Roger Walsh offers several lines of evidence suggesting that some shamans may indeed be so described. He then examines the defining practice of shamanism, namely, journeying or soul flight and compares journeying with analogous phenomena such as lucid dreams, spontaneous out-of-body experiences, and near-death experiences.

One of the central tenets of spiritual disciplines is that our minds are usually out of control and that mystical practices are capable of bringing them under greater control. “All scriptures without any exception proclaim that for attaining salvation, mind should be subdued,” said Ramana Maharshi. Deane Shapiro has done much research on the nature of self-control, and was a pioneer in examining meditation practices from this perspective. In his paper he extends the self-control perspective to a broad examination of the nature, types, and role of self-control in Balinese practices and culture.

This issue completes the collection of articles inspired by the September 1988 Esalen conference called “Mysticism Reconsidered.” We are grateful to the members of Esalen Institute and especially to Michael Murphy and Steve Donovan, who made this conference possible, as well as to our colleagues who participated.

Frances Vaughan and Roger Walsh
Guest Editors
Self-Control and Other Control in Cross-Cultural Perspective: Balinese Trance and Religious Beliefs

Deane H. Shapiro, Jr.

This investigation examines the nature and content of Balinese formal and informal trance practices within a self-control framework. This involves exploring not only the practices themselves, but also discussing the self-control "frame of reference" and assumptions with which the study was undertaken. The article also examines the control-related function and cultural context in which Balinese trance occurs and discusses trance in relationship to other types of "lack of orientation" within the Balinese culture, such as mental illness and drunkenness. Finally, the article explores the way in which Balinese cultural beliefs, as well as individual behaviors and attitudes, are utilized within a spiritual framework to maintain orientation and a sense of control across developmental and life-cycle issues.

From the perspective of our cultural paradigm, the Balinese culture is in its very nature an altered-state experience. In fact, an underground travel guide that I was given when I went to live and study in Bali in 1982 described going there as "stepping into a giant acid tablet." The Balinese views of self and identity; interpersonal relations; lack of climax in feelings, thoughts, and behavior; and temporal/spatial orientation are quite at variance with those of the West.

My two months in Bali gave me an opportunity to step back from our own culture for the first time since a period spent in Asia thirteen years earlier. I was able to reflect on and evaluate my experiences in those intervening years and to examine and reconsider my assumptions and beliefs about the nature of reality. Further, the "rawness" of living in the jungle again brought me face to face with a fear and awe of the universe and caused me to reflect, in an existential way, about my role and place in the universe and to confront some of the deepest questions that we, as humans, face.

Because spirituality—a combination of Hinduism and island animism—pervades the Balinese culture, addressing those questions in that context has had a profound effect on my relationship to and view of the ultimate nature of the universe. Before I went to Bali, I understood the world within a "self-control" framework. That worldview involved certain assumptions about humans and the universe in which we live. The experience in Bali challenged that worldview, opened me to the limitations of an exclusive self-control framework, and allowed me to experience the power and oneness of a unitary, "benevolent Other." In many ways, as I look back and reflect on my experience in Bali, I see it as catalytic in my transition from the non-theistic approach of Zen to my "return" to the theistic position of Judaism.

BACKGROUND

Many of our cultural and individual beliefs, habit patterns, and value systems are so deeply engrained within us that we do not recognize them. This may be one of the reasons why, historically, great leaders have been those individuals who have engaged in what Toynbee called the cycle of withdrawal and return (Toynbee 1934). This cycle, which may be helpful for all individuals at different times in their lives, occurs in many ways (Walsh 1984). One way is actually to remove ourselves from our culture for a period of time. Such a separation may provide us the opportunity to recognize the orienting assumptions of our own culture and may cause us to "wake up" to what Tarrant (1986) has called the "consensus trance" of our own culture; to see the cultural relativism of our own views and values (Kleinman, in Wilson and Wilson 1987); and perhaps to scrutinize the unexamined assumptions of the paradigm through which and by which we see the world (Kuhn 1970).

This article reports on such an opportunity, involving my stay in Bali, a small island off the east coast of Java. There were two professional reasons why Bali was selected as the culture to examine. First, it had been reported that the Balinese evidenced extraordinary self-control during several of their trance practices (Belo 1960). It appeared that these trance states, as well as their dance and physical movement to achieve altered states (Bateson and Mead [1942] 1962) and fluid states of consciousness, could provide a logical extension of my previous work ex-
maining Eastern and Western self-control strategies (see also Wikan 1989).

A second criteria was to find a culture markedly different from our own in which to study self-control. Mead had noted that “Balinese culture is in many ways less like our own than any other which has yet been recorded” ([1942] 1962, xvi), a view reaffirmed just before I left for Bali by one of Mead’s former students and colleagues.3

The initial intent of this investigation was to study the nature and content of Balinese trance within a self-control framework. During the course of the investigation, however, it became clear that a self-control framework was not sufficient to understand the content of trance and, further, that the content of trance could not be understood without reference to the control-related function and cultural context within which the trance was occurring. Therefore, during the course of this investigation, the nature and scope of what was being studied broadened. This is reflected in the way in which the paper is written—in an inductive style—from the particular to the general, reflecting the manner in which the investigation evolved.

The paper is divided into two sections. The first section discusses the pre-Bali frame of reference with which this investigation began and then examines trance as a self-control strategy, the control-related function of trance, and trance in relation to other types of lack of orientation—mental illness and drunkenness. The second section addresses the ways in which the Balinese cultural beliefs, as well as individual behaviors and attitudes, are utilized within a spiritual framework to maintain orientation and a sense of control across developmental and life-cycle issues.

THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF BALINESE TRANCE

Views of Self-Control Prior to Going to Bali

There were four key sources that had created and formed my self-control frame of reference: (1) my experiences with Buddhism, particularly Zen (D. T. Suzuki 1956; S. Suzuki 1976; Conze 1951; Warren 1969); (2) the “self-control” school of behavior therapy that stressed that we are “controlled” by the environment, often without our knowing it (e.g., Skinner 1953), and, therefore, need to develop ways for individuals to gain more control over their own lives (Homme 1965; Kanfer 1979; Mahoney and Thoresen 1974; Bandura 1985); (3) the “organismic view” of human nature of the humanistic psychologists (Rogers 1951; Maslow 1968; Goldstein 1939; Angyal 1965); and (4) the search for identity and “standing forth” to “deny our nothingness” in the face of an indifferent universe of the existentialists (Barrett 1958; Kaufmann 1956; Bugental 1976; Camus 1955, 1956; May 1961; Yalom 1980).

All of these views have several aspects in common. The environment (and the universe) is viewed (initially) as indifferent or hostile, controlling the individual and/or causing the individual pain and suffering. Therefore, in order for the individual to try to protect himself or herself from unnecessary pain and suffering, it is up to that person to exercise choice and responsibility to rearrange the environment—the external environment as well as the internal one (e.g., the mind). Rearranging the external environment can be done in order to have that environment facilitate the development of personal self-control (e.g., a clean room in which to meditate and therefore help remove distractions; a support group to encourage maintenance of an exercise program). Efforts to rearrange the environment can also be undertaken to help make the world a more compassionate, gentle, and humane place. In terms of the internal environment, a person may be taught to turn from the “shoulds and oughts” of society in order to listen more carefully to one’s innate self-actualizing nature or to learn self-regulation techniques to better learn to control the mind, thereby reducing pain and suffering. As Buddha noted (1981, 314):

A disturbed mind is forever active, jumping hither and thither, and is hard to control; but a tranquil mind is peaceful; therefore, it is wise to keep the mind under control. . . . It is a man’s own mind, not his enemy or foe, that lures him into evil ways. (p. 364)

Based on this understanding of self-control, my previous work (a) explored the content (similarities and differences) of both meditation and behavioral self-control techniques (Shapiro and Zifferblatt 1976; Shapiro 1978a, 1980; Shapiro and Walsh 1984; Shapiro 1984); (b) has developed a model conceptualizing different modes of self-control: positive assertive, positive yielding, negative assertive (overcontrol), and negative yielding (too little control) (Shapiro 1982, 1983d); (c) suggested that self-control is not a unitary concept but needs to be looked at in terms of six different dimensions—goal, awareness, choice, responsibility (Shapiro and Shapiro 1979), discipline, and skill (Shapiro 1983b);
and (d) noted that different modes of self-control may be necessary and appropriate depending upon the context involved (e.g., body, mind, ego, interpersonal, professional) (Shapiro and Shapiro 1984; Shapiro 1983d).

These views (retrospectively clarified) were the assumptions, beliefs, and conceptualizations with which I left for Bali in order to study Balinese trance as a self-control strategy.

Trance as a Self-Control Strategy

Just as meditation can be understood both in terms of formal and informal techniques (Rahula 1959; Shapiro 1978b), Balinese trance can be similarly understood. There is an “informal” trance practice in Bali called “awayness” in which an individual becomes “vacant-faced and bare of all feelings” ( Bateson and Mead [1942] 1962, 4). This practice occurs several times throughout the day, sometimes directly in response to a fearful or painful antecedent, sometimes with no apparent antecedent, and sometimes as a counterbalance to instrumental, goal-oriented activity (e.g., completion of a task, such as woodcarving). During awayness, the individual does not seem to be aware of his or her external surroundings. It is “a habit of withdrawing into vacancy. . . . These periods of awayness are not followed by manifestations of fatigue, and are usually terminated by a sudden resumption of activity” ( Bateson and Mead [1942] 1962, 68).

In addition to the trance state of awayness, which may occur informally throughout the day, there are also several types of formal, institutionalized trance ceremonies in Bali. These include those performed by “trance doctors”; mediumistic ceremonial practitioners representative of a certain god; fighting and self-stabbing trancers; and child trance-dancers.

Whereas the informal trance of awayness can occur without specified antecedents, there is always preparation and induction associated with the formal trance practices. Although there is variation in the preparation and induction of the trance, as well as in the trance experience itself, the trance preparatory environment generally includes restriction (and altering) of the senses through the use of music (McPhee 1946), incense, and often the chewing of betel (Winkelman 1986; Walsh 1989). This is done to help the individual draw awareness away from the normal environmental anchors and cues. Behaviorally, the actions of “trancers” range from complete immobility and relaxation to agitated muscle movements, such as the self-stabbing trancers (ngoerek) in the Barong (battle of good and evil) and the trance dance involving fire walkers (sanghyang garang) (Belo 1960).

