25. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 180–1.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
28. Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
29. Welch, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
30. Fung Yu-Lan, *op. cit.*, p. 183.
31. Welch, *op. cit.*, pp. 23–24.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21 and pp. 33–34.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 44.
34. cf. *Ibid.*, p. 79 in chapter 27 of Waley's translation of Lao Tzu.
35. Fung Yu-Lan, *op. cit.*, p. 229.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
37. cf. Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
38. Welch, *op. cit.*, pp. 66–68.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
40. Fung Yu-Lan, *op. cit.*, p. 228.
41. Welch, *op. cit.*, pp. 26–27.
42. cf. Waley, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
43. Welch, *op. cit.*, p. 46.
44. I am assuming sufficient familiarity with Tillich to make elaborate text references unnecessary. The reader who desires this, or discussion of these claims about Tillich, is referred to my several recent articles on Tillich's concept of being-itself. The most directly relevant to the theory of Ideas is "Tillich and Plato", *Sophia,* Vol. XV, No. 3 (October, 1976), 26–29.
45. In case what is meant by "technical" is not clear, in what I have called the technical sense, the meaning of ". . . exists" is arbitrarily restricted to connoting the properties of being a finite, concrete spatio-temporal object. That connotation is not part of the meaning of ". . . exists."

Translations

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CONFIGURATIONS OF JAVANESE POSSESSION EXPERIENCE

Paul D. Stange

INTRODUCTION

The cases of trance, possession, and psychosis outlined here will remain no more than stark sketches of the experiences referred to. Description has been compressed so that only muted suggestion touches the powerful emotive substance within them; only brief comments acknowledge dimensions which ought to resonate throughout each case. Within the limits of this essay I can neither hope for the poetic description which might make the cases palpable nor pretend to comprehensive analysis. Instead my aim is simply to elicit suggestions which may strike chords for others engaged in exploring the interplay between experience, conception, and society. My preoccupation lies in that dialectic rather than with dense ethnographic description.

Despite substantial variation in both context and interpretation, all three cases involved possession — at least inasmuch as most Javanese observers viewed events in those terms. The most common Javanese terms are *kesurupan,* literally "to forget", and *ndadi,* which means not only to "trance" but also simply to "become" or to "happen". None of the instances I am dealing with lent themselves to the relatively straight-forward resolution traditional ritual and shamanic procedures have provided. In each case the ineffectiveness of established therapeutic techniques can be linked to conceptual ambiguity, to the presence of several rather than dominance of one cultural framework. The cases also illustrate the Javanese maxim that "insanity is mysticism without *ngelmu"* (science or discipline). Those possessed revealed special insights into rather than lack of consciousness of ordinary reality. The experiences cannot be characterized by terms like "delusion" and "hallucination" so much as by disjunctive interactions with social reality. The problems were generated by the difficulty of communicating profound insights to an audience unwilling or incapable of acknowledging them.

The first case is one of ritual possession in a village context within which everyone shared a relatively clear and homogeneous set of assumptions: that the ritual functioned to propitiate potentially dangerous spirits which might otherwise disrupt communal harmony. Excepting a few Islamic elements, the cultural framework was that of Javanism *(kejawen),* the ageless peasant animism which is rooted in cults of the guardian and ancestral spirits. The second case is more complex. It lies imbedded within the persistent tension between Javanist and Islamic forces. Paradoxically, the ostensible agents of Islamic purism acted in Javanist terms; those apparently representing Javanism adhered to quintessential Islamic practice. In the final case, two Westerners echoed an earlier experience which had been termed psychosis, but not within an Indic-Javanese framework of spiritual quest.

Before introducing the essential features of Javanese spirit belief which

underlie all three cases, I feel compelled to underline a fact which ought, but appears not, to be self-evident: any attempt to reduce experience and consciousness to the dimensions of intellect and behaviour is misguided. In this context the point is that it is nonsense to question the existence of spirits and only slightly less misguided to imply that they only exist within the minds or as a projection of those who believe in them. Both viewpoints evade the real issue. When people from animistic societies speak of spirits, their language is a statement about substantive experience, *not* a hypotheses about what may or may not exist outside themselves. Traditional cosmologies are in the first instance *lived,* not simply *held* as beliefs.[1] Whenever interpreters of those cosmologies treat them simply as sets of ideas, there is a tacit ethnocentric assumption that cosmology functions everywhere as it does for us — as the merest shadow rather than living substance of experience.

