

Film Guide *for Jero Tapakan*

A Balinese Healer: Synopsis

A Balinese Trance Séance

Jero Tapakan, a spirit medium in Central Bali, is engaged in a consultation with a group of clients at the shrine-house in her home. A narrated introduction precedes the main séance, providing a visual impression of how a séance looks and then background information on the medium and her profession. The clients wish to contact the spirit of their dead son to discover the cause of his death and his wishes for his cremation ceremony. Jero is possessed several times in the course of the séance: first by a protective houseyard deity who demands propitiatory offerings that had previously been overlooked; then by the spirit of the petitioner's deceased father, who requests further offerings to ease his path in the other world; and finally by the spirit of the son. In an emotional scene the son's spirit reveals the cause of his premature death (sorcery) and

instructions for his forthcoming cremation. Between each possession the medium converses with her clients, clarifying vague points in the often ambiguous speech of the deities and spirits. The closing shots of the film show the final prayers and the clients' departure. The film attempts to present the participants' view of what is occurring, and all dialogue is subtitled.

Linda Connor
Patsy Asch & Timothy Asch

A Balinese Trance Séance
A 30 minute, 16mm/DVD/VHS,
by Timothy Asch, Linda Connor & Patsy Asch
1986

Jero on Jero: 'A Balinese Trance Séance Observed'
A 16 minute, 16mm/DVD/VHS
1986

Study Guide Design by Mike Berendsen

Jero on Jero: 'A Balinese Trance Séance' Observed

In 1980 we returned to Bali with video cassettes of our 1978 Balinese footage. Jero Tapakan, a healer whom we had filmed, looked at all the cassettes several times. This film presents some of her comments to Linda Connor and her reactions as she watched and listened to [A Balinese Trance Séance](#) for the first time.

By watching herself, Jero had a unique opportunity to reflect upon the experience of possession. Her comments provide insights into how she feels while possessed, her understanding of witchcraft and her humility in the presence of the supernatural world. More mundane thoughts are revealed as well, for example, the importance of the appearance of her home. Jero's approach to watching the video tape and her spontaneous comments contrast with Linda's more controlled statements that reflect academic and filmmaking goals.

Most audiences should see and discuss [A Balinese Trance Séance](#) before screening [Jero on Jero](#). People usually find Jero's comments more valuable after they have examined and discussed their own reactions to the trance film.

Ethnographic Notes: Spirit Mediums and their Séances

Consultations with spirit mediums at séances are ritual events in which the practitioner brings clients into direct contact with spiritual powers that the participants believe are responsible ultimately for the course of their lives. For a brief duration, spirits and deities manifest their wills to be interpreted directly by their petitioners. From a Balinese perspective, this renders the situation a particularly authoritative one.

Séances construct a relationship between human beings and cosmological forces in terms of hierarchy. Supernatural beings dominate; humans are powerless and deferential. Within the structure of the séance, accommodation to the will of the deities and spirits is assumed, and yet can only be achieved at the expense of consider-

able effort by the petitioners. Although there are many contexts in Balinese social life where egalitarian relations of cooperation and collective effort receive ideological emphasis, such relations are not salient during the *séance*. But humans are not merely the pawns of deities: the existence of spirit mediums such as Jero Tapakan speaks the possibility of compromise and bargaining with supernatural wills. To some extent deities and spirits can be placated through the instrumentality of the *séance*, which also gives recognition to the bonds of sentiment linking the spirits of the deceased to their living relatives. This linkage permits the petitioners some leverage in the supernatural realm, thus diminishing their perceptions of their own powerlessness.

In terms of the participants' ideology, mediums are conceived as the passive instruments of supernatural wills. However, those practitioners such as Jero Tapakan, who actively interpret the deities' and spirits' utterances to their clients, are usually regarded as the most highly skilled. This reason is never given by Balinese, who attribute the specialist's success to the strength of his or her inner spiritual forces which facilitate communication between the human and the supernatural realms. But the medium (male or female) is nonetheless respected as a person of some influence and status (e.g. see Jero's comments in [Jero on Jero](#) on clients' perception of her status).

When discussing their own attributes, mediums usually portray themselves as the humble vehicles of possessing agents and readily admit to their great ignorance in all spheres of human activity. In [A Balinese Trance Séance](#), for example, Jero early remarks that "Others are literate, and can do anything", and several times during [Jero on Jero](#) reiterates that: "I'm just an ignorant commoner". Clients defer to the practitioner's knowledge as superior to their own but all parties defer to the knowledge of deities and spirits, while, between each possession episode, attempting to make sense of the latter's somewhat cryptic utterances.

Even the simplest *séance* is a delicate process of negotiation and exchange of information, in which mediums perform crucial functions. Because skepticism is rare, both about the existence of deities and spirits and the capacity of these beings to make their will known through mediums, the main concern of would-be clients is to select a skilled medium who will not make a clumsy or mistaken connection with the deities or spirits the clients wish to contact. Suspicions about practitioner fraudulence, whilst not unknown, are rare.¹

Clients may consult two or three mediums and compare the results before settling on a course of action. They may do this because they are dissatisfied with the outcome of an earlier *séance* or because they wish to have additional spiritual endorsement of their intentions. Nowadays (as shown in [A Balinese Trance Séance](#)) clients often carry cassette recorders to record the medium's utterances which they discuss with the practitioner after the *séance* or later with relatives at home. All mediums I encountered insisted that

¹ Belo, working in the 1930s; in Bali, found the same form of limited doubt. See for example Belo, 1960:226-7.

clients record only the speech of the possessing agents and not the discussion in between. They expressed the opinion that their own utterances as ordinary Balinese were not worth recording. Cassette recorders have been readily adopted to use at *séances* because the pronouncements of the deities and spirits are often obtuse and lists of offerings are long and difficult to remember. In cases in which the rituals to be performed are important and complicated, further discussion (of the utterances) at home is warranted before any decision is taken. It is possible that the use of cassette recorders may increase the tendency to consult more than one medium, as comparison of outcomes is facilitated. However I have no evidence that this is in fact occurring.

Sometimes when a *séance* has come to an unprofitable end, the clients suspect that they have mistaken the identity of the deity or spirit. This may be what is occurring, for example, in [A Balinese Trance Séance](#) when the chief petitioner asks of the possessing spirit "Whose father is this, who as asking, who is speaking, so that I'm not confused?" (311). On other occasions clients conclude with resignation that the deities and spirits are not willing to speak on that day. These problems do not threaten the institution of mediumship even if they may weaken the standing of individuals within the profession. A medium's reputation suffers when clients consistently fail to gain satisfactory outcomes, but usually criticism is phrased in terms of weak inner spiritual forces mitigating against effective contact with the supernatural, rather than in terms of the medium being a charlatan.