In several ways, my pre-Bali assumptions and conceptualization of trance as a self-control strategy seemed warranted. Walsh (1989), discussing shamanic states of consciousness, has noted two aspects of a control dimension: the ability to enter and leave the altered state of consciousness at will and the ability to control the content of the experience while in the altered state (Noll 1985). Both of these appear to be characteristics of the trance state attained during the practice of “awayness.” Further, based on my own work on the mode and dimensions of self-control, there are many aspects of formal Balinese trance that allow the practice to fit conceptually within a self-control framework. For example, in the initial stages of induction, formal trance involves choice and individual responsibility. Additionally, the mode appears to involve a letting-go type of control (positive yielding). Belo cited the case of a priest who stated that he would let himself go into trance with more abandon when he was not also responsible for the ritual (e.g., when he was engaging in a trance practice with another priest officiating), and she noted that “trance is something to which the subject must give himself up . . . subjects may go into trance without their presence [i.e., environmental factors conducive to trance] or stay out of trance in their presence” (Belo 1960, 150, 252).

The role of the priest in initiating the ceremony and the contextual and environmental cues also did not seem major hurdles to a self-control conceptualization. Previous discussions of trance have suggested that, compared with hypnosis, trance revealed no discrepancies “except for the substitution of a formalized situation for the hypnotist” ( Bateson and Mead [1942] 1962, 35). All self-control strategies, however, involve the seeming paradox of some initial teaching of the strategy to the individual (e.g., Shapiro 1983a). Therefore, if “self-hypnosis” were also occurring, trance could still be seen as self-control strategy. Further, although it is true that there are certain environmental cues that encourage the practice and attainment of trance states (Belo 1960), these could be seen as “environmental planning” (Thoresen and Mahoney 1974) or reciprocal determinism (Bandura 1978) and, therefore, would not preclude trance from being conceptualized as a self-control strategy.
Once deeply entered, there is no personal choice about ending the trance behavior.

However, for successful completion of several of the formal trance practices, the self-control framework began to seem too limiting. For example, in the formal trances in dances like the Barong and the sanghyang jarang (trance dance involving fire walking [Belo 1960]), there is often an inability to stop once started; that is, once the individual enters the trance state, it almost always requires the priests’ sprinkling holy water to bring the person out of the trance (see picture on page 39).

Thus, once deeply entered, there is no personal choice about ending the trance behavior. Further, individual responsibility for stopping the behavior is turned over to others—the priests. The dancers are able to totally let go of and abandon self-control only because of a framework in which religion (manifested by the priests) ultimately provides the control. In fact, during my conversations with several priests about this, they noted that it was very important for the people to believe in them and that it was this faith that gave the priests the power to pull them from the trance when they were in danger of truly harming themselves. Further, it often appeared that the trancers in formal trance not only were unable to pull themselves from the trance, but also were not always in control of the content of the altered-state experience. Therefore, it became clear that conceptualizing trance only as a self-control strategy was too narrow and limiting. I saw that formal trance did serve an important control-related function in Bali but that that function was far broader than could be understood viewing trance only within a self-control framework.

Control-Related Functions of Formal Balinese Trance Ceremonies

For adults, other than in the trance dances, the freest emotional expression is among the insane.
—Dr. Denny Tong, dean, Medical School Denpesar, Bali

Everyday interactions in Bali are normally quite structured, both by a rigid caste system and by a highly developed social etiquette procedure in which there is little room for ambiguity (or emotionality) (Geertz 1966; Geertz and Geertz 1975). Affect is limited, interactions are impersonal, and there are strong societal prohibitions against engaging in disagreements and against trying to push issues through to “climax” (Bateson & Mead [1942] 1962; Wikan 1989). A high premium is placed on individuals’ maintaining their “sense of orientation” within the culture: temporally, based on a tightly structured system of several overlapping weekly cycles; spatially, based on the ubiquitous use of four cardinal points of orientation; and personally and interpersonally, based on birth order, caste, and assigned place in the community.

The term paling (lack of orientation) in Balinese refers to those who are drunk, delirious, or in trance. The first two are pejorative uses of the term. Drunkenness is perceived by the Balinese as a self-induced (via alcohol) lack of orientation (Nathan 1986). The Balinese appear to drink very little. My translator, Wayan, noted that “teachers, police, and other civil servants in Bali don’t drink—they are very distinguished models for us.” This appeared also to be the case when Bateson and Mead were in Bali. They noted that, with few exceptions, Balinese resist alcohol because it causes the drinker to lose his orientation (Bateson and Mead [1942] 1962).

“Delirious” is a label and quality often applied to the mentally ill. A mentally ill person in Bali is perceived as someone who is not in control of him- or herself, a person who lacks orientation. “Insanity” is thought to occur when a person is possessed by evil spirits (black magic), and mental confusion is seen as resulting from the continual internal struggle between good and evil. In Bali, evil is nearly synonymous with the individual’s being out of control in a nonprescribed fashion (i.e., other than during trance), and that “deviance” of being out of control is considered a threat to the order and structure of the society.

The diagnosis of mental illness, therefore, is based on the Balinese culture’s prevailing style of moderation—neither boisterous enjoyment nor outbursts of anger being considered proper (Atteneave 1982). Thus, the acting-out patient is generally brought to professional attention, while the quieter, more depressed family member is tolerated more easily. There was little documented incidence of depression, but that may be because the depressed do not create problems for the society and therefore go undiagnosed.
The two protagonists in the Barong ceremony: Rangda (foreground) is the personification of evil; Barong (behind), the personification of good. The ceremony ends with no clear victor, representing the eternal struggle of good and evil.