JAVANESE SPIRIT BELIEFS

Among Javanese there is very little doubt about the existence of spirits. There may be a growing minority of modern Javanese sharing a Western styled skepticism, but for most of the population debate centres not so much on whether spirits exist as on how best to relate to them. The *santris,* that is the more seriously Islamic portions of the population, feel that it is best to leave spirits alone, to focus attention exclusively on surrender of God. Few of them, however, would deny that spirits exist. Others, the *abangan* who are more indebted to Java's animistic and Indic heritage, continue to tend ancestral graves, prepare flower and incense offerings, and meditate on contact with assorted ancestral spirits.[2] For the latter, contact with spirits serves either to enhance the spiritual status of those living now, through advances toward a purity which aids the spirits as well; or more often to aid in materially oriented acquisition of money, marriage, rank, and power. Among poor villagers today, for example, one of the most common motives for spirit contact is to obtain prior access to results in the national lottery *(Nalo).*[3] Stories of supposed success circulate widely.

Javanese responded to questions about the nature of spirits by stressing that they are just like people with the single exception of lacking a physical body.[4] Otherwise spirits are thought to share in human ranges of thought, memory, feeling, and desire. In fact they are human but exist now within the spirit realm through having died "imperfect" deaths. For in the Indic terms common in Java, death is only complete when there is a total dissolution of body and spirit into union with the cosmos *(moksa).* If there is clinging in the final instant, if the ego remains attached to the phenonmenal reality we experience now *(maya),* then the spirit remains within the cycle of reincarnation. Most often that means suspension for a time in the transitional realms of those awaiting rebirth. Desires *(nafsu)* are the glue linking material and spiritual dimensions, the physical medium is the context in which desires can work toward satisfaction. While this is in the first instance a suggestion of what spirits are thought to be, it doubles to explain why they remain interested in human affairs. Not having the bodies necessary to satisfy their still active desires, they seek vicarious gratification through contacts with humanity.

Just as spirits are conceived in human terms, so the dimension they inhabit is structured in an elaborate hierarchy parallelling the social order (or at least

what is once might have been). Each village has a village head *(lurah)* and at the same time a guardian spirit or founding ancestor *(danhyang).* In cases of disruptive possession the standard strategy of the shaman *(dukun)* is to report the incident to the local *danhyang* just as a robber might be reported to the police or *lurah.* The spirit hierarchy leads right up to the court *(kraton)* level, where the ruler ensures harmony within the realm by maintaining contact with the spirit kingdoms which culminate in Njai Loro Kidul, the Queen of the South Sea.[5] The major spirit centers, where the interaction between human and spirit realms is most intense, are holy places *(kramat)* such as royal graves, springs, caves, volcanoes, the ocean, and ancient temple sites. The fact that cult centers coincide with geographically and historically significant places is a direct indication of the cosmological device linking the current social order with natural forces through the mediation of potent ancestors who had themselves come to a harmonious accommodation with the powers of the cosmos.

While spirits occupy this central role in the social sense, there can be no understanding of what spirits are in Java apart from the fundamental premise that the macrocosm and microcosm are not simply linked and parallel, but continuous. Javanese will explain that spirits in the astral realm have a murky substance with only the vaguest form; that in the mental realm they have clear forms without substance.[6] They will then go on to assert that spirits are carried in our blood, that they are linked to elements within our own being. It is at this level that it becomes clearest that spirit beliefs constitute a cosmology not only in being interwoven with the mythic ethnic history, not only in laying out the dynamics of natural forces, but also as maps of individual consciousness.[7] All these dimensions are present and interwoven within the Javanese sense of spirit realities. For the experts, whether rural shaman or urban mystic, acknowledgement that spirits are real simultaneously at all these levels is explicit. For the layman the understanding may be vague, but the intuitive awareness of spirit presence is strong at all levels. The spirits suffuse present reality and the line separating them from society is porous — leading to a wide variety of contacts between dimensions.

Chance meetings with Javanese very often lead to stories about an uncle, cousin, or neighbor who encountered spirits while moving house, during war, or in the routine of life. These stories are as often passed by professed skeptics as by believers, they circulate much more widely than do admissions of personal experience, but even the latter are common. Circulation may exaggerate the frequency of encounter, but that is less important than the fact that these stories are taken seriously. In the villages the routine of ritual and communal meals *(selametan)* provide a structure explicitly directed at harmonizing relations with the spirit realms. In the context the immediacy of spirit presence may be absent, but for the *dukun* who often presides, the contact is more direct. Some rituals, such as the instance which follows, invoke direct spirit presence through possession. Mediums *(prewangan)* come in many varieties, some entering trance and becoming entirely a vehicle for the possessing spirit, others remaining conscious while transmitting messages, others functioning through elaborate ritual or esoteric quest.