Professional humility is a safeguard against the possibility of harsh judgment by clients and neighbors. It is from this perspective that Jero Tapakan's frequent protestations of ignorance and personal incompetence in [Jero on Jero](#) should be viewed. Stories abound of mediums who either became too greedy and eventually lost their clientele or became seduced into self-aggrandisement by the pursuit of spiritual power (*sakti*) for egotistical ends and thus lost the ability to communicate with the supernatural realm. These anecdotes foster an implicit code of ethics amongst *balians*² and clients.

However there is tension between the expectation of humility and other demands the profession makes: the necessity of displaying some virtuosity in the conduct of the *séance*, a facility for handling metaphorical language, astuteness in sensing mood and atmosphere during the *séance*, and the ability to make the most of the feedback which may be obtained from the clients. The tension between the expectation of humility and the strenuous efforts needed to attract a clientele is resolved by the commitment of participants to an ideology that the possessing agent rather than the medium is responsible for the practitioner's behavior. This is most evident in Jero's comments during [Jero on Jero](#), for example: "I'm too ignorant. It's my 'siblings within' who pray and call the deity. I myself don't know who should be addressed."

² *Balians*: traditional healers, including spirit mediums, diviners, masseurs, midwives, and bone-setters. See Section III.

Although there are many perspectives from which the structure of the *séance*, the attitudes and behavior of participants, and the medium's instrumental roles can be analysed, in the film [A Balinese Trance Séance](#) we have chosen to represent the situation as far as is possible in accordance with what we construe to be the participants' understanding of the event. In [Jero on Jero](#) we have tried to provide further insights into Jero Tapakan's view of the *séance*.

Ritual Possession

Since the 1930s scholars such as Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, Jane Belo, Beryl de Zoete and Walter Spies have documented and analysed the frequent and varied occurrences of ritual possession in Bali.³ During possession, supernatural agents assume control over the persona of their human vehicle, who typically professes amnesia. Jane

Belo's *Trance in Bali* (1960) is possibly the most exhaustive single ethnographic work on trance ever written. In the main body of the text she describes the various types of trance 'practitioners' or 'participants' in four districts in Bali. These types include spirit mediums like Jero Tapakan, as well as temple mediums who are the vehicles for deities and several types of ceremonial trance-dancers, including child dancers.

In the 1970s and 80s a similar range and frequency of ritual possession can be found with the same positive evaluation by Balinese villagers as Belo found in the 1930s. There remains great variation from one village to another in the incidence of different types of ritual possession. In the district where I worked, several villages had integrated ritual possession into their cycle of temple ceremonies, whilst in many villages such events never occur. The region boasts large numbers of practicing spirit mediums; some other areas have very few. Several customary-village communities stage public rituals of exorcism entailing dances involving possession, which recur over a period of days or weeks and in which many men and youths participate. Neighboring communities may never perform such ceremonies. In one remote highland settlement male and female adolescents take part in ritual dances of possession which occur during important local temple anniversaries. In some temples in mountain villages, groups of mediums consecrated to a particular deity become possessed and pronounce on the details of ritual,

often effecting changes in the course of the proceedings. At many ceremonies, both in private houseyards and public temples, possession may overtake a number of the congregation in a seemingly unpredictable fashion. Variation from community to community is one of the most striking characteristics of ritual possession in Bali.

Since the 1930s and even earlier, several dance and drama forms which incorporate episodes of possession have been performed for foreign and domestic visitors in numerous venues on the island. Today, with ever larger numbers of tourists visiting the island, these

³ See, particularly Belo, 1960.

commercial performances are a significant means of income for members of many small dance clubs which abound on the island and function in more traditional

contexts as well. But the impact of tourism and the doctrinal issues around the 'commercialization' of Bali's ritual arts, which are often debated in the provincial newspapers, have little effect as yet on the beliefs and practices about possession trance in the villages of the island. Episodes of possession trance are usually accepted and welcomed, and in many cases considered crucial to the performance of a ceremony.

There is often an element of fear and awe on the part of petitioners at a *séance* or members of a temple congregation drawn into close interaction with a supernatural agent acting through its earthly medium, but these emotions are somewhat mitigated by the rather stereotyped behavior of the spirits in any given context and by the set pattern of interaction with which people learn to deal with them. This is evident in [A Balinese Trance Séance](#) when the petitioners use polite gestures and formulaic phrases at key points in their interactions with the possessing agents, especially the more distant and imperious deity.

The three categories of supernatural agents which possess humans are demons (*buta* and *kala*), deities (*dewa*) and ancestors both uncremated (*sang mati*, *pirata*) and cremated (*pitara*, *hyang dewa*). The loftiest deities (*betara betari*) do not endanger their purity by possessing humans at all.⁴ These deities (such as Betara Surya, Betara Siwa, and Betara Wisnu) may only be approached by offerings and prayer and, in the case of Brahmana high priests, by meditation. The possessing agent may be named (or proclaim itself through the medium, as in the *séance* on film) and may be associated with a particular temple, sacralised natural site, or descent group. But in some cases, especially of possession by demons, the supernatural agent is not named or located and only the category (deity, ancestor, demon) is known or inferred from the ceremonial context or the demeanor of the person possessed.

It is rare for someone possessed in a ritual context to lose complete control, although this is not the case in episodes of 'deviant' behavior which are attributed to demon possession. In cases of ceremonial possession by demons, when performers make dashes into watching crowds, they are restrained by onlookers. Damage to property, such as temple structures or refreshment stalls, is uncommon. During such volatile episodes, those possessed rarely make coherent utterances. The subjects (usually men) drink large quantities of rice whisky and eat live chickens, the harsh food and drink which demons are believed to favor. Those possessed by deities and ancestor spirits may often be impatient and angry but they are also restrained and eloquent in their criticism of and comments on people and events. Deities are offered 'pure' foods such as cooked poultry and coconut milk. Their petitioners and congregation pay

⁴ However it is not unusual for less lofty deities who may possess mediums to be referred to as *betara*. This happens in [A Balinese Trance Séance](#), where 'Betara Guru', a protective houseyard deity, speaks through Jero in the first three possession episodes.

them deference by addressing them in particularly elevated language forms, as is evident in the filmed séance.

Ritual possession trance, or what I have referred to less precisely as 'trance' in the film [A Balinese Trance Séance](#), is thus a highly differentiated sphere of behavior in Bali. The meaning of possession is constructed through a broadly based ideology which embraces many areas of Balinese cultural life. Balinese language does not contain within it a generic term for 'trance' or even 'ritual possession trance' thus it is advisable to eschew the use of such terms as representative of primary analytical categories, or even as useful descriptive categories, except in the loosest sense. In order to convey some information about the complex ways in which Balinese refer to possession experiences, I have attempted to translate indigenous terms as literally as possible in the subtitles to [Jero on Jero](#). For example: 'forgetting' (*engsap*), 'remembering' (*inget*), 'holding the brazier' (*ngisep*) and 'entered' (*karauhan*).

