AUTOHYPNOSIS AND TRANCE DANCE IN BALI

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Abstract: A masterpiece of historical importance, this paper recounts Jay and Madeleine Haley’s trip to Bali nearly 50 years after Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead first went there. The Haleys met several of the same individuals who greeted Bateson and Mead and made a film they entitled “Dance and Trance of Balinese Children.” This is a fascinating document of a culture and society so different from our own and the technique of dance and trance used to regulate emotion and violence.

This paper includes selections from film transcripts and interviews on autohypnosis. In 1995, Jay Haley and Madeleine Richeport-Haley made a 45-minute film called “Dance and Trance of Balinese Children.” The film combines new footage with that taken by Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead 50 years previously and records how children, who are sacred to the Balinese, go into a trance during ceremonial dances. The film shows both ceremonial dances and children dancing spontaneously in the streets. Learning trance through dance is passed on from generation to generation, and children begin dancing at a very young age. Following are selected excerpts from the film, narrated by Jay Haley.

—Madeleine Richeport-Haley

In Bali, they have been dancing for a thousand years. From generation to generation, they preserve their way of life by passing down their dancing skills. The Balinese have been invaded by modern civilization in the form of three million tourists who visit each year. While many cultures have been changed by tourism, the Balinese maintained the integrity of their art and culture despite the commercial invasion. They have little crime or juvenile delinquency. The unique nature of Bali is maintained by the gods and also by the children. The gods are appreciated in many temples. The culture is maintained through the dance. It is
dependent upon the enthusiasm of the children and the teachers who
guide them. Dancing such Hindu epics as the Ramayana transmits the
value of their culture. At an early age, the parents introduce children to
dance movements. Dance is so popular, it is routinely taught in the pub-
lic schools. Like other Balinese activities, dance emphasizes the values
of group collaboration, not individuality.

[Film footage includes an interview with Ngurah Supartha, a master dancer
who established dance schools in Bali and whose two daughters and two sons
began dancing before they were 5 years old, as he did.]
The schools Supartha established in Bali continue to teach children.
There is a rigorous discipline to the dance, but the children find it fun, as
do the teachers in private schools, who are not paid. Often the children
dance every day after school, as well as in class. Although the children
in Bali enjoy learning to dance, it is not done only for recreation. Many
dances are sacred and are performed in the temples. The children also
dance for many tourists who visit Bali. Each dance is an offering to
the gods in this religion, which is a mixture of Hindu and animistic
beliefs. The children learn they are part of a long tradition, since each
child is considered the reincarnation of the great grandparents. To find
out which great grandparent influences a child, sometimes the family
goes to a local spirit medium who becomes possessed by the grandpar-
ent’s spirit. A child who is a gifted dancer can have inherited that from
a great grandparent. These spirits also lead to “taksu,” or to dancing
with divine inspiration. This can mean going into trance as they dance.
The gods come down from the sacred mountains and possess people,
joining with pleasure in the ceremony. People expect the gods to enjoy
themselves because they are thought of as being playful, like children.
Many children never get formal training in the dance, but they dance
in temple ceremonies all their lives. There are more than 300,000 tem-
ple in Bali, if one includes the family temples, and there are constant
festivals all year around. Most of them involve dancing.
The villagers make offerings to the gods in many forms, including
the dance. The children live in an atmosphere where offerings are care-
fully created and carried to the temples. When the gods have accepted
the essence of the offerings, the Balinese being a practical people, take
the offerings back home and dine upon them. The priests dispense holy
water. Children also do so. Because they are more vulnerable to posses-
sion by the gods, children are treated as sacred. Traditionally, children
were taught individually, but today they are taught in groups. Like any
art form, Balinese dance is simple in its primary movements.