Finally of course there are the more threatening, because less socially controlled, instances of malevolent possession. In those instances spirits enter unwilling individuals to fulfill some end of their own, damaging the human vehicle in the process. Although many traditional mystics cultivated spirit possession as a technique giving them occult powers of invulnerability

(kekebalan), clairvoyance *(kewaskitan)*, or whatever, most of the contemporary mystical sects *(aliran kebatinan)* disapprove.[8] They stress that possession invariably damages the human spirit, not just through possible insanity, but generally because during possession the spirit of the vehicle is shunted aside, depressed to make room for the actions of the spirit which enters. This "high brow" argument is that despite the apparent skills demonstrated through possession, the individual spirit looses opportunities to carry out its own karmic duties.

The cases of possession presented below become meaningful against the backdrop provided so far. For those tending toward the animistic rather than Islamic pole of the Javanese spiritual spectrum, human society and the spirit realms are experienced simply as different points on the continuum uniting the microcosm and macrocosm. Neither harmoniuos social relations nor balanced personal development occurs without healthy spirit relations. Traditionally rituals functioned socially and mystical quest personally to establish or maintain that balance. Possession, whether in ritually sanctioned or spiritually questing context, has been the most powerful and immediate form of contact. It is well understood that within the intensity of possession experience lies the potential for backfire. If rituals fail or individuals lack proper guidance and strength, the powers invoked may devastate rather than harmonize. As times change, as the cultural world becomes confused by competing ontologies, the potential for misfire mounts. The cases which follow illustrate both the strain of contemporary spiritual quest in Java and the workings of possession in general. They are instructive precisely because in each case the formal structures failed and in failing opened cracks which reveal their works.

RITUAL TRANCE DANCING

The intense drama of the Balinese struggle between Rangda and Barong is well known to both scholars and tourists as a classic trance situation. Javanese equivalents seem poor cousins by comparison, but nonetheless a form of trance dancing is common and readily identifiable as a genre. The genre includes wide variations in style and substance, including *reog, jatilan, prajuritan,* and *jaran kepang.*[9] In some troupes dancers specialise in eating glass and peeling coconut husks with their teeth, more commonly they eat unhusked paddy, flowers, and bananas (skin and all). In almost all variants the dance employs a plaited bamboo hobby horse and trance is induced with the aid of distinctive rhythms from a simple percussion orchestra. Under most circumstances only troupe members are susceptible to trance, but they have been known to enter it even by hearing the rhythms by chance over the radio. Usually trance is facilitated by the physical release which follows dancing to near exhaustion, at which point the normal psychological defenses weaken and possession occurs.

I saw performances of Javanese trance dances about half a dozen times and of almost as many styles, but by far the most revealing was one performance in which, from the ritual standpoint, things did not go smoothly.This particular *prajuritan* performance was an all day affair which took place near Salatiga on the slopes of Mount Merbabu in late 1971. It was held in the village *(desa)* of Tegalwaton, near the ancient ruins at the spring called Senjaya.[10] The group of two dozen dancers and musicians collected a fee of 4,500 rupiah (about US $15 at the time) for the day long affair. The ceremony was sponsored by a village matriarch, among whose seventy-two descendents was one young boy who has been circumcised the night before. As explained by those present, the

purpose of the ceremony was to exorcise any lingering malicious spirits who might have disrupted village harmony in general and the newly circumcised boy's sensitive spiritual state in particular.

The day began with a small ceremony at about nine in the morning. As is usually the case in syncretic Javanese practice, it opened with an Islamic prayer, then the matriarch distributed small amounts of money to each of her great grandchildren. Most of them immediately spent the money on the ice sticks being sold outside the house compound by the peddlers who collect around such village rituals. Then the extended family, the *prajuritan* troupe, and interested villagers formed a procession which wound its way slowly to Senjaya, about a mile from the village. At the springs almost everyone bathed and all along the circuit of hamlets we passed the troupe paused for brief previews of the performance to come. Returning to the matriarch's home, the musicians set themselves up on the verandah along with invited guests and a large crowd of onlookers formed a dense circle at the periphery of the compound. Despite the fact that the afternoon and evening sessions lasted four hours each and were punctuated by rain and drizzle, the crowd remained large. Even these casual bystanders performed a function — preventing escape whenever one of the dancers threatened to break out of the circle.