The filmed séance conducted by Jero Tapakan has to be seen in the context of many similarly structured séances frequently conducted all over the island by hundreds of different spirit mediums. It also has to be viewed against the background of a large repertoire of possession rituals and dance-dramas which Balinese villagers regularly participate in or observe, as well as a realm of ideas about possession available to explain much of human behavior.

Spirit Mediums Clienteles

Spirit mediums' clienteles are different from those of other balians in that mediums' clients prefer to consult a practitioner whom they do not know personally if an important decision or problem is involved. Some people travel long distances across the island to find a medium of repute who is not acquainted with their affairs. This may seem to contradict the widely stated assertion that those possessed cannot remember what was said or done during possession. However, clients do not seem to find this contradictory. There seems little suspicion of fraud, but they are embarrassed at discussing affairs of moment with a medium one already knows well (when she or he is not possessed). Or perhaps their attitude stems from the knowledge that a minority of mediums are not

trustworthy, and that consulting a medium one already knows increases the chances of fraudulent practice. Potential clients generally seem more willing to give credence to the great spiritual powers of distant balians than to the readily observable powers of practitioners in their own neighborhood. For any or all of the above reasons, clients will rarely consult the same medium twice, but will seek a new medium for each fresh problem that arises. And if the first consultation is unclear in outcome, clients may consult other mediums about the same problem before weighing up the results and acting accordingly. The family members who had consulted Jero in [A Balinese Trance Séance](#) reported that they had been satisfied with the outcome of the séance, and thus had consulted no other mediums. After the cremation of their son, they had consulted a different me-

diu to learn whether the ceremony had been performed according to the spirit's satisfaction. When asked why a different medium had been chosen, the father only answered 'that it was always 'clearer' to proceed that way.

If the matter of concern is considered of minor importance,⁵ family members do not attempt to find a new balian who is far from their home but will usually consult one close by. In these cases, only two or three members of the family attend, the offerings are simple, and the consultation brief.

When the problem concerns a large group or community, such as a temple congregation, village council, or hamlet, all the members will be exhorted to attend the consultation and witness the speech of the medium. Thus groups of 20 or more petitioners occasionally pour into the houseyard of a spirit medium. On other occasions the medium may be asked to conduct the séance at the group's temple, witnessed by the entire congregation.

The composition of groups that arrive in mediums' houseyards varies according to the nature of the clients' problem. Usually one sees groups of three, four or five, including both males and females. Members of client groups are usually related (often members of the same patrilineally extended family) and often inhabit the same houseyard. It is these people who cooperate most closely on ritual matters and in everyday economic affairs and thus are most likely to share the same problems. The groups often include senior female kin experienced in séances (as is the case with the group filmed in [A Balinese Trance Séance](#)). Each group has a chief petitioner (referred to as the *pengarep*, from *arep*: front) who may or may not be the chief spokesperson. The chief petitioner is designated as the one who has primary responsibility for resolution of the problem in hand. Sometimes this person may be an older woman, more often one of the senior males of the family. Other participants are not debarred from speaking. Clients dress in clothes appropriate for a ceremonial occasion, including the ceremonial sash without which one cannot enter temples or the medium's shrine house.

Illness is the most commonly occurring problem brought to mediums. Other clients come to contact their dead relatives about instructions for cremation ceremonies and/or to find out the cause of death of a family member (as is the case in [A Balinese Trance Séance](#)). Clients also may seek instructions for building a new family temple, or a new residential pavilion in their houseyard. In these cases they need information about the form of the structure, its appropriate scale, orientation, and the necessary offerings for the blessing ceremony. Some groups come about family quarrels and tensions in the houseyard, suspecting that there is a supernatural origin for such events. They may come to find out more information about a theft, although most balians will not divulge any information about the specific identity of a thief (or sorcerer - see Jero's comments in [Jero on Jero](#)), for fear of both police investigation and

⁵ Minor matters include identifying the spirit of a newborn child (see [Belo, 1960: 239-249](#)) or the loss of a small piece of property.

of magical retaliation on the part of the accused party.

In my records of 79 séances with 11 different mediums in the Bangli district, the statistical breakdown of types of clients' problems is as follows:

- (a) illness of a relative (49%)
- (b) an effort to identify the cause of a relative's death and/or instructions for mortuary rites (18%);
- (c) household strife and misfortune (10%);
- (d) identifying the reincarnating ancestor in a newborn child (6%),
- (e) other (16%).

The Clients In 'A Balinese Trance Seance'

The séance on film, which took place in Jero Tapakan's house-yard, was of average length and complexity⁶, and reached a satisfactory outcome as far as the clients were concerned. These people were farmers who lived in an outlying settlement of a small village about 20 kilometers to the northwest of Jero's home, in an area of non-irrigated fields planted with dry rice, sweet potato, corn, cassava, cloves and citrus trees. The people involved in the filmed séance are all close relatives - the chief petitioner, his mother, his brother (or classificatory 'brother') and the brother's wife. Standing in the background, or sitting on the edge of the group, are neighbors and more distant relatives. This large group traveled together on the southbound bus which passes near their village in the early morning en route to market in the district town. They deliberately chose a market day because transport is easier to find. The day was also chosen because the clients considered it auspicious: *purnama*, the day of the full moon.

All of the members of this large group came about similar problems related to a collective cremation ceremony which they planned to perform about two weeks after the séance. Each person had one or more dead relatives (in some cases already deceased a number of years) who were to be cremated on the specified day. The clients had come to contact the spirits of these relatives in order to discover the spirits' wishes or their cremation rituals. On the morning we were filming, these petitioners rearranged themselves in Jero's shrine house three times, with different spokespersons on each occasion. They told me that they had chosen Jero because she had been recommended to them by other people in their village who had consulted her. Neither Jero nor I was acquainted with the clients previously (although, as Jero points out in *Jero on Jero*, between 1978 and 1980 the old woman returned 'about ten times' to assist other co-villagers in their consultations). She would be considered valuable at a séance because of her command of the complicated forms of polite Balinese, as well as because of her knowledge of offerings and ceremonies which are often requested in bewildering detail by deities and spirits.

⁶ For information on the structure of séances, see the introduction to the annotated translation.

The clients did not know that Timothy Asch and I would be filming on the day they chose but they consented to participate after Jero explained that we were scholars interested in filming the séance in order to convey its significance to members of our own culture. The actual séance proceeded in much the same fashion as the many others I witnessed between 1976 and 1978.

A week after the séance, I visited the chief petitioner and his family in their 'field cottage' (as it is referred to in the film). They received me warmly, and were willing to speak about their response to the séance. I replayed the tape recording of the séance, which they already had heard several times because one of their neighbors (who appears on the film) had also recorded the proceedings with his own cassette recorder. The mother (who had been absent from the séance because she was menstruating and therefore unclean) was particularly pleased to hear my recording as she said it was clearer than the one the neighbor had made.