Balinese dance movements reflect movements and values in every-
day life. Right and left hands move in opposition providing balance,
never moving in the same way. Harmony is strived for in every
action by always balancing good and evil. In the Balinese dance, the
movement of males and females is pleasantly different.
What characterizes Balinese dance is the movement of the eyes. Children must learn to open them wide and look up to the side, then rapidly back to center, with chin pressed outward. The eye movement may encourage trance. Showing the teeth in dance indicates aggression. Only villains part their lips and show their teeth. Others do not, even when angry. One of the lifecycle ceremonies is to file down the canine teeth at puberty. This symbolically eradicates the animal nature of both women and men and ensures that adults are able to control their emotions. As in the dance they learn the control of every muscle and emotion. There is almost no dancing without music, which is also an offering to the gods. The musical ensemble, called Gamelan, is pentatonic or five-tone scale. It is made up of xylophones, gongs, drums, cymbals, flutes, and many different instruments. The instruments are said to have spiritual powers. They don’t use written music. They memorize through imitation and repetition. The drum is an important instrument. It signals the movement of the dancers and is the cue for exits and entrances, as well as leads the other musicians.

One of the most impressive orchestras is the “Jegog” in Western Bali, with its sacred carvings and instruments that are 10-foot bamboo poles, large enough to sit upon and be played. There is also a single flute. The religion of the Balinese is Hindu. Their major gods are the Hindu trinity: Brahma, the creator; Vishnu, the caretaker; and Siwa, the destroyer. There are many lesser gods, as well as ancestors and demons. The children learn to appreciate a supernatural figure in Bali, the Barong. Resembling a Chinese dragon, this creature protects the village from all evil. Another supernatural figure is the powerful Rangda, the Witch. She represents evil and must be guarded against. Observers watching Barong and Rangda often go into trance. Trance is a part of all ceremonies in Bali. The Barong represents good, and the witch represents evil. In life and in ceremonies, the Balinese attempt to balance these forces rather than try to get rid of evil.

A major trance dance is the Kris dance. When possessed by the gods, men attack themselves with the sharp daggers, yet they are not hurt. Children observe these ceremonies at an early age. The Kris experience is part of an old tradition. It was filmed a half century ago by Mead and Bateson.

[In the film, Margaret Mead points out that “No one gets hurt. If anyone is hurt, the people say the trance is not real.”]

The Krises are taken away, and the dancers are awakened and cleansed with holy water. After trance, the priests return to normal. When asked about the experience, they say they feel tired but very well. Sometimes they don’t remember what happened. Supartha danced with the barong mask, holding it up himself. It weighs over 75 pounds. He didn’t believe he was in a trance because he remembers everything that happened. A few days later he felt the pain. He says he must have
been in a trance during the dance if he’s so strong [to dance for more than one hour holding the heavy mask]. Today, the Kris dances in the Barong plays are performed daily for the entertainment of thousands of tourists. The dancers must produce a trance on schedule, or act one, which is different from the experience in the temple. Trance is common throughout Balinese dance. It is a spontaneous occurrence. Trance is also deliberately induced in specially chosen children who are trained for a special ceremony. Their trance indicates possession by the gods. The young girls go into a trance holding onto shaking puppet sticks.

An authority on this trance dance is Dr. Bandem, president of the University of Arts in Bali. He says the girls practice for six months before the actual ceremony. These children are transformed by the trance into virgin nymphs, semi-gods in Hindu mythology. This practice, filmed by Mead and Bateson years ago, is still common today. Their assistant and translator was Made Kaler, who recalls their careful work when studying the trance dance at that time. [See below for excerpts from an interview Jay Haley conducted with Made Kaler.]

Balinese trance was examined by the world’s authority on hypnosis, Dr. Milton H. Erickson.

[Voice of Milton H. Erickson, MD]

Margaret Mead brought back films of Balinese dances and she had her notes and the task was to watch the film and identify who is in a trance and who he was not in the trance. Who was going into a trance and who was coming out. For example, those two girls are dancing and, while one is awake, the other is in a trance. Now the one is awake and then the other has gone into trance. The tremendous economy of movement that the Balinese show, tremendous economy, and the hypnotic subject always shows a tremendous economy of movement.

[Jay Haley continues the narration.]