The dances progressed in intensity as the day wore on, though they took the form of assorted skits, comic interludes, and mythic battles without a comprehensive plot. Narrative never became a major interest, the plots remaining little more than a framework for dancing and trance. It is worth noting that the increasing intensity of trances correlated directly to increasing age of the dancers. The younger dancers who performed earlier moved much more easily into and out of trance than did the older ones, revealing a direct link between trance and socialization. All of the dancers were young men, the youngest barely adolescent and the oldest in their twenties.[11]

A number of *dukun* (shaman) supervised the exorcism process. As each dancer reached a limit, four or five troupe members would grab and hold him while the *dukun* offered water, fruit, or raw rice, whispered in his ear, and finally blew on his forehead. In several of the most severe trances, the *dukuns* in attendance failed and runners were sent off to neighbouring villages to summon further assistance. Had all gone normally, in each case of possession the dancer would have acted as a vehicle for the spirit for a time, remained within the formal structure of the dancing, and then returned through exorcism to a normal state (however exhausted both physically and psychically). On this occasion the process was not so smooth. Several dancers broke the basic structure and failed to respond to normal exorcising routines. One remained for some time vocally hostile to other members of the troupe — in short there were unusually bad vibes. Two trancers spoke while possessed, something I did not experience on other occasions.

One case of rough "re-entry" occurred late in the afternoon. Two dancers were ceremonially fighting with wooden swords while on their bamboo horses. Concentration was intense and there were two others already in trance within the ring. One of the dancers began to lunge ferociously, with his eyes bulging. At the end of a lunge his body froze into rigidity and he was immediately grabbed by helpers. Instead of submitting he refused their grip, threw down the horse, and raced madly around the circle in huge kicking jumps. He fought and danced so hard that he was rushed off the ring as soon as enough helpers could get him in hand. Once inside the house four of his friends pinned him to the

floor. At that point he began speaking, sounding as though in anguished conflict within himself. He spoke in Indonesian rather than Javanese, itself perhaps a hint at the reasons for his difficulty in entering fully into the trance.[12] He kept saying he had only come to the performance with the desire to help, to increase *selamet* (harmony); that he had only come to add to the performance not to ruin it. He seemed convinced that he had done something wrong. The friends who held him did not seem terribly concerned, but humoured him until, after some time, he calmed down.

The evening brought increasing intensity and disharmony, culminating toward midnight in a very awkward scene. A skit was in progress with a man and woman talking. Another actor, in a red mask, began circling the two in a threatening manner, then snapped abruptly into a trance. He was rushed immediately into the house as it was obvious he could not be dealt with normally. He spoke incessantly, sounding very much in pain and repeatedly crying "get out!" (*mari keluar*). Finally he turned on the others insisting that he was all right and they should let him joint the crowd. When they released him he resumed the same circling pattern, obviously remaining in a semi-trance state. One helper grabbed him from behind and provoked an intense outrage. He turned in fury on his fellow troupe members and began a tirade in front of the crowd. He demanded to know why he had been unfairly restrained and insisted that he was normal. Shifting his line of argument, he turned on the troupe manager and announced that the performance had been a flop, everyone should go home. At any rate he insisted that he was going to because he could not tolerate the bumbling performance. He clearly blamed the troupe manager for the troubles. Upset, the manager pleaded apologies and begged forgiveness on the grounds that he had only been on the job for several months. Everyone watched awkwardly. Finally another troupe member began to mediate by seeming to agree with the accuser, but arguing leniency. He suggested that the dancer ought to go home and offered to go along. They both sat down and the atmosphere began to settle.

At that point, with everything still very much up in the air, I had to leave to return to Salatiga with my host. I was never able to find out what happened, whether the dance continued, or how the angered trancer fared. Clearly the performance had not propitiated the spirits. For villagers intending to cleanse unhealthy tensions reflecting spirit presence, the performance had complicated rather than harmonized the situation, disturbing an atmosphere it was designed to stabilize.

POSSESSION AND SOCIAL CONFLICT

Here my focus is on a case of possession generated by a conjunction of the psychological and social pressures typical to rural Java. Possession occurred on an evening which was to have been used for a ritual marking the dissolution of a very minor branch of the national meditation organization called Sumarah. To begin with I will sketch the components of the situation, attempting in the process to suggest the nature of the pressures which focused on the Sumarah leader who was trying to organize the ritual.

Possession occurred in a remote village some miles east of the regional center (*kabupaten*) of Pacitan. Pacitan itself is only accessible after travel along fifty miles of dirt road from the larger Javanese cities of Ponorogo to the northeast and Surakarta to the northwest. It lies squarely within a south coast district famous throughout the island not only for its poverty but also as a stronghold of magic

and the occult. The region is characterized by dry rocky hils, chalk ridden soil, and only occasional river valleys which are the focus of wet rice and coconut cultivation.