The family members told me that they were satisfied with the information they had gained through Jero's séance, that it was very clear, and that they had felt no need to consult other mediums for a 'second opinion'. When asked if they had performed all the rituals according to the instructions of their dead son and his grandfather, they replied that they had done so, except for the offerings which were specifically requested for the day of the cremation, which wasn't to take place until a few days after my visit.

It was on this occasion that I obtained information about the circumstances of their son's illness and death; this is included in the narration to the film. He had suffered from fever and vomiting, and had a swollen stomach. The symptoms had developed slowly. First they took the child to a healer in their village, a man whom they had often consulted about family illnesses and problems. He had not said much about the nature of their son's complaint, nor its causes, but had given them some magically potent oil (*tutuh*) and some holy water with which to treat the child. When this had no effect and the child's condition worsened, they had made the difficult decision to take him to the district hospital. They traveled there by bus, an uncomfortable journey for a sick child. The bus trip took about 30 minutes, plus 1/2 hour to 1 hour to carry the child up and down the three steep ravines between their house and the road. The father said the child died a few days after admittance to the hospital and that the doctors had told the parents the boy was suffering from typhoid and had been brought to the hospital too late for effective treatment. The séance which we filmed was the first time since his death that his family had attempted to contact the boy's spirit.

In November 1980, I returned to the client's village with Tim and Patsy Asch to show the family the results of our filming in 1978. They showed little surprise when we arrived at their inaccessible dwelling (on foot, carrying heavy video equipment). Several members of the family and a large number of neighbors delayed their preparation of offerings for a forthcoming ceremony to watch

the videotape. They were excited to see themselves and identifiable objects and places on the videotape and in color. The arrival of the boy's spirit generated strong emotions amongst family members, especially the mother, who had not been present at the séance, and the boy's father, who again wept.. They seemed pleased with the film and expressed no objection to its contents.

I also took the opportunity to ask them about the boy's cremation and any further contacts they had had with his spirit. The father told me that the cremation ceremonies had proceeded smoothly and that several weeks after their conclusion he had again consulted another medium to inquire if there had been any oversights or errors which might impede his son's path in the next world. The spirit had again spoken with the family, assuring them that its progress was satisfactory and that there were no major oversights during the cremation. The family's opinions about the fate of the sorceress referred to in [A Balinese Trance Séance](#) are discussed below.

Sorcery

Concern with sorcery is a strong undercurrent in Balinese social life. Unnatural or premature death, chronic or serious illness, and a host of other misfortunes are attributed to the malevolent intentions of those skilled in black magic or, to use the Balinese idiom, the powers of the left (*penqiwa*, from *kiwa*: 'left'). In Bali, sorcery is construed to be the conscious and secret deployment of supernatural magical powers by individuals with malign intent. Accusations of sorcery are seldom publicly made but suspicions are widespread. Reprisals rarely take place through public, institutionalized means. The injured party who suspects sorcery as the cause of his troubles will privately seek counter-magic from a *balian*. Those whose life styles are sufficiently deviant or eccentric (often distinguished by living alone in magically dangerous locations -near rivers, graveyards etc.) are commonly suspected of being 'witches' or 'sorcerers' (*leyak*), but just as often the tensions amongst kin, affines and neighbors are so great that they prompt the same sorts of suspicions and accusations within this intimate sphere. The provincial newspaper in Bali during the years 1977-78 contained several reports of murders and assaults within families or hamlets - the motive for the crime being sorcery leading to the death or illness of a member of the murderer's family. Such motivations are by no means discounted in court during the trials, and the defendant can be sure to receive some popular sympathy. But these cases are the exceptions - suspicions are usually more diffuse and reprisals much less drastic, taking the form of defensive counter-magic or protective magic (*penengenan*, from *tengen*: 'right') which *balian*s of the 'right' path can minister. These *balian*'s measures take the form of offerings and charms, to be worn on the body and placed around the house or other threatened place.

It is revealed by the boy's spirit during the séance that the cause of his death was not typhoid, as the doctors diagnosed, but bewitchment by a female relative. The account of his death at her hands is

stark and emotional ('I was pierced through the lungs'). The son is planning revenge on the woman, for which he desires his father's assistance. In the film the son cries that he has been stabbed through the lungs by a patrilineal female relative. It is these females, in a society where inheritance is patrilineal, who, if they marry out of their patrilineal extended family, can expect to inherit nothing on their parents' death. Their alleged discontent with their situation is semi-institutionalized by the common attribution of sorcery. The ascribed motive is envy of good fortune experienced by the women's brothers and their offspring, as well as discontent with the relatively less influential position of wives and daughters-in-law in a strange household. Other people, male and female, old and young, relatives and strangers, may also be suspected of sorcery, although not with such regularly attributed motivation.

The son does not expect that his grief-stricken father will take direct physical action against the female relative (whose exact identity, as opposed to structural position, is typically not mentioned). Rather, he expects the complicity of his father in the revenge plan which he, the son, is going to execute from his influential and relatively impervious position as a spirit in the afterworld. He enlists the father's cooperation by requesting that his living relatives make the necessary offerings to higher otherworldly powers: a way of begging their permission for the spirit to undertake magical reprisals (see Jero's extensive

discussion of these points in chapters 7 and 8). The father, at first carried away by his shock at discovering the cause of his son's death, agrees to the spirit's request but later, when pressed further, attempts to evade the issue. He does this by changing the subject slightly (What's this about sickness?) and seeming not to know what the son is talking about when he mentions the offerings which must be made. No doubt he feels that his son, as a spirit in the afterworld, is now in a powerful enough position to carry out his revenge without implicating his parents. He refers to the spirit's advantages in this respect at another point in the dialogue when he says: 'What has caused this to be so? Please try and speak of it a little to your father, as you already know about the "great world" (# 450, p.). To participate in a supernatural vendetta would place the father and his immediate family in a dangerous position over which they would have very little control. Later in the dialogue it seems as if the father has abnegated his authority over his small son, although his earlier spontaneous reaction was not to do so. Ultimate responsibility for the revenge is left with the spirit.

When I visited the family a week after the séance I learned that the parents had indeed made, or planned to make, all the offerings requested by the son. However they were reluctant to discuss the offerings directed specifically towards the purpose of revenge, from which I gathered that they were not willing to involve themselves intentionally in the reprisals in any way.

During our visit to the family in 1980 I learned more details about the case of sorcery. In 1978 they had declared that they knew the identity of the sorceress (although of course they declined to

name her) and that the medium's utterances had only confirmed their suspicions. In 1980 I inquired whether they felt that any revenge had been perpetrated upon her. They agreed that it had, and told me ill health had afflicted her for almost two years. First she had fallen down a ravine and broken her leg, which had prevented her working for some months. Then she had suffered a severe respiratory and lung complaint which had caused her discomfort for many months. The father averred that these afflictions were the proof he needed to confirm his suspicions that she had been instrumental in causing his son's death and, at the same time, constituted just punishment for her behavior. The circumstances also vindicated the father's feeling that revenge could take place without his active participation. He attributed the woman's motivation to her envy of his household's economic position which, although by no means prosperous, had improved markedly in the last few years, while her household had declined somewhat.