The only area where paling has a positive connotation is with respect to trance. Trance is the one approved societal "lack of orientation." It is only in formal trance ceremonies that individuals are given societal permission to let go of control in ways that are not normally allowed within the culture. The trance ceremonies are occasions for "exhibiting emotions never otherwise appropriate, except on the stage" (Bateson and Mead [1942] 1962, 223), due to the culture's strong restraint on emotional expression and "anti-climax socialization." In the children's trance dances, the youngsters exhibit willful behavior, "pettishness, stamping their feet" (Bateson and Mead [1942] 1962, 144); in the Legong dance, adults shift with disconcerting abruptness between a sweet, exaggerated, loving look to an angry, hostile, temperamental look. Belo noted of one of her subjects, "He is never angry. He is always polite. If he's not in trance, he's never angry" (Belo 1960, 151).

Another example of this emotional expressiveness in dramatic form involved the "self-stabbing trancers" (called ngoerek) who appear near the end of the Barong dance. In that ceremony, Barong, the good dragon, fights against Rangda, the evil witch. The dancers raise their swords (kris) to attack the evil Rangda (expression of aggression turned outward?); then Rangda tricks them, and they turn the swords upon themselves (aggression turned inward?). Through this ceremony, individuals can express these emotions, but take no responsibility for them. One of the subjects in Belo's study said, "It's as if there were someone ordering me to stab" (Belo 1960, 129). Only in the theater is this overt expression of emotion permitted, and, through vicarious modeling (or catharsis), it becomes an opportunity for the audience, too, to experience, at least for the duration of the trance ceremony, greater freedom of emotional expression than is otherwise allowed in the culture.

In this regard, Ruth Benedict, who made the classic distinction between Apollonian and Dionysian configurations of culture, noted that the distinction could not be applied to Balinese culture. "The customary poise and moderation resembles the Apollonian, while the outbreak into trance, approved and recognized in the culture, is nearer to the Dionysian" (Benedict, cited by Mead in the Introduction to Belo 1960, 1).

In addition to permitting overt expression of emotion, trance allows decisions for the community to be made. Because citizens and leaders are often reluctant to take assertive actions or innovation (e.g., to decide to renovate an old, unused temple), during trance the gods (called taksoe—control spirits) speak through a person and tell the community to renovate the temple. This allows for innovation without personal responsibility (the gods told us to do it). Bateson and Mead noted that, without trance, life in Bali would go on forever in a fixed and rigid form (Bateson and Mead [1942] 1962, 5, 71).

An additional function of trance seems to be to teach a focusing of attention. Bateson and Mead noted that consciousness and attention in Bali, for the most part, consisted of a "dreamy, relaxed dissociation, with occasional intervals of nonpersonal concentration—trance, gambling, and the practice of the arts," and that trance served as an altered state for "increasing attentional control—a highly disciplined state in contrast to a low attention, low climax normal state of awareness" (Bateson and Mead [1942] 1962, 47).

These three functions illustrate that trance ceremonies provide an opportunity for the
Balinese (directly or vicariously) to let go of the normal cultural mode of acting, behaving, and perceiving (with its rigid, controlled parameters and structure) and to do so within the controlled context of a ceremony, with the priests (benevolent others) ready to bring the person back from the trance. The trance ceremonies thus provide an opportunity to develop (create, contact) an alternative reality (Tart 1969, 1972, 1975, 1986; Walsh 1989; Bourguignon 1973; Bourguignon and Evascu 1977; Shapiro 1980; Winkelman 1986) to the normal cultural state of consciousness.

A final function of the trance ceremony appears to deal with the issue of evil in the world. As Mead noted, the trance is, at one level, an “exorcism of the powers of evil . . . and of the threats of demons. It is reassuring and relieves the anxiety, not only of the performers, but of the onlookers as well. The demons represented in the dance are a way to account for the unconscious and almost uncontrollable forces in human nature” (Mead, in Belo 1960, 3). At nonceremony times, when a person becomes angry, Balinese believe it is because a demon witch has entered the person.

For example, as noted, in the Barong dance, Rangda, a terrible witch, engages in ritual combat with the good monster (dragon, lion) Barong. The priests break the players out of an evil trance into which Rangda has put them. There is a huge battle between the two, which ends inconclusively—recalling the indecisive struggle for dominance between good and evil in the universe. This drama provides the Balinese with a worldview in which effort is required to try to overcome evil, but also in which there is acceptance of one’s inability to ever fully and perfectly do so. Good and evil are believed to be in a continual battle, and the Balinese view themselves as on a stage, both witnesses to and participants in that fight. The stage metaphor is an apt one, for the Barong to the Balinese is not a drama to be watched but a ritual to be reenacted; no aesthetic distance separates audience and actor, and both frequently enter a trance (Cleveland 1986). This dance provides a way for the Balinese to relate to and understand the struggle between good and evil in the world. It also provides a way for them to externalize (and thereby attempt to understand and have a sense of control over) the complex battle between good and evil that goes on within them; it helps them to not be overwhelmed by fear arising from their inability to control totally their evil impulses.

**Summary of Section One**

This section began by exploring the assumptions and conceptualization of self-control with which I approached the study of trance in Bali. That view focused almost exclusively on the individual and self-control. Environment was perceived as indifferent (if not hostile) and something from which one had to constantly defend and protect oneself.

By studying several formal trance practices in Bali, I realized that they could not be adequately conceptualized within a self-control framework, but also required the concept of “control by a benevolent other.” In control by a benevolent other, rather than a sense of control’s coming from individual self-control efforts, a sense of control comes from feeling that a benevolent other has things in control (Taylor 1983; Wallston et al. 1978).