Dr. Erickson clarified the similarities between ritual and hypnotic trances. These include a state of absorption, moving limbs as a unit, a rigidity of movements, and a minimum use of energy. There is increased muscular tonus. Convulsive movements express the fantasies of the action. There may be amnesia. These children show feats of balance as they dance in unison for hours. They are carried around the village on men’s shoulders to ward off evil spirits. The girls are awakened with incense and holy water. Their song says, “Smoke of the mountains, sweet smelling smoke, trembling on the spot, when pressed down, the perfume rises.” These dances evolved into the very popular Legong dance, where prepubescent girls dance together in unison.

Supartha’s father, a dancer, recognized his talent early and arranged for him to be taught as a child by the better teachers, including the great dancer I Ketut Maria known as “Mario.” Supartha is not only a musician, dancer and choreographer, but he was head of the Arts Center in Bali and well known as the teacher of dance. Having won many
awards, he has played more than 75 roles, and he has created more than 400 musical and dance compositions. Supartha was born into a Balinese family that can be traced back for hundreds of years. He was raised in a family of artists in a Royal Court in central Bali. He played in this palace as a young child. The family has occupied this palace since the sixteenth century. He has several mothers and many brothers and sisters since his father had four wives. The family sponsors many of the temple ceremonies.

One of Supartha’s sons recalls in the film that “My father told me he stayed up all night at the temple ceremonies moving his body. In one day there would be as many as six ceremonies. When he heard the music from his house, he ran to the temple. He tried to keep his body from moving, but he could not. He danced as long as people did not see him. He tried to imitate the movements.

Dance, like life in Bali, maintains the traditional forms while changing. The children of Bali learn through the dance the essence of being Balinese. The goal is for harmony between people, between people and nature, and between people and the supernatural world.

Jay Haley and Madeleine Richeport-Haley made and narrated another film in Bali in 2002. The half-hour video, “Family Therapy in Bali,” presents a series of cases seen by Balinese healers and examines the similarities between Balinese trance healing methods, the hypnotic techniques of Milton Erickson, and the strategic family therapy approach of Jay Haley. Following is an abridged excerpt of the film’s narration.

Balinese claim that they communicate with ancestors and receive their wisdom and protection. The unique nature of Bali is maintained by the gods. The gods are appreciated in many temples. There are more than 300,000 temples in Bali if one includes the family temples, and there are constant festivals all year around. The villagers make offerings to the gods in many forms, including the dance. The family is so important in Bali.

The Balinese household consists of several buildings surrounded by a wall. These are for sleeping, cooking, rice storage, and temple shrines. Each pavilion has a strict spatial orientation, facing the mountain or facing the sea. Male children continue to live in the compound while girls move in with their in-laws when they marry.

In the closed living conditions, handling relatives and obligations can cause tensions. Explanations of witchcraft are often given. A healer will usually blame an ancestor, not the relative who lives next door and finds ways in which the ancestor insists on relatives not sharing a kitchen or something similar, which increases tensions among female relatives. They never name the guilty party causing the problem, because social contact with that person would be too difficult. The family reaffirms itself through ceremonies, which take place daily.
A case that we followed [was that] of the 15-year-old farm laborer brought to a Balian because he was suffering from seizures for which physicians had found no physical cause. The Balian suggested that the boy, Neomon, and his family member live with the Balian’s family so that he could observe the seizures. The family talked with the Balian, who learned that Neomon’s father had died and Neomon remained in the household of his father while his mother remarried and moved to the compound of her new husband’s family, which is customary. The Balian performed many rituals with the boy and family. He also referred them to a medium with whom he collaborated on cases. He wished to find out the cause of the problem. Possessed by the spirit of Neomon’s dead grandfather, the medium’s diagnosis was that the family had not performed the correct house ceremony after the father died. Therefore, the family had to make extensive preparations that required the entire family to attend, including Neomon’s mother. Relatives have a dialogue about the problems, and when the mediums are skillful the issues are resolved by exploring them and coming to agreement.

Jay Haley interpreted this case in the same way he interprets many problems. Through bringing the family together, the problem could be resolved and the elaborate rituals could lead to interpersonal solutions. By moving in with the Balian, the organization of the family was changed, the son was no longer stigmatized and blamed for the problem as it became a family issue that could be resolved in the proper ceremony. According to Haley, what seems strange from individual dynamics, such as the cause being black magic, does not seem strange when seeing the interpersonal functions. The whole family resolved the stepfather issues. Similarly, in Western family therapy the whole family might be brought together to resolve the stepfather issues.