Offerings

Balinese religion, for most of its adherents, is elaborately ritualized, and offerings form one of the main elements of worship and supplication, exorcism and propitiation. Most women in rural households spend an hour or so each morning making simple offerings. More complex constructions may take many hours, days or weeks of preparation by women skilled in the art. Some women, especially those from the courtly and priestly families, spend their whole lives learning about offerings and acting on ceremonial occasions as consultants to those with lesser knowledge.

The basic elements of offerings are: young coconut fronds (*busung*) and the darker green leaves of a palm tree (*don ron*), flowers, plants and fruits; meats, especially chicken and duck; and rice, cooked or uncooked, ground or unground, often colored and molded into thousands of different shapes. Most of the elements of the natural world are at some time incorporated into offerings and form a link with their corresponding elements in the supernatural realm. Offerings link Balinese worshippers in a series of complex transactions with the forces of the supernatural world, and the idiom of the marketplace is often used to describe the meaning of offerings in ritual (see *Ethnographic Background*, p.).

Completed offerings have a brief life; women carry them on their heads to the place where the ceremony is held, if it is outside their own houseyard; offerings are blessed by officiating priests and offered up to the deities concerned, although in simple everyday offerings the woman herself will recite a simple prayer as a consecration; after the ceremony the offerings are taken home again, their essence (*sari*) having been consumed by the deities and spirits. Offerings are prepared not only for the benevolent manifestations of supernatural forces but also in propitiation to potentially dangerous underworld manifestations. The remains of offerings made to deities and spirits

are often considered spiritually beneficial to their human petitioners, and are taken home to be consumed by members of the households where they were so painstakingly prepared.

Offerings which petitioners carry to a séance are relatively simple and inexpensive. The exact form varies depending on their purpose in consulting the medium. If it is for a minor matter, they may only carry a simple *canang* offering, consisting of a tray of cut and woven coconut leaves on which the clients place flowers and rice as well as the money which they are donating to the medium in return for her services. In addition to the *canang*, many clients carry a *tapakan palinggih* offering, consisting of a round bamboo tray on which is placed a bed of rice, a length of cloth and a string of Chinese coins with a *canang* atop. Clients endeavor to bring offerings as elaborate as their time and resources will allow when they consult about major problems, as they judge that the speech will not be edifying if their preparations are below what their means will reasonably permit.

In addition to the *tapakan palinggih*, many clients bring a larger offering termed *banten apejatian*. This is a more elaborate version of the basic elements of rice, flowers and the woven, delicately-shaped coconut leaves, with the addition of some poultry and a coconut. Some clients bring the *banten apejatian* incorporated into the more complicated *banten asoroh* ('a set of offerings') which requires several baskets to contain similar ingredients in greater quantities and more elaborate arrangements. *Banten asoroh* and *banten apejatian* are common offerings on many ceremonial occasions. They are, so to speak, common currency, unlike *tapakan palinggih* which is mostly prepared for séances. As well as generalized forms, most ceremonies in Bali also require special offerings.

Petitioners who wish to contact the spirits of dead relatives, both uncremated and already cremated, bring an additional offering called *rantasan* which consists of clothes representing those of the dead person (or that person's actual clothes) folded decoratively atop an ornate tray and capped with a *canang*. The spirit is conceived to be attracted to these clothes. In the case of those already cremated (and thus in a purified state), the petitioners carry clothes of yellow and white, befitting the more holy status of the spirit.⁷

The offerings seen in [A Balinese Trance Séance](#) are *banten asoroh*, *tapakan palinggih*, and *rantasan*. At the beginning of a day of séances, Jero also makes her own offerings, which she consecrates in her shrine house. These are usually very simple in form, just one or two *canang*, and are consecrated separately from the offerings which the petitioners bring. The former are for the deity of Jero's shrine, who presides over the séances, whilst the clients' offerings are directed towards the deities and spirits whom they wish to contact.

The deities and spirits who possess the medium may demand offerings in addition to those made by the clients and the me-

⁷ Priests and other persons who are purified in life by consecration ceremonies wear yellow and white clothes.

dium. These offerings may be a means of easing spirits' paths in the afterworld, a way in which the petitioners can compensate for past mistakes, or they may be a gesture intended to ensure success in a particular enterprise in which they are about to engage. The possessing agents often stipulate the day and the ceremonial occasion of which the offering is to be a part. In the *séance* filmed, for example, the deity in the first trance commands the petitioners to make some offerings in their houseyard on the day of the cremation so that household spirits will not be neglected when the family leaves for the ceremony in the village. In the second trance, when the chief petitioner's father possesses Jero, he chides his relatives for neglecting some important rituals at his own cremation (some years past) and requests that they make a compensatory offering called *Guru Paduka* (see editing notes, p.). The son's spirit in the third trance asks for a complex array of offerings, including one (to Brahma, Siwa and Wisnu) which will enable him to take his revenge on the woman who bewitched him (see editing notes, p.) and a *durmang-gala* offering to exorcise any evil influences which may prevent the smooth progress of his forthcoming cremation. Offerings requested in this manner demonstrate the dependence of the dead on their living relatives.

Rituals of Death

In the film, the petitioners have come to consult the spirits of their dead relatives through the medium. They have a specific purpose in mind: to find out about the circumstances surrounding the death of their young son, for whom they are still grieving, and to elicit from him any special instructions he may have for the performance of his own cremation ceremony.

This is one of the main reasons why people consult mediums in Bali, especially at times of the year which are considered auspicious for the holding of mortuary rites (the dry months of July and August, when the harvesting is finished). As emphasised in the narration of the film, cremations are among the most complex and costly rituals in Bali. Mistakes may anger the spirits, which can only have ill effects on their living relatives. Often when a family consults a medium about the cause of some misfortune with which it is afflicted, it is revealed that the family neglected some important component of a mortuary rite in the past and this is put forward as the cause of their present suffering. In these circumstances, compensatory offerings are prescribed by the possessing spirit to remedy the oversight (which may be impeding its progress in the afterworld). These procedures may be more trouble and cost than the original ritual which was overlooked or badly performed.