In addition, this section looked at several specific control-related functions of formal trance within the Balinese culture. The discussion of the function of trance resulted from a broadening of the scope of the investigation from the altered state experience of the individual during trance to the cultural context within which that experience was occurring and which may have given rise to the formal structure itself. As Bourguignon (1973; Bourguignon and Evascu 1977) noted, 90 percent of cultures have institutionalized forms of altered states of consciousness.

After examining the issues in this section, I broadened the scope of the investigation to
include an exploration of how the Balinese, through trance, as well as other practices, beliefs, rituals, and behaviors, have addressed major control-related issues that we as humans face. This required a more refined and careful focus on the cultural context, a more multi-faceted view of control, and a closer examination of the Balinese belief system, which perceived the environment and the universe not as hostile and indifferent, but as sacred and benevolent.

BALINESE METHODS OF MAINTAINING A SENSE OF CONTROL AND ORIENTATION

In Bali, religion is the primary means by which an individual gains a sense of understanding, meaning, and control over issues that are unknown and out of control. As Covarrubias noted in his classic book on Bali:

Religions were born of man's desire to understand and control the mysterious process of nature. . . . Eager to place his fate in the hands of superior beings who would take care of his needs and on whom he could place the responsibility for his failures, man created a pantheon of supernatural beings—protective gods and adverse evil spirits—whose goodwill he aimed to gain by rites, offerings, and sacrifices. (Covarrubias [1937] 1982, 260)

The Balinese pantheon of gods is a particular combination of Hinduism (the three gods of Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu—creator, destroyer, and protector—and the forms and heroes of the Indian Ramayana), combined with the island's indigenous animism. On one level, there is duality. For example, Rangda, the evil witch in the Barong dance, comes from the Indian goddess of death, Durga, and represents the eternal struggle of evil against good. On another level, however, the Balinese believe that good and evil, life-and-death dichotomies, are transcended and that these covariables are "reconciled into one unity" (Covarrubias [1937] 1982, 290, 307). This reconciliation is represented (and carried out) by the god Shiva (Siwa) (Covarrubias 290, 307).

The foundational assumption for the Balinese sense of orientation and control is based on these religious and metaphysical beliefs. The Balinese believe not only that there is an overarching framework of order in the world, but also that as long as one stays in one’s place, one is part of this cosmic whole. This belief system provides individuals with an ordered structure in which they can have a sense that the world is at least understandable (Campbell 1972) and, on a higher level, controlled by a benevolent, unifying other (e.g., Smith 1965; Taylor 1983).

All aspects of Balinese life follow from this metaphysical framework (McPhee 1946, 12; Geertz and Geertz 1975; Geertz 1966):

Speech, style, posture, dress, eating, marriage, even house construction, place of burial and . . . cremation are patterned in terms of a precise code of manners which grows less out of a passion for social grace as such [than] out of some rather far-reaching metaphysical considerations. (Geertz 1966, 29-30)

The entire life of the . . . Balinese—their daily routine, social organization, their ethics, manners, art, in short, the total culture of the island—is moulded by a system of traditional rules subordinated to religious beliefs. By this system they regulate every act of their lives so that it shall be in harmony with the natural forces. (Covarrubias [1937] 1982, 260) (emphasis mine)

This section of the paper elaborates on how these traditional rules are evidenced in cultural beliefs and practices in the following five areas: (1) an orientation toward oneself that involves an "anonymous, impersonal" identity; (2) the caste, kinship, and highly developed social etiquette procedures; (3) a lack of climax in personal and interpersonal activities; (4) the very tight temporal orientation of the Balinese (several different weekly cycles within a nonlinear framework); and (5) the ubiquitous use of four cardinal points of spatial orientation.

As will be seen, all of the above rules, mores, and practices are highly structured and have a major control-related purpose: to
minimize disorientation and feelings of (or actual) lack and loss of control and, thereby, to ensure order and to reduce, as much as possible, ambiguity, the unknown, and surprise.

**Personal Identity**

In Bali, the cultural and religious system provides a framework in which there is no existential search for personal identity required (e.g., Erikson 1958, 1959); rather, identity orientation is predetermined at birth by caste, birth order, and an assigned place in the community (and the cosmos). This identity orientation is not personal, but "impersonal." For example, Balinese are not called by names but by the repetition of numbers (depending upon birth order): one, two, three, four, and then back to one (for the fifth child). These numbers have different variations depending upon which of the four castes (priestly, ruling, warrior, working) a person is born into. For example, Wayan, the name of my translator, means the number one (used only as a name in the lowest [working] class). In addition, when you call "Wayan" in a village, several people may respond, and there is no way to know whether they were the first born, the fifth born, or the ninth born. Geertz (1966) notes that "they address each other almost exclusively by these names rather than by either personal names or kin names."

Being known by a number in our culture could be the height of loss of identity, causing one to feel depersonalized, helpless, and out of control. The effect, however, is quite the opposite in the Balinese culture. For the Balinese, sense of identity is not something to be achieved, but something to be accepted. "No appeal has ever been made to him [the Balinese] to achieve in order to validate his humanity, for that is taken as a given" (Bateson and Mead 1942, 1962, 48). The Balinese system gives a clear sense of identity orientation (albeit impersonal) with no fear of losing identity (because it is a given), no fear of losing autonomy or individuation (because those are qualities neither valued or sought), nor any fear of "low self-esteem" (because identity is not under one's control, and therefore not the result of personal efforts).