Sumarah is one of the dozen or so major mystical organizations which operate at the national level. It exists from its own point of view simply to foster meditation aimed at total surrender to God — with the view that through that surrender individuals can then become vehicles of divine will and compassion rather than ego. Although, like other major groups, it is recognized by the government, not all mystical practice is approved. In practice Sumarah treads a delicate line to avoid provoking orthodox Muslim reaction at local and national levels.[13] Currently the organization has around ten thousand members, almost exclusively ethnic Javanese and scattered throughout the island. One of the major regional centers is at Ponorogo, of which the Pacitan branch is a subdivision. Almost every year the leaders of the Ponorogo region tour the remote village branches to guide meditation practice and attend to organizational formalities. The events which follow occurred during their tour in 1973.

The Ponorogo leaders had already been on tour for a week when I joined them, by chance on the very day on which they planned to formalize the dissolution of one village branch. The branch had been in existence for two or three years and had been started by the village police officer (*mantri polisi*). He in turn had joined Sumarah during an earlier posting at the nearby district office. The branch was being dissolved in the face of overt pressure by the village head (*lurah*). Circumstances, especially the *lurah*'s almost total monopoly of village resources, suggest that he was objecting to Sumarah mainly because through it the *mantri* may have been organizing latent hostility and beginning to form a channel connecting opposition to higher level powers. The *lurah*'s explicit objections were based on Islamic purism and the claim that the *mantri* had neglected police duties out of enthusiasm for Sumarah. The *lurah* was explicit, when I spoke to him, in stating that once the *mantri* was transferred (he had already arranged for that) the local residents would have no need of Sumarah. Whatever the facts of the matter, local residents felt no need to oppose him and began arranging to withdraw their membership. Whether they did so because their interest had been superficial or out of fear of the *lurah* remained an issue.

In fact this was the issue that Karno (a pseudonym) was not quite ready to pass over. He was more than a little frustrated at the prospect of the closing of the branch, not because it was so significant in itself, but because it typified a range of stumbling blocks the organization faced. Several branches had closed for similar reasons in the same region and the membership of the urban branch had been declining for years. In all cases he felt inclined to blame external pressures and he became determined to "research" his way to the root of the problems. So in marking the dissolution of this particular branch, he decided to force the issue by having those who were withdrawing make public statements of their reason for doing so. In short he threatened to stand village ritual on its head by making it an occasion for overt confrontation.

In taking this course Karno was departing drastically from both Javanese etiquette and Sumarah practice. Javanese go to extremes in their effort to avoid roughness of interaction — they will almost always deny difficulties rather than allow disruption of social harmony (*rukun*). Sumarah philosophy exemplifies the cultural norm by emphasizing introspective self-correction. It stresses acceptance of external realities, yet Karno was becoming preoccupied with external restrictions. Karno was clearly misguided from the social and

political standpoint as well. Sumarah exists in its rural setting on the sufferance of local powers. On the day prior to this, there had been an excellent illustration of how Sumarah successfully harmonized with those village powers. On arriving in another village some ten miles farther from the coast, Karno and his associates divcovered that their meetings coincided unintentionally with an Islamic celebration. Immediately they adjusted their schedule to begin at four in the afternoon rather than eight in the evening. Throughout their meeting they asked Sumarah members to also attend the Islamic meeting and stressed that it would be right for them to do so. The idea of holding a "dissolution ceremony" in which villagers would be carpeted was clearly out of order.

During the late afternoon Karno and I visited all of the local notables to obtain permission for the ritual and extend invitations. At first, observing his rather aggressive attitude, I began to wonder whether I needed to revise my estimate of the need for deference to village officials. After a meal at the home of a local member, Karno and another member from Ponorogo went off to attend to last-minute errands. Meanwhile a number of local members nervously explored how they could best evade the dilemma of either lying about serious spiritual matters or hopelessly alienating the social powers of their village world. A heavy cloud cover blocked out the moon and stars and there was a continuous drizzle. After some time a boy came breathlessly racing into the house exclaiming that there had been an accident. He was confused about details so I went dow the hill to the local clinic to see for myself.