In this family, two daughters were treated at the same time. The healer knows the cause is supernatural because the client produces tears. The girl’s problem was diagnosed as an unhappy grandfather who was reincarnated in the girl, causing her low blood pressure and sadness. The family participated in all aspects of the preparations and performance of the rituals.

Families prepare hundreds of offerings, or bantem, which are combinations of food, cash, flowers, and rice.

The cure required the collaboration of a priest to perform the proper ceremony. Jay Haley spent time questioning this healer about many aspects of his work, including family violence. To resolve marital conflict, the Balian gives an amulet to the husband to make him more amorous. One of the ways this Balian deals with aggression is by filing down the canine teeth at puberty. This is an important lifecycle ceremony celebrated by the whole family. This eradicates the animal nature of both women and men to assure that the adults are able to control their emotions. The major symptoms of madness that is symbolically controlled is aggression.
[Jay Haley speaks.]

I was on the Gregory Bateson research project from 1952 to the 1962. It was housed at the VA Hospital in Menlo Park, California, where we concentrated on madness and therapy. Bateson is often referred to as one of the fathers of family therapy. We went to Bali to observe the natural healing context of problems such as madness and how the Balinese family deals with them in their culture. There are thousands of Balians or healers of different kinds. These Balians are specialists in reading the ancient Sanskrit texts on the palm leaves, which contain Balinese beliefs and practices.

Balians dispense advice, medicines, trance, and instructions for offerings. Balians usually see clients in their own family compound. Clients are also accompanied by family members when they visit the Balian. The Balian prepares sacred objects on the shrine, which include daily offerings of coconut rice and incense. This client is accompanied by her daughter. The Balian puts a Kris, or small sword, in water to diagnose the problem. He explains that it is caused by black magic.

Clients may enter a trance. Balians always prescribe medicine or a ritual to clients.

In this case, a girl had been treated by the healer for going crazy and had recovered. She now accompanied her friend for the therapy. The friend was suffering from headaches and wanted to be beautiful. The Balian uses his incense for purification. The healer puts a Kris in the water to diagnose her problems. He explained it was black magic and put ginger root in her nose to expel tears. Tears indicate supernatural causation. She is expelling something as if she were expelling her problem.

In response to my question, the Balian said that he refers clients to the hospital in Bangli when the cause is not black magic. There is one mental hospital in Bali. When we visited, it had only 35 beds. One of the few reasons to hospitalize a person is for aggressive behavior. It is interesting to note, however, that, although the Balinese are an amiable people, they have a tradition that occasionally a citizen would run amok and kill people without being aware. This would continue until the citizen was killed. Nothing seemed to stop this out-of-control suicidal behavior. Then someone proposed that the out-of-control person not be killed but be arrested and imprisoned without being killed. This discouraged people from suicidal running amok to apparently avoid prison. In the United States, such people would be considered insane when they have no awareness of having killed. In Bali, running amok was not excused by accusations of insanity.

This healer’s own problems originally were interpreted as divine or blessed madness caused by the gods. He disappeared and wandered for six years and isolated himself in the mountains. Rather than giving him a debilitating diagnosis, this behavior may precede initiation as a
healer, a valued person in Balinese society. Then he claims to have been buried for more than one month. When his body was uncovered, he was a Balian able to heal others. Hearing voices he began to try out sacred objects. He told us he now sees between 60 and 300 people a day for a few minutes each.

The theory most relevant to family therapy is systems theory. This was introduced in the 1940s. The idea for therapy is that motivation is outside the person. What a person does is caused by what another person does. One’s thoughts and feelings are said to be in the hands of other people. This was a special interest of Gregory Bateson, and he explored human relations from that view in his research project.