In Bali, the sense of control related to identity has a completely different culturally and socially conditioned content. As Geertz has noted (1966, 43), the thrust of the culture is to mute or gloss over ... those aspects of their existence as persons—their immediacy and individuality, or their special, never to be repeated, impact upon the stream of historical events.

The illuminating paradox of Balinese formulations of personhood is that they are ... , by our terms anyway, depersonalizing. What the culture strengthens is standardization, idealization and generalization implicit in the relation between individuals whose main connection consists in the accident of being alive at the same time. ... It is their social placement, their particular location within a persisting, indeed an eternal, metaphysical order.

An example of this lack of personal identity is reflected in the creation of art, such as woodcarvings and sculpture, which historically in the Balinese culture, have been done anonymously. In our culture, artistic creation is signed, and it is considered important (from both a creative and a marketing standpoint) to have a unique style. In Bali, however, artistic creation is not performed for either social acclaim or profit, but merely to fulfill what one is supposed to do in life. The techniques for the sculptor are neither hidden nor copyrighted but freely shared with others who wish to learn them.

**Interpersonal Relations**

In addition to a very structured system of personal identity, the Balinese have also developed a very ordered system of interpersonal relating. This interpersonal system provides a clear orientation in which there is little room for ambiguity (or emotionality) and appears to minimize interpersonal tensions that inevitably occur as individuals become closer and more intimate. Geertz has called this the "ceremonialization of social intercourse," observing that "from a man's title you know, given your own title, exactly what demeanor you ought to display toward him and how toward you in practically every context of public life" (Geertz 1966, 29). This style of interpersonal interaction results in emotionless, rigid encounters in which almost no affect is ever expressed, and individuals have an almost anonymous view of one another. The Balinese do not seem willing to become close to each other in ways that we would define as intimate. As Geertz also noted (1966, 54–55):

Balinese social relations are at once a solemn game and a studied drama. To maintain (relative) anonymization of individuals with whom one is in daily contact, to dampen the intimacy implicit in face to face relations, ... the ceremoniousness of so much of Balinese daily life, the extent (and the intensity) to which interpersonal relations are controlled by a developed set of conventions and proprieties is thus a logical correlate of a thoroughgoing attempt to block the more creatural aspects of the human condition—individuality, sponta-
neity, perishability, emotionality, vulnera-

bility—from sight.

This rigid, structured, emotionless interpersonal orientation seems to help address cer-
tain potential problems of interpersonal com-
petition (e.g., getting ahead of a peer) by its
rigid caste system, a lack of meritocracy, and
an impersonal view of oneself, in which one’s
efforts should only be toward fitting in, and
one cannot ever change one’s identity or place
in the current social or metaphysical system.
This provides each individual with a very
clear and precise interpersonal orientation—a
structured way to interact with his neighbor.
This structure appears to help keep interper-
sonal feuding to a minimum and to make the
loss of a “relationship” easier to accept.

From our culture’s perspective, the above
model, with its low level of emotional inti-
macy, may not seem as though it would pro-
vide much of an interpersonal support sys-
tem. However, for the Balinese, it does pro-
vide the basis of a strong social support sys-
tem. Within each caste (and each kin group-
ing within each caste), there is a sense of be-
longing—and extended families are the rule,
generally with three generations of family
(kin) living in one dwelling (Geertz and Geertz
1975). In fact, one of the worst punishments
that can be given a person is to be banished
from the particular tribe and kin system. Based
on the caste and kin system, there is a very
tight social structure. This structure gives
both social support and a sense of order and
control. However, it appears that the kin and
caste system primarily establishes a sense of
order in the world but not a sense of intimacy,
for the relationships themselves are not close.

Thus, the Balinese have found a way to
have a sense of control, social support, and
belonging through their caste and kin sys-
tems, but they seem to value a sense of con-
trol (obtained through order and structure)
over intimacy and closeness in interpersonal
relations.

Lack of Climax in Activities/Behaviors/
Feelings

This emotional distance in interpersonal rela-
tionships is part of a cultural style that may
be referred to as “lack of climax” (Bateson
and Mead [1942] 1962). Geertz (1966, 61) has
noted this lack of climax with regard to both
social relations and temple rituals:

Issues are not sharpened for decision, they are
blunted and softened in the hope that the
mere evolution of circumstances will resolve
them. Quarrels appear and disappear and on
occasion they even persist but they hardly ever
come to a head. A ritual often seems, as in the
temple celebrations, to consist largely of get-
ing ready and cleaning up. Balinese are not
the sort to push the moment to its crises. . . .
Balinese social life lacks climax because it
takes place in emotionless present, a vector-
less now.

This lack of climax—an emotional nonre-
ponsiveness—begins in early childhood so-
cialization. Parents do not respond to chil-
dren’s attention-seeking efforts of any kind—
whether appropriate, from our value system,
or inappropriate (e.g., tantrums). Children
learn that seeking attention is not reinforced,
and overt emotionality, in behavioral terms,
is extinguished. Bateson and Mead point out
that children seeking parental approval will
not receive it, and therefore are taught that
they should not even try for it. Further, it is
not uncommon to see parents actually tease
their older children into an agitated, jealous
state (e.g., by fondling a younger sibling
overly in front of the older sibling) and then
not responding to the older sibling’s tantrums
and cries for attention.