Entering the clinic I found Karno sitting on a table and filled with humor, but surrounded by a distressed crowd of villagers. It was a very dark night and he had been walking along an unfamiliar road without a flashlight. The road had been widened, but not the bridge across a small stream. Unknowingly, Karno had walked off the road and fallen ten feet, landing on the base of his spine amidst the rocks of the stream bed. Passing out for some time, he woke to find himself paralyzed and helpless until a passing villager found him. Once taken to the clinic he found he could move with care, though occasionally in intense pain. The anguish of those around came not so much in response to his physical complaints as through the verbal abuse and aggression which poured from him. Everyone sensed that following the accident they need have no fear the ritual would occur, but Karno lashed out with sarcastic accusations at anyone within striking range. He abused the local army officer for having avoided him in the afternoon, he harrassed the medical aid, he challenged anyone to prove that Sumarah was hostile to Islam (as had apparently been claimed), and he quizzed the local Sumarah members as though they were at the ceremony he had threatened to hold. Lacking any finesse, he rang an extremely sour note. As soon as we could, the local Sumarah members and I carried him first to the house, then by stages to the district hospital and back to Ponorogo by jeep. There Karno, another friend and I settled in for an intensive week of combined therapy, exploration, and recovery.

During recovery Karno gradually adjusted to social norms, beginning to direct his attention to his internal difficulties rather than projecting his problems externally. Throughout convalescence he was periodically in extreme physical pain. In interactions he alternated between almost normalcy and extreme aggression. Both his physical and psychic states varied directly in response to those around him. When treated as though physically sick he seemed in extreme pain, especially while in hospital. When people approached with anxiety due to

the assumption that he was insane or possessed, he justified every fear by heaping radical criticism on them. His comments were biting, as those who received them well knew, precisely because they touched at deep rooted issues they were trying to avoid facing. On the other hand, Karno gained both physically and psychically whenever he was dealt with normally.

Karno's "possession" was certainly an ambiguous case. Villagers who viewed his experience through traditional Javanese lenses had no doubt that he had been attacked by a spirit. The circumstances surrounding the episode almost cried out for such an attack and every response he gave confirmed their fears. Apart from the extent to which his experience paralleled others, it was virtually essential to attribute his state to powers beyond his control. Doing so was the only alternative which allowed villagers to avoid taking his statements seriously. On the face of it his statements had been inflammatory and dangerous. Yet tne local army officer, though visibly upset, commented that it was a good thing Karno had been possessed — otherwise he would have been in trouble. The district head (*Camat*) made the same point, saying he was happy to have met Karno prior to the accident and to know that this was not his true nature. Culturally Karno's behavior sat comfortably as possession; socially and politically peace depended on viewing it that way.

Within Sumarah the conceptualization differed even though the logic had somewhat similar consequences. Sumarah applies the concept of *evolusi* to such states. Within the group imbalanced states are seen as a common result of attempting to force spiritual development. When individuals try to compress their progress, to speed it up unnaturally, they may overload the nervous system, activating more spiritual energy than it can handle. The therapeutic strategy practiced within Sumarah involves direct internal awareness rather than objectification of the sort concepts of possession imply. The practical consequence of labelling, however, bore some resemblance to the dynamics operating at the village level. Karno was particularly devastating in his comments to one Sumarah friend, a young man who became visibly distressed. However, when one of the older Sumarah members explained that Karno's experience was one of *evolusi*, the cloud broke. Relief spread across his face with the comfortable revelation that *this* was what he had heard so many tales about. Just as the notion of possession allowed villagers to ignore Karno's stinging comments; the concept of *evolusi* allowed the young man to take Karno's words less seriously.

It is particularly interesting to note that this case involved more than simply a juxtapositioning of concepts. Long standing Sumarah members explained that the nature of *evolusi* experiences has changed over the years. During the fifties *evolusi* experiences bore much greater resemblance to traditional Javanese notions of possession, now such experiences are becoming more elusive and ambiguous. Karno's experience was seen as a severe instance, yet at the same time as more subtle and complex than those of the past. The altering textures of imbalanced states reflect changes in the style of meditation practice as well.[14] Within Sumarah the trend has been away from ritual and formal styles and toward less rigid categories of inner experience. It is not surpirizing that possession states, which constitute the underside of spiritual quest for Sumarah, should also show a similar evolution.

PSYCHOSIS AND OCCULT POWERS

Javanese lore warns constantly that the dangers of the spiritual journey are

intense. Seekers are advised to seek competent guidance and loners are thought to be courting madness. Young people are admonished to wait until age has muted their desires before plumbing the depth of spirituality. Mysticism is seen primarily as a path toward balance and effectiveness within society and there are warnings that without discipline that balance, and with it sanity, are lost. Warnings are intensified on all counts for those cultivating occult powers because in the awakening of those powers the dangers of overload multiply. When contact with the social world weakens then the boundary between mysticism and insanity becomes shadowy indeed.