When Bateson studied Bali with Margaret Mead in the 1930s, partly supported by a grant to study dementia praecox, they hypothesized that Balinese character was based on a particular sequence. The mother stimulated the child, and, when it responded, she would ignore it. This idea was remarkably similar to the hypothesis Bateson proposed in the 1950s on his communication project. He suggested that schizophrenia was caused by a double bind, which occurs when parents communicate conflicting levels of message to the child, such as the parents encouraging the child to respond and then objecting when he does. This was one of the few family hypotheses, and it was clearly a way of thinking that Bateson had experienced for decades from Naven to Bali to Menlo Park.

They (Mead and Bateson) produced unrivaled visual materials—22,000 feet of 16 mm film, 25,000 photographs, and seven finished films—which to this day have not been surpassed in anthropology. We returned to the village where Bateson and Mead lived, Bayunggedé, to talk with some of the elders who knew them. It was difficult to imagine them spending three years to see the full cycle of ceremonies. We learned that many of the people they studied in the 1930s, now elders, remained in the family compounds, making institutional care unnecessary. In this village as in others we visited, many of the lifecycle rituals from birth to death were changed little, providing a sense of security, independence, and community collaboration.

[See below for excerpts from an interview Jay and Madeleine Richeport-Haley conducted at the time with Made Kaler.]

Bateson sent John Weakland and myself to Arizona to discuss the relationship between trance and schizophrenia with the master hypnotist, Milton Erickson. Erickson was already familiar with Bateson and with Mead’s and Bateson’s Balinese material. In our conversations with Erickson, he outlined the differences between the hypnotic subject and the schizophrenic patient. They have similar behaviors with different significance. The experience of the hypnotic subject is comfortable and for a legitimate purpose, while the subjective experience for the schizophrenic is not comfortable and is not part of himself. While the
hypnotic subject has some control over behavior, the schizophrenic is out of control. For the hypnotic subject, the experience is not permanent and limited to now, while the schizophrenic experiences indefinite continuation. The hypnotic subject loses contact with certain realities, while the schizophrenic is often exceedingly aware, even in a stuporous state. The schizophrenic cannot limit attention to just one thing. The catalepsy of the hypnotic subject responds to the hypnotist. The cataleptic stupor of the schizophrenic responds to anyone. Rapport is not necessary. Movement for the hypnotic subject shows responsiveness to understanding, while the schizophrenic’s waxy flexibility responds to being moved. Both are literal.

Milton Erickson once told me that the major differences between the two, meaning the schizophrenic and hypnotic subject, are illustrated by a patient walking up and down kicking himself. The schizophrenic really kicks himself; the hypnotic subject kicks himself in a less effective way. He can help himself while the schizophrenic cannot. I feel that the schizophrenic can help himself as much as the average citizen. It may sound irrational, but it is a metaphor for something rational.

Mead brought the material to Erickson for analysis on trance, which began a long friendship. Erickson discussed the Balinese trances with Haley and Weakland as analogous to hypnotic trances. These children are transformed by the trance into virgin nymphs, semi-gods in Hindu mythology. They were influenced by this naturalistic non-pathological orientation to trance. Ritual trances in public ceremonies are valued and provide the opportunity to learn the control and skills of ritual possession trance. In the trance-dancing ceremonies, these individuals express behaviors that would be seen as mad outside this context. One learns the movements from a very early age and had a change from spirit possession to the controlled and voluntary possession trance, which is limited in both time and space.

A major trance dance is the Kris dance. When possessed by the gods, men attack themselves with the sharp daggers, yet they are not hurt. Children observe these ceremonies at an early age. The Kris experience is part of an old tradition. There are other explanations for madness, which may be handled in this ceremony. They include the bewitchment introduction of small creatures into the body, divine curses, and inherited factors. One of the defining symptoms of madness is aggression, which is so unusual in this culture outside the ritual context. Balians will tell someone with the problem to join a Barong group and dance. Many people with the illness are told to dance in the ceremony. Balians go to ceremonies to protect others against black magic. Rituals of exorcism and purification are performed. Entire families attend these ceremonies together. Jay is questioning about amnesia. They say they feel tired but very well. Sometimes they do not remember what happened. Like Erickson, Haley believes hypnotic and ritual trances are the
same phenomena. He sees trance having the same sequence, a request for voluntary responses and then a request for involuntary ones. This is a paradox, to direct someone to behave involuntarily. In the Balinese trances, a leader makes requests for specific dances and then requests that they be possessed by the gods as they dance, an involuntary response as it is not them dancing, but the gods.