Children are also taught to fear the un-
known and not to venture too far away (or
the evil witch will capture them). These prac-
tices teach that there is a secure “home base”
within which one can remain oriented and
have a sense of control. Efforts to venture
forth, either physically or emotionally, are
futile at best and fearful at worst:

Orientation is felt as a protection rather than
a straight jacket, and its loss provokes ex-
treme anxiety. . . . The Balinese is always a lit-
tle frightened of some indefinite unknown . . .
and relaxed at the center of any world in
which he knows the outlines. (Bateson and
Mead [1942] 1962, 48)

An additional example of this lack of re-
ponse and climax is found in Balinese end-
ing-exchanges. Whereas in our culture it is
customary when leaving a room or ending an
interaction with another person to make sure
to say goodbye or thank you, to signal com-
pletion, the Balinese merely leave the room.
We feel a sense of control and orientation by
completing the goodbye; the Balinese feel a
sense of control by minimizing the goodbye.

Temporal/Spatial Orientation and a
Sense of Control

Part of any standard mental-status exam is
an effort to determine whether a person is or-
iented in space and time. Spatial and temporal
orientation indicates that an individual has a
certain sense of order as well as reality-based "grounding points" and thus is "in control" with respect to this aspect of ordinary awareness.

**Time.** Time is used by most cultures to represent biological aging: appearance, maturation, decay, and disappearance of concrete individuals. Our culture has a very clear linear sense of time, based on a lunar/solar calendar, with each year adding on to the next to provide "historical time."

Balinese lack a dynamic sense of time. Rather, time is nonlinear (with no past, present, or future), useful for precisely locating a particular moment but not for building a historical sense of development. Geertz has referred to this as the "detemporalizing of a conception of time (again, from our point of view)" (Geertz 1966, 45).

The Balinese have two calendars: one is the lunar/solar, and one is a permutational one, built around interactions of independent cycles of days. For example, there is a three-day cycle based upon the fact that every three days members of the village go to the market. There are also a number of other cycles (ranging from two-day to ten-day cycles, of which the three-, five-, six-, and seven-day are the most important).

The Balinese calendar, however, has no way to measure "historical" time, the elapse of time in a linear sense. Further, because of the Balinese belief in reincarnation, time is both for the moment and forever. There is no real sense of linear time, or past, present, or future. For example, individuals know what combination of cycles it was when they were born, but not their age. One person I lived with, when I asked his age, said he didn't know (maybe thirty-two or thirty-four). He said it didn't make any difference. However, he knew exactly how the three-, five-, and seven-day cycles were interacting when he was born. Geertz (1966, 47) noted:

> The cycles and supercycles are endless, unanchored, unaccountable and, as their internal order has no significance, without climax. They do not accumulate, they do not build and they are not consumed. They don't tell you what time it is; they tell you what kind of time it is.

The nature and organization of "time" created by the Balinese provide a sense of order that is reflective of their worldview. A nonlinear sense of time has several control-related advantages in that there is no sense of "losing time," or time urgency, and, as will be discussed in more detail in the section on physical illness, there is a reduced fear of aging and death, which have no real, absolute meaning in a nonlinear, cyclical temporal-orientation.

**Space.** The Balinese spatial orientation is also "rigid and precise... [There are] four cardinal points: East and West (determined by the rising and falling of the sun); and inland and coastward (determined by reference to the principal mountain on the island, the Gunung Agong, which is the home of the gods)" ( Bateson and Mead [1942] 1962, 6). Inland and East is the higher status position and determines where in the village the temple is placed, where the family shrine in the compound is located, where the superior person in the home sleeps, and even how that person's body is positioned (the head should be inland or east of the feet). From this very structured and ubiquitous spatial orientation, the Balinese are given a framework in which they can always be oriented with respect to space—from awakening, through other activities (e.g., the latrine is always located coastal and west), to going to bed at night.

**Summary of Section Two**

It has been argued that the five areas just discussed, and the religious system, myths, and beliefs in which they are contextualized, provide the Balinese with a sense of control and orientation. As such, they may be conceptualized as "preprogrammed" interventions that, in a preventive way (for subsequent generations), anticipate potential control-related perennial issues that humans face and serve as a type of benevolent other to provide order and control. This may be referred to as a type of "cultural" environmental planning (e.g., Thoresen and Mahoney 1974), a mastery model (Wolpe 1958, 1969). For the Balinese, as long as one stays in one's assigned place—through the tight temporal orientation; the ubiquitous use of four cardinal points of spatial orientation; the rigid caste system; the highly developed social etiquette procedure in which there is little room for ambiguity; the lack of climax in personal and social interactions; and the impersonal identity that is predetermined at birth—one is part of this cosmic order and has a sense of orientation and control.

**FINAL COMMENTS**

Many of the Balinese practices and beliefs are nearly opposite of those in our culture and would, presumably, cause many in our
culture to have a sense of “learned helplessness” (Seligan 1975). However, these views, and the religious framework within which they are contextualized, serve the Balinese in a variety of ways: they provide a circumscribed, relatively predictable world in which the people can act within certain constraints; give them a clear sense of when to let go of active efforts; and establish a sense of order about their place in the world.

This does not mean that the Balinese use only accepting and benevolent-other control strategies. In fact, a strong emphasis is placed on managing those areas of life that are (or should be) under their control (Wikan 1989). As my host Wayan said to me: “Life is discipline… The only way to be happy is to be in control of life.” This means that one has to work hard to try to fit into one’s given station in life: control one’s emotions; stay oriented in time and space; and try to maintain an anonymous, impersonal view of oneself and others. Beyond that effort, however, life is no longer in one’s control, and that needs to be accepted. It is from this acceptance, occurring within the framework of cultural and religious beliefs, that the Balinese derive their sense of control.