All of these dangers were present in the experience of an American couple in Java. Gay and John (pseudonyms) had travelled the overland route for close to a decade. Starting in Africa they had lived in India and Nepal, occasionally experimenting with mystical practices along the way. Once in Java they became loosely associated with a number of teachers in the old court city of Solo (Surakarta). Although peripherally involved with several groups, their interest came to focus on a Javanist variant of Hindu yoga practice. While taking bits of instruction, however, they failed to submit totally to the guidance of their guru, instead continuing to mix techniques. For the most part they lived at a Buddhist retreat near Semarang on the north coast, settling into an isolated lifestyle of meditation, batiking, visits to Solo, and trips to major temple sites. They spent several long periods of retreat, fasting and meditation, concentrating their practice at the temples of Dieng, Gedongsongo, Sukuh, and Ceto. They used those temple sites as Javanese mystics always have: as centers of occult power which are particularly potent channels for contacting spirits. Their practice included a traditional Javanese favorite, *kungkum* (meditation while immersed to the neck, preferably in the waters of a sacred spring or at the meeting of two rivers). Their stated aims included the awakening of clairvoyance and invulnerability against knives.

They got results. Gay began to experience extraordinary states and an associated difficulty relating to society. Her progress and visions became particularly intense after a ten day period of fasting and meditation at the Tantric temple of Candi Ceto, on the northern slopes of Mount Lawu. Returning to Solo from that experience Gay entered into a visionary world of convoluted conflict with her guru. She alternately worshipped him and despised him as the center of a nexus of evil. She said she had not only contacted, but become possessed by the spirit of Candi Ceto. There was no doubt about significant change and she became extremely difficult to relate to. She interfered with her guru's routines by lodging herself in his residence, stealing one of his *pusaka* (magic weapons, in this case a *kris*), and entering in occult battle with him.

At this point the mundane intruded — their visas expired and John was forced to go to Jakarta for renewal, leaving Gay in the care of other Westerners in Solo. Most of the spiritually oriented Westerners there at the time were involved in Sumarah and planning a visit to the Ponorogo branch of that organization. Rather than leaving Gay unattended, we arranged to take her with us. Arriving in Ponorogo at the home where we were being formally received, we began to explain the background to her unstable condition. In the midst of our explanation Gay entered the room stark naked. All the Westerners present reacted with excruciating embarrassment, doing their best to cover her up. The Javanese remained cool and collected, simply chuckling at this demonstration that Westeners were capable of sharing so fully

in the dangers as well as benefits of spiritual life. Gay's behavior was in fact so consistent with our statement of her situation that they experienced no anxiety about what would otherwise have been unthinkable.

Later on similar experinces were repeated in Solo and Yogya. At one point Gay and John went to Yogya to look for a batik artist they knew, somehow convinced that he held the key to their difficulties. On arrival at his home they were told he was in Bali. Unbelieving, they moved into his house, disrupted its routines, and refused to budge. A number of *dukun* were called to expel the spirits that had possessed them.(John, though less strongly affected than Gay, entered into similar states whenever her experience peaked). All the *dukun* failed and finally the police were called. It took eight policemen to restrain John. Before they got him in hand he smashed through glass doors, gashing himself almost to the bone in four places. Finally the police took them to a local psychiatric hospital, where they were forcibly kept. At this point the authorities contacted the Solo group for help.

The Westerner's concern was to prevent deportation, which it seemed could only end in padded cells. To some extent our fears proved unwarranted — the police and psychiatrists in Yogya wanted only to wash their hands of the affair. Both stressed that Gay and John were only marginally in their sphere of competence. The police were unconcerned since the artist made no move to press charges for the disruption of his home. Both the police and psychiatrists advised us to find spiritual guidance for the couple, to find a *dukun* or guru. Again, the fact that they were viewed as victims of possession exempted them from civil prosecution. I had not suspected, until this point, that the division of labor between traditional and Western forms of medicine would apply in the psychiatric realm.

Eventually Gay and John were persauded to follow the prescription of their guru. He advised them to undertake a one week retreat at Sendang Semangi, a sacred spring near Yogya. Their instructions were to bathe nightly at midnight after making the proper offerings. The object was to "strengthen the nervous system" so it could cope with the intensity of occult power which had been tapped. In this their guru reflected his intention — to do anything which might provide added stability as long as it did not jeopardize the powers which had been activated.[15] Several Westerners from the Solo group volunteered to help the couple and we made the necessary arrangements with the Yogyanese cult which had facilities at the spring. The therapy had, at best, marginal results and the instructions given were only loosely followed.