The process of purifying a dead person's spirit and liberating the soul is extremely elaborate and often so expensive that poorer families have to wait many years before they are capable of carrying out this obligation to their dead relatives.⁸ Consecrated persons (high

priests, kings, local priests, *balian*s and others) may not be polluted by burial, and cremation ceremonies (usually with wide community support) are arranged soon after the death. Others usually receive a simple burial ceremony after which the restless spirit may have to wait a long time while relatives prepare for the cremation. Cremations, even the simplest, take many weeks of preparation and some families may place themselves in debt for generations (by pawning rice fields, for instance) to raise the necessary funds for the offerings as well as for outlays of food and payment for the assistants who are called in. But purification does not end with the cremation (*ngaben*, *palebon*) alone. A post-cremation ceremony (usually referred to as *nyekah*) follows when relatives can afford it. For most people the final purification of the spirit (*hyang*) and liberation of the soul (*atma*) may not come until many years later, if at all, with a further post-cremation ceremony (often referred to in ordinary speech as *nuntun*) and a ceremony to seat the now deified spirit in the family's ancestral shrine in its house temple (usually referred to as *Palinggih Betara Hyang Kompiang*).

Theoretically, once apotheosis has been achieved through these ceremonies, the spirit loses its persona and merges with the divine. In practice, these spirits can be contacted to speak with their living descendants, especially when their separate personal identity is still remembered, as in the case of ancestors not more than two or three generations removed from the living. These deified spirits are addressed much more formally and politely than recently dead and unpurified spirits.

The relationship between the living and the dead is one of mutual dependence. The living depend on the dead for their own well-being as the dead have the power to curse, whilst the dead rely on the living for their successful apotheosis through the cremation and post-cremation ceremonies. In such a complex relationship there are many opportunities for error and oversight; possession is the way in which communication is effected, to restore the balance which has been upset and to prevent further disruption. Usually, intervention of ancestors is deliberately sought through mediums because a specific problem has arisen. Sometimes, however, ancestral spirits are sufficiently provoked to spontaneously make their will known. This commonly happens at family and descent-group ceremonies when one of the group becomes possessed and speaks with the voice of an aggrieved ancestor.

In [A Balinese Trance Séance](#) two spirits are contacted. The first is the father of the main petitioner who possesses Jero in the second trance (the fourth of the actual event - see full translation, Section II). This spirit has in fact already undergone a cremation and thus is well along the path to purification, but he chides the petitioners for overlooking some important rituals at the time of the ceremony. He is still awaiting the final post-cremation ceremony for which his descendants (to judge by their replies) do not seem to have any immediate plans.

⁸ See Katherine Mershon (1971) for a discussion of mortuary rituals in Bali.

In the final trance of the film (the fifth of the event - see Section II below), the recently dead son of the main petitioner descends and speaks. They are first and foremost concerned to find out about the causes of his death and then to receive his special instructions for his own cremation, as well as for other rites which may ease his path in the afterworld. It is for him that his living relatives brought the offering of clothes (*rantasan*), whereas the advent of his grandfather is unexpected but accepted as part of the order of events.

Eka Dasa Rudra

At the time we filmed the *séance* (July 1978), Balinese throughout the whole island were involved in preparations for a centennial festival at their 'mother temple', Pura Besakih, on the southern slope of the highest mountain on Bali, Gunung Agung. At Besakih, all Balinese have the responsibility of worship - the temple is a unifying symbol where homage is paid to the many manifestations of Sang Hyang Widi Wasa, the One God. The temple consists of hundreds of shrines, arranged in courts along the terraced sanctuary of the mountainside. Different regions and groups of Balinese are responsible for the various complexes of shrines. Ceremonies are held throughout the year on the auspicious days of the lunar calendar and the *wuku* calendar, with different groups participating. The upkeep of the temple is financed by the government, by income from temple lands and from the contributions of the congregation. Caretaker priests and customary officials in the hamlets surrounding the temple complex have primary responsibility for the routine organization of the ceremonies which take place there. But on great religious occasions the whole Balinese community of worshippers is responsible for participation in the ceremonies.

In May 1979, Eka Dasa Rudra, a centennial festival of exorcism, propitiation and purification, was performed.⁹ This ceremony takes the form of a huge sacrifice (*taur agung*), followed by prayers of thanksgiving to Sang Hyang Widi Wasa. The sacrifice, an elaborate sequence of ceremonies lasting many weeks, is performed to appease the destructive aspect of underworld forces which may otherwise vent their wrath on human beings, and thereby to restore balance and harmony between the microcosmos and the macrocosmos.

Preparations for the Eka Dasa Rudra of 1979 lasted more than one year. Not least of these was the ceremonial cleansing of polluting influences throughout the whole island. Most importantly, spirits of uncremated dead had to be released from their earthbound state. Thus for many months preceding the ceremony Balinese families, no matter how poor, were involved in organizing the cremation ceremonies which would ensure the purification of spirits of the dead, as well as cleanse local communities of death pollution. Families who could not afford to stage the elaborate and costly cremation ceremonies separately joined together with others of their village,

⁹ *The historical background to the Eka Dasa Rudra ceremony of 1979 and its regional political significance are discussed in Forge 1980; the ceremony in Stuart-Fox 1982.*

hamlet or descent group to stage collective cremations whereby most of the cost could be shared. Without the pressure brought about by the forthcoming Eka Dasa Rudra, such families would have postponed these cremations for yet a few more years until they mustered the necessary resources.

During the weeks we were filming in Bali, the pace of life was transformed by phrenetic preparations for the many collective cremations which were being organized. Prices of commodities needed for such ceremonies rose steeply and families placed themselves in debt for many years to raise the necessary funds. For the weeks of preparation, and the many days which it takes to perform a cremation correctly, work on everyday tasks slowed down as people's energies were directed towards the staging of these all-important events.

In the middle months of 1978, an unusually large proportion of mediums' clients came to consult their dead relatives about their wishes for their cremation ceremonies. Jero Tapakan handled hundreds of such cases during the months from May to September 1978, the peak of the 'cremation season'. Such activity was brought about by the imminence of Eka Dasa Rudra; it is unlikely that it will be repeated for many years.

Language and the Seance

Balinese is an Austronesian language (like most of the 300 different languages in the Indonesian archipelago) and is of the Malay-Javanic subgroup. Inscriptional evidence from the eight and ninth centuries AD indicates that from at least as early as this period there were Sanskrit influences on the island's language and the scripts used derive from Indic origins. The integration of Sanskrit and Old Balinese (pre-eleventh century) linguistic forms was only one of a variety of Buddhist and Hindu influences on Balinese courtly culture, channeled through the Javanese kingdoms. After the 11th century, Javanese influence seems to have increased, for following this period (which corresponds with the marriage of the Balinese prince Udayana to the Javanese princess Mahendradatta and the reign of their son Airlangga in East Java), court inscriptions are written in Old Javanese. For many centuries classical manuscripts written in Old Javanese have

been copied and adapted by Balinese scholars and communicated through art and ritual forms, thereby exercising a profound influence on ordinary spoken Balinese as well as on literary forms. Most Balinese who are unschooled and illiterate in classical scripts refer to any combination of Old Balinese, Sanskrit and Old Javanese languages (often intermixed with modern Balinese) as 'Kawi', although philologists usually identify Kawi with Old Javanese. For Balinese, Kawi is not just an archaic language but is the vehicle by which sacred and powerful knowledge is imparted.