What can we learn from the practices and wisdom of the Balinese culture? First, I should note that I do not believe that the Balinese system is a panacea for those seeking spiritual wisdom. Because of what appears to be a high emphasis in Bali on “fitting in,” Balinese techniques, like meditation and prayer, are designed to avoid “breaking out” (e.g., into a state of ecstasy and communion with God). As the Geertzes (Geertz and Geertz 1975, 10) noted:

Private silent prayer, inward contemplation, and personal religious speculation, are all unusual, though of course, they occur. There is, in the general population, but sporadic concern for either theological or ethical reflection, for spiritual ecstasy, for divine communion, or for personal feelings of worshipful awe.

However, I do believe the study of Balinese culture—with its ubiquitous spiritual lifestyle, practice of awareness, and peaceful acceptance of that which is beyond one’s control—can provide us with some important teachings. At the least, we can learn to see the cultural relativism of our own worldviews. This awareness can be a first step in addressing the task that Bateson and Mead noted in the preface to their book on Bali (Bateson and Mead [1942] 1962, xvi):

We are faced with the problem of building a new world; we have to reorient the old values of many contrasting and contradictory cultural systems into a new form which will use but transcend them all, draw on their respective strengths and allow for their respective weaknesses. We have to build a culture richer and more rewarding than any that the world has ever seen.

These words were echoed by Joseph Campbell in his Masks of God when he noted that some mythology of a broader, deeper kind than anything envisioned anywhere in the past is now required… [a mythology] far more fluid, more sophisticated than the separate visions of the local traditions, wherein those mythologies themselves will be known to be but the masks of a larger… “timeless schema” that is no schema. (Campbell 1959, 18)

Toward that end, this paper has tried to show how both self-control and other control are blended in the Balinese culture in order to give a sense of control and orientation. That blend of self- and other control occurs throughout all religious and mystical traditions in some combination (e.g., Smith 1983). It is hoped that, by examining Balinese trance, culture, and myth from a self-control/other control perspective, this article has helped to contribute to the creation of the richer, more rewarding culture that Bateson and Mead envisioned and the timeless mythological schemata that Campbell called for in the future.

NOTES

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1. As Erickson noted in his book on Gandhi (1969), the explanations for professional activities, no matter how rational and logically written, are never so simple. And as Jung observed, individuals do not randomly select personality theories to study. Therefore, in retrospect (with seven years’ hindsight), it is possible that I was facing personal and developmental life-cycle issues (e.g., Vailliant 1977; Levinson 1968) when I chose a South Sea island on which to study self-control; at the time, I was thirty-five, married with three children, and reading biographies of Gauaguin.

2. Jean Houston and Clifford Geertz, personal communication, August 1982.

3. See note 2, Jean Houston.

4. The information used for this investigation of Bali covers several historical periods, including the anthropological investigation of Bateson, Mead, and Belo in the 1930s; the field investigations of the Geertzes in the 1960s and 1970s; and my own two months in Bali in 1982. My time in Bali involved observing trance and
dance practices, witnessing ceremonies such as tooth filling and burial, and a visit to the one inpatient mental health hospital on the island.

I had two main ‘informants’ who helped guide me in Bali. One was Wayan, a member of the lowest class, married, and father of two, who was my host while I lived in the jungle area outside Ubud and the person who also served as translator; the other was Dr. Denny Tongs, the dean of the medical school in Denpasar. There were also interviews with several artists (woodcarvers) and ‘white magic’ priests. (For my sake, as well as their own, no one took me to see practitioners of black magic.)

5. For the purpose of this article, a reciprocal determinism (Bandura 1978) is assumed between culture and person, and neither issues of first causes, or percentage of variance from person/situation interactions (Michel 1979; Kendrick and Funder 1988), is addressed. It is further assumed that in both the homogenous Balinese culture and in our own pluralistic American (Western, technological) culture there can be identified what Bateson called an ethos—‘a culturally standardized system of organization of the instincts and emotions of individuals’ (Bateson and Mead [1942] 1962, xi)—and what Skinner, in defining culture, labeled as ‘a set of categories of reinforcement’ (1971, 182). However, the assumption of ethos (or generally accepted set of categories of reinforcement) and the use of the term person in the aggregate are not meant to negate or in any way deny that within-individual variations do occur (often along the particular control dimensions discussed).


7. Among Balinese adolescents around sixteen to eighteen years old, there was considerable evidence of what was called baubiyau (hysteria), a demonstrative and vocal expression of emotions considered quite deviant in Balinese society. Bateson and Mead ([1942] 1962) interpreted this as a ‘streak of rowdyism’ that was a rejection of adulthood with its ‘staid and controlled demeanor.’

8. Because of the Balinese belief in reincarnation, there is the feeling that, depending upon the judgment of the gods, one’s current behaviors may influence one’s caste and station in the next round of rebirths.

9. Because of the increased influx of tourism, and the demand by these tourists to know the ‘names’ of the artists whose work they are purchasing, many artists now sign their works.

10. See note 5.

11. The term mastery has been used by various authors in two different ways and is clarified here to prevent possible confusion. One refers to a ‘mastery model,’ derived from Wolpe’s work, in which a person and/or culture preprompts and plans in order to ‘master’ (e.g., not be fearful) when a potentially difficult situation arises. The other use of the term mastery refers to active assertive efforts to gain control over the environment (or one’s self) and is not necessarily dependent on addressing a problem situation.

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