In summary, these are the similarities between strategic family therapy and Balinese therapy. Whether in public or private sessions, the family is brought together. Tasks or rituals are given. Balians and therapists are trained, they have specialties, they collaborate, and they refer to one another and to physicians. They give explanations for problems that are outside the individual. In strategic family therapy, it is in the social context, and, in Balinese therapy, the explanations are in other-worldly spheres. And also there is the optimism that the client is curable.

M. Kaler (MK) was 19 when he began working as assistant to Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead from 1935 to 1937. This excerpt from a 1991 interview by Jay Haley (JH) and Madeleine Richeport-Haley (MRH) took place in Made Kaler’s home in Denpasar, Bali, when he was in his 80s.

JH: How did you happen to meet the Batesons?
MK: I went to Jakarta to the museum to get a job. Gregory Bateson went to the museum. He was asking Vander Holk to help him because the only language he understood was English. I spoke Dutch.

JH: What did he want you to do?
MK: To help him with the language.
JH: Where are you from?
MK: From Singaraja, North Bali. I was in Jakarta for one year, in 1934.
MRH: A long time ago, almost sixty years.
JH: You have a good memory. So, they got married and came to Bali with you. They chose that village Bayunggede for some reason?
MK: It was the suggestion of Walter Spies, who had been in Bali for many, many years, not from me. They met in Ubud. As anthropologists, they liked to be among the purely Balinese people. I don’t belong to pure Balinese. My ancestors came from Java.
JH: Did the villagers think they were strange coming in with cameras and all?
MK: Yes. Not only cameras but rifles. They came from Samoa and they thought it was the same in Bali. The first time they came to Bali, Bateson was carrying rifles.
JH: I’ll be darned. Did they get used to them living there?
MK: Today in Bayunggede, there is a high school and many more people speaking English today. I very seldom come across English-speaking people.
JH: Did you advise them what to take pictures of and what was important in the village? How did they know what ceremonies were important?
MK: They stayed in Bayunggede for at least one year. In that year, everything that will happen will begin again.
JH: A full cycle.
MK: After that we moved to Batuan and after that to Bangli.
JH: So you moved with them? You are a connection to that very important enterprise.
MK: I couldn’t get them all the answers.
JH: Were you married at the time you worked with the Batesons?
MK: I married two months after they went to the U.S.
MRH: Did you accompany them in their work in the mental hospital in Bangli?
MK: It wasn’t there then.
MRH: We went to visit the hospital.
MK: My daughter is a psychiatrist. Sometimes she goes to Bangli. She works here in Denpasar, Dr. Hannati.
MRH: Has she looked at books of Mead and Bateson?
MK: Some of those books are still with my daughter, “Balinese Character.”
MRH: Jay Haley works with schizophrenic patients and he has been interested in how Balians (healers) treat patients, so we have been visiting Balian, too.
JH: Were the Batesons liked by the villagers or were they afraid of them?
MK: All the villagers liked them. They were nice people, almost like a doctor when someone is sick they came to our place to get some medicine. They helped the villagers.
JH: Did the villagers think of Margaret Mead as a Balian?
MK: Oh, no.
MRH: They didn’t think of her as a Rangda, a witch?
MK: Sometimes the color of the hair was the same color hair as the witch.
JH: Did Mead and Bateson influence what you did later on in your own life?
MK: Maybe. They always tried to help me. When they went back to the U.S. they got a job for me. I liked them very much. Every time they came to Bali, they always came to visit me.
MRH: Do you think the trance dancing today is different from the 1930s? Has the trance dancing become less today than it used to be?
MK: I don’t think so. The trance dancing is still going on. I don’t think it’s less than a long time ago.
JH: Would Bateson and Mead arrange to have a ceremony in the daytime to have light for the cameras?
MK: They couldn’t arrange it. No. It could happen day or night. That’s impossible.
JH: That’s a reason for waiting a whole year to wait for each ceremony.
MK: Sometimes at night, sometimes the whole night. We went to a village close to Bayunggede and stayed there sometimes the whole night.
JH: Bateson once told me he kept one camera on his knees and one in his hands while Margaret pointed to the picture.
MK: Bateson was the camera man and Margaret Mead was taking the notes—with me. Margaret Mead was making notes in English and I was making notes in Balinese at the same time and then we compared notes.
JH: You must have been very accurate. They were very concerned about getting things right.
MK: Margaret Mead would ask me, “What’s that about?” I also didn’t know, but I would ask the villagers, the older people. Sometimes we would get wrong information. Older people also didn’t know exactly what it was about.