From the fourteenth century onwards, with first the expansion and then the decline of Majapahit (see above p.), members of Javanese courts began to settle and have an increasing influence

on Bali. Part of this influence must have been the assimilation of spoken Javanese into the Balinese vernacular, and the elaboration of the latter into different 'levels' or 'registers' according to status and intimacy factors, the language which we find in Bali today. Refined language forms, influenced by the Javanese presence, must have developed among those in spatial or social proximity to the courts, whilst a more undifferentiated form of Balinese predominated in areas outside that sphere of influence. At least, so we can conjecture by looking at patterns of language use in the 20th century.

There is a tendency for Western commentators to over-rigidify the conceptualization of levels in Balinese language. Balinese themselves refer to their language as having a 'high' or 'refined' form (*basa alus*) and a 'low', 'coarse' or 'ordinary' form (*basa kasar* or *basa biasa*). Some Balinese and some linguists further subdivide the language into a 'middle' form and into several subdivisions of the refined form. In fact, there are only about 600 - 1,000 words which vary (i.e. exist in two or more forms) according to the level of language used.¹⁰ But as these words are among the most common, they can make a considerable difference to the sound of any utterance. However, it is important to stress that the attribution of levels to Balinese language is of limited usefulness as an analytical tool, because any utterance may contain a mixture of high and low words, depending on various characteristics of the speaker, the person spoken to, and the subject spoken about. In general, those of low social rank speak high to and about those of high social rank, whilst the latter speak low to and about those beneath them. But whereas, formerly, inherited title in the traditional status or 'caste' system was one of the main indicators of social rank, these days the situation is complicated by crosscutting factors such as wealth and modern occupational status. Variables related to social distance of the speakers, such as age and sex, also affect the choice of language, as does the setting in which the interaction takes place.

In former times, if a low-ranking person spoke in a low Balinese form to one of high caste, the punishment was exile or even death. Even today (as some reports in the provincial newspaper reveal) such cases can be taken to a court of law, and the offender fined. But generally, especially in those areas of Bali where the traditional elite is still highly esteemed and enjoys some local power, such an infringement is unthinkable. It is not just a breach of manners but an offense against the moral order.

Many Balinese, especially those who never had any close ties with the traditional elite, are not eloquent or even fluent in high Balinese forms. The language of familiars is low Balinese, with minor modifications to take into account distinctions of age, wealth and sex. Most Balinese are able to sufficiently elevate their speech to accommodate interactions with strangers and those of slightly higher status. When, in the villages, two strangers meet, if they are to carry on an extensive conversation the one initiating the interaction

¹⁰ For a more detailed sociolinguistic analysis of Balinese language, see Zur-buchen 1981:....

must ask the other: *Tiang nunasang antuk linggih?* ('May I ask your "seat"?' - rank or 'caste') so that appropriate language may be used.

Modern life, with its increased social and geographic mobility and intermixing with other ethnic groups, has brought with it problems of status ambiguity and incongruity which are as difficult to resolve linguistically as they are any other way. Some of low birth have risen in the ranks of the bureaucracy, or have attained wealth which outshines that of their titled neighbors; marriage has occurred between groups where formerly it was proscribed. For many who have received even an elementary education, the use of the more egalitarian national language, Bahasa Indonesia, provides a way around difficult status impasses. The public selection of a lexicon with which to address another person, or speak about a third, is one of the most potent indications of one's perceptions of the social status of self and other. Today mistakes, the social effects of which are difficult to remedy, can be avoided to a large extent by the use of Indonesian, or by a mixture of Indonesian and some high Balinese key words.

The use of stratified speech extends into interactions with the supernatural world. Deities and spirits with whom humans converse during séances are generally of higher status

than humans and must be addressed accordingly. Deities are addressed in a very high form, otherwise reserved only for the highest-ranking humans. This usage reinforces the social distance between deities and humans, which is much greater than the distance between spirits and the humans with whom they once resided. Purified ancestral spirits

who are long dead are addressed in high language, but not as high as that used with deities. The closest approximation to familiar everyday speech in this intercourse with the supernatural is the communication with spirits of recently-dead relatives. As well as being of the lowest spiritual status (if, as is usually the case, they have not yet been cremated), the emotional bond with such beings is strongest, creating a pressure to speak intimately such that formal speech is an artificial constraint. Recently-dead spirits are often addressed almost as they would have been in life by their emotionally distraught relatives at the séance.

Angry and imperious deities speak extremely low to their petitioners. Spirits address their relatives in the colloquial low Balinese they would have used when alive but often with a greater accentuation of anger (at petitioners' neglect of rituals) or grief (at parting from the petitioners), thus enhancing the emotional pitch of the whole interaction.

The linguistic interaction of the trance séance is a complex one, bringing into play many different levels and moods of speech. During a typical séance, language level and mood

shift many times. As soon as the possessing agent leaves the medium, language forms are abruptly realigned with no apparent effort on the part of the participants. The medium, when not possessed, is addressed politely as a stranger of moderately high status.

The level of language in which she is addressed depends on the rank of the petitioners as well as her own. There are also many non-verbal indicators of status which accompany language behavior. In the case of séances, the medium generally sits higher than her clients, both when possessed and when chatting to them conversationally. Relative head height is an important index of social status in Balinese culture, in this case reflecting both the medium's status as a consecrated practitioner, and the status of the deities and spirits who possess her.

Brief summary of the language used in the film. During the interaction on film the clients speak fairly high Balinese to Jero. She speaks less high, but still politely, to the clients, as she is a consecrated person and they are of commoner rank. Were they of higher rank than Jero (i.e. with a gentry title), she would address them in high Balinese, and they would probably speak politely but less high to her (if they considered that their title prevailed over her consecrated status). The petitioners speak very high Balinese throughout the first trance when Jero is possessed by a houseyard deity. However, they are not very fluent in the flowery phrases of this language and the level of language occasionally drops a little. The deity speaks extremely low and imperiously to them. The petitioners speak a lower, but still polite, form of Balinese to the spirit of the father in the second trance. The spirit speaks low to them in return but it is a more colloquial, familiar form of Balinese than the deity speaks. To the spirit of their recently-dead son, the petitioners speak more intimately as they are carried away by their emotions, even to the point where they forget to address him by the title befitting a spirit (*Jero*) and instead call him by the birth-order name by which he was known in life (*Nengah*).

The mantras used by Jero. Preceding the séance, Jero recites several mantras. She repeats a part of the longest one before going into each succeeding trance of the séance. These mantras are a mixture of High Balinese, Old Javanese and Sanskrit which Jero refers to as Kawi. As she is illiterate in the classical written language, it was not possible for her to obtain the mantra by consulting traditional palm-leaf (*lontar*) manuscripts, where such information is recorded. The sacred phrases were given to her by a ritual expert (*kelian adat*) in her hamlet, who is literate and in possession of several *lontars*. She then learnt the mantras by rote. The form and sequence of the words are in themselves powerful and Jero does not make variations. The recitation, after 20 years, is extremely stereotyped, with little variation in phrasing or pace (see editing notes for more information on this point). The only difference is a variation of several seconds in the point at which she becomes possessed at the beginning of the séance and an attenuation of the mantra in succeeding recitations.

The early mantras are used by Jero to purify herself, her shrine house and the offerings so they will all be fitting receptacles for the supernatural presence which is to descend. In these mantras she also requests her own spiritual forces within to come to her aid in conducting a successful séance (see Jero's own exegesis of these mantras

in the subtitles in *Jero on Jero*). The last and longest mantra is an invocation to the deities of the Balinese pantheon to preside over the séance, bless the participants, and imbue the speech with clarity so that it will be successful. The powers of Brahma, Wisnu and Siwa as primary deities of the pantheon, are invoked, but these manifestations are not conceived to enter the medium, nor are high manifestations such as Dewi Gangga (the goddess of the Ganges or Gangga and by association the deity of water) and Saraswati (the goddess of learning and thus of the spoken and written word). Most of the deities lend their powers in a generalized way without possessing the medium. It is a houseyard deity (Betara Guru) and the clients' ancestors who possess the medium. Jero also invokes the Taksu deity (Bagawan Taksu) an interpreter or intermediary force whose power enables her to speak and be understood whilst possessed.

Background and Editing Notes

(Patsy Asch)

In 1980, we -- Timothy Asch, Linda Connor and I, Patsy Asch -- returned to Bali with two goals: to explore the value of showing people film of themselves in order to generate new data and to fulfill a promise to show our footage to the people filmed. For these purposes, we transferred our footage to video cassettes and took a color monitor to Bali. In the village where we had filmed in 1978, we played our video cassettes in houseyards, temples and markets -- wherever groups wanted to watch. Approximately half the footage focuses on Jero Tapakan, the other half on the organization and performance of a collective cremation in Jero's hamlet.

Before showing any of the footage of Jero to others in her village, we wanted her to have an opportunity to see it alone and to censor any material she did not want shown. Since a private showing in Jero's home was socially unacceptable, we invited her to a neighboring town, where a Balinese friend made available a large room.

We thought it might be valuable to film some of Jero's reactions, particularly to *A Balinese Trance Séance*, as data for Linda's research. Tim hoped that footage of Jero's reactions to the trance séance could also be shown to colleagues and students and would challenge some of their interpretations. However, we had very limited footage and so we only loaded two 4001 rolls of film -- 22 minutes -- although we intended showing Jero 105 minutes of video tape: the trance film (30 minutes), all the footage of Jero telling of her life before she became a medium (45 minutes), and a roughly edited version of a film of Jero giving a massage (30 minutes). Our plan was to tape record all Jero's and Linda's comments and to film some segments if that seemed valuable. At least translations of the recording could be included in this [book]. As soon as the trance film began, we realized that Tim was right: Jero's animated reactions could form the basis of a short, companion film: *Jero on Jero: A Balinese Trance Séance Observed*.

We had an uninterrupted tape recording of Jero watching the trance film. I synchronized sound and film, putting in blank leader (spacing) wherever there was sound but no picture. Since the sound recorded while Jero watched the video tape was continuous, and since the film, by adding leader, was the same length, by using the eight plate Steenbeck editing table at the University of Sydney, we were able to look simultaneously at the trance film on one screen and Jero's reactions on the other, while listening to both or either sound track. Video tape expands and contracts so the two sequences were not perfectly synchronized: the sound from the video tape, heard below Jero's comments was not the same length as the original sound on the trance film. But, by using this background sound, I could synchronize any short segment fairly closely and we were able to tell exactly what was on the screen as Jero commented.

Jero's and Linda's comments as they watched the film were transcribed in Bali. Using this transcription and Linda's running translation, the three of us selected a rough version based primarily on the sound track. There were certain points we thought important for Western audiences: Jero's account of the experience of possession, some of the cosmological details, information about witchcraft, and something of the contrast between Jero's and Linda's viewing style -- the one interactive and naive, the other goal oriented but more passive. We hoped that in discussions following screenings of the trance film, issues problematic for Western audiences would emerge and then could be contrasted with the issues Jero felt compelled to address. For example, many Westerners have questioned the sincerity of Jero's practice and accused her of fraud, of consciously deceiving her clients. Jero doesn't defend herself against such charges, perhaps because it has never occurred to her that people would doubt her sincerity. What seems to worry Jero is that she will be accused of arrogance, that people will question her right, as an "ignorant commoner", to be a vehicle for the deities and spirits. Jero keeps addressing this point even when Linda seems to me to be expressing her impatience or dismissal of the issue.

Having settled on the dialogue that we wanted to include, I used shots from the original trance film in two ways: either as 'cut-aways' or fill-in images when we had no picture of Linda or Jero, or when an image from the original film enriched Jero's comments, for example, when she explains the meaning of specific gestures. In either case I used the image that was on the video screen when the particular comment you are hearing on the sound track was recorded (with the exception of the final, departure shot).

Introductory Stills

The introductory stills were added after the film was edited.

(1) Title still of Jero: this shot was recorded much later in the day when Jero was looking at the biography footage. Tim and I chose the shot without reference to the sound from the video tape, which

we could not understand. It was only when we were mixing the sound tracks that Linda heard it. She felt it inappropriate because Jero might be embarrassed: Jero was laughing about an incident when she had violent diarrhoea. Therefore, we mixed the track with the TV sound very low, increasing the volume only on Jero's comment.

(2) Jero's houseyard: this still was taken from a slide that Tim photographed from a tree in the street that runs along the eastern side of Jero's houseyard. The houseyard temple (*sanggeh*) is in the foreground. Most of the individual shrines are visible (see diagram, p.). Behind, in the center of the frame, is the back wall of Jero's shrine house, in which she sits during a *séance*.

(3) Filming: this still is from a slide I took while Jero and Linda were looking at the biography. Note, as in the first freeze, Jero and Linda have changed seats at Tim's request, in order to have Jero turned more toward the camera when talking to Linda.

(4) TV: the shots of the television screen were filmed in Australia because the images on the screen recorded in Bali were not clear. In each case we made sure by listening to the sound of the video tape in the background that it was the image Jero would have been seeing. The TV monitor and recorder are the ones actually used in Bali.

Translation of the Dialogue

Linda has prepared a running translation of the entire recording that we made while she and Jero watched the trance film. All the comments recorded while they were watching the film -- those from which [Jero on Jero](#) were drawn -- appear in column 3 of the next section: [Shot List and Commentary for A Balinese Trance Séance](#). Those recorded after the film was over appear in the following section: chapter 8

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