JH: Did Mead and Bateson learn enough Balinese to ask villagers questions themselves?

MK: They also asked them but not so very fluently.

In 1989, Madeleine Richeport-Haley (MRH) interviewed Milton Erickson’s wife, Elizabeth Erickson (EE), an excellent hypnotic subject, about autohypnosis and her own experiences with Margaret Mead’s films of Bali trance dancers. The following is a selected excerpt.

MRH: When did you meet Margaret Mead?

EE: Our acquaintance with Margaret Mead went way back to Eloise [Michigan]. She and Dr. Bateson did work on Balinese trance. She found out that Dr. Milton H. Erickson was an authority on hypnosis so she asked him if she could come to see him and show him her trance films and have his professional input. He had me view some of those films in a hypnotic state.¹ I did not have hypnotic amnesia for a lot of that. I remember the pictures. I remember telling her that one of the subjects hadn’t awakened yet.

MRH: Why did Milton put you in a trance to review the films?

EE: He just thought that a subject in a hypnotic trance would have interesting observations about other subjects in hypnotic states, and especially when it was a different sort of trance state really. And I guess that was true. Down through the years, we had a lot of conferences with Margaret. She and Milton always enjoyed the exchange of ideas, and we regarded her as part of our family.

MRH: Describe the steps you go through in an autohypnotic trance?

EE: What I really do is to get in a relaxed position. You don’t make a definite effort. You just kind of let it happen. What I like to do is run through the various sensory fields and just note how they alter as you go more and more into a hypnotic state. What I would note—I can’t even remember how I did it—I’d start with a visual state and usually just get interested in some minor detail, sometimes a light reflection, and progress through the auditory feeling and how they had seemed to be dying out. When you turned your attention, you’d become aware again and they would be more and more meaningless. Then I’d go through kinesthetic sensations of my arms and legs and realize that I had not been aware of them until I turned my attention to them again. I would find that I would have to think about where is my right foot, and then I could figure out exactly where it was, but there wouldn’t be the instant recognition. I think there’s an actual visual change the eye goes through when

you go into a deep trance, that your vision can be centered by eye muscles on some visual point and you get a shift toward the bluer end of the spectrum. And you sometimes, especially in the interior but you can in the outdoors too, get a feeling that there’s a sort of back lighting between things. There has been some research done on it. I am convinced that this is an actual phenomenon of the eye itself, that it is not a psychological thing but it is a physiological change in the eye. I found that exceedingly interesting and would spend a lot of time looking at visual changes. I found when I would go into hypnotic trance I could see invisible glass and in the ordinary waking state I couldn’t. I stood there quite a while asking myself what do I see that makes me see glass there aside from an occasional dust speck on it? I think because the eye becomes more sensitive to light reflection. I am interested in this because I was always interested in sensory processes in psychology.
Autohipnosis y trance de baile en Bali

Jay Haley y Madeleine Richeport-Haley

Resumen: Una obra maestra de importancia histórica, este artículo recuenta el viaje a Bali de Jay y Madeleine Haley casi 50 años después de que Gregory Bateson y Margaret Mead fueran por primera vez. Los Haley conocieron a muchos de los mismos individuos que recibieron a Bateson y Mead e hicieron un video que titularon “Baile y Trance de Niños Balineses.” Este es un documento fascinante sobre una sociedad y cultura muy distintas de la nuestra y la técnica de la danza y el trance utilizada para regular emoción y violencia.

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