Without hoping to communicate the intensity of the altered states Gay and John experienced, I do want to comment on the nature of the awareness they demonstrated. Occasionally their actions generated tales of occult power — breaking iron locks, passing through doors, tremendous strength, not needing medication for severe wounds, etc. Whatever the background to those stories, they are not the dimension of experience I want to emphasize. Visions of Tolkienesque power sagas abounded, but those by no means overshadowed the often more disturbing directness of their comments on those around. The most impressive alteration in their consciousness came through the form of extremely acute perceptions of other people. Unfiltered by social nicety, their words struck right at the hearts and fears of everyone they interacted with. Gay commented persistently on the meaninglessness of possessions (in the sense of ownership!). She refused to acknowledge socially and personally defined spaces, taking everything as her own and commenting that ultimately no one

owns anything. My point is that in this, and in fact numerous other expressions, she took "raw" (in the sense of acultural) truths and expressed them with complete disregard for social norms.[16] In most cases the kernel of truth and the nakedness of its expression was powerful. What made her behavior unpalatable was not the element of fantasy and hallucination that some might see in it, but the insistence on truth regardless of consequence, regardless especially of the capacity of those receiving to accept it.

In this case again my description ends with circumstance. Gay and John began to enter their intensely disassociated states in late 1973 and the events described occurred during the period up to February 1974. At that point I left Java. Gay and John remained in Solo for some months after that, but to my knowledge no clear light lifted the cloud over their experience up to that point.

INTERPRETATION

The cases juxtaposed above combine to suggest a number of conclusions with potential relevance to other explorations of altered states. In the first instance I want to focus on the nature and meaning of spirit possession; in the second on the functions of the terms applied to such states. On both counts my interest lies in clarifying the interplay between culturally determined conceptions and the textures of living experience.

In the first place I could not help being struck, as a witness to each case, with the incisive insights demonstrated by those under attack. I had thought that possession states, especially of the malevolent sort illustrated here, would be characterized by delusion, hallucination, distortion, and fantasy. Elements of all those could be found in each case, but none of them would define the awareness expressed. Instead I found an often extraordinary insight, an insight not generally available to the socialized consciousness of those around. I am not asserting the presence of occult powers, though many observers interpreted events in those terms. I am asserting that the defining feature of this form of possession lies in the disjunctive relationship between society and the awareness of those possessed. That disjunction arises not because of the "unreality" of the insights acquired through possession, but because both individuals and social groups are unable or unwilling to acknowledge the truths expressed. It may be that possession is considered malevolent not because it destroys the stability of those affected directly, but because it threatens to radically eliminate the petty deceptions upon which so much of social life is built.

To put my interpretation into proper context, I need to emphasize that my point is not partisan. I am not placing values on the awkwardness experienced during the trance dancing or the Pandora's box opened by Karno and Gay. I am simply pointing out that their awareness could not be defined by the ridiculous and the illusory.

Definition in those terms works only when premised on the very social values which are threatened. As social scientists concerned with interpretation, we can hardly rest on such a premise.

Turning now to the meaning of spirit beliefs, my suggestion is that animistic religions have raised special difficulties for Western interpreters primarily because of our rigid dichotomization of subjective and objective, inner and outer. We have felt justified in discounting spirit beliefs, taking it as self-evident that there are no such things and assuming that there must be some other explanation for events.[17] In doing so we fail to recognize the ontological

relevance of cosmologies which we may have explicated beautifully elsewhere. I think we can avoid that error if we take experience as the starting point, relating all belief systems to the substantive nature of events. All three cases involved an intensely charged atmosphere, an immediacy of emotional power, an expectant concentration. Those elements feature in all descriptions and no one denies their relevance. An ethnographer may leave it at that, having acknowledged psychological intensity to move on to socio-cultural explanation of the forces which generate it. Indigenous explanations indicate the presence of spirits *within* the charged atmosphere. In doing so they are not postulating the non-existent, but providing their cultural interpretation of an experience.

For the Javanese in particular, reference to spirits directs attention simultaneously to microcosm and macrocosm. Westerners tend to assume the reference is simply to an "outer" dimension if spirits are to have any "objective" meaning. Lay Javanese may objectify in the same way Western observers do, but experts in Java know that the reference is dual — to the natural forces evident in the workings of the cosmos *and* to psychic forces experienced within the individual. Because the inner and outer are simply aspects of each other, not separate as our cosmology postulates, spirits assume a reality which is very hard for us to appreciate. There is a time-warp involved, this is not simply a matter of choosing between labels for the same thing. Tense feelings, unsettled vibes, personal anxieties, social pressures, etc. then become not alternatives to spirit belief, but complementary explanations. Psychological, cultural, and social forces do not negate either the substance or indigenous interpretation of possession — they simply highlight what an indigenous person might see as the visible expressions of spirit influence.

Progressing outward from the experiential into the cultural and social dimensions of possession, the cases demonstrate that experiences are refracted through the cultural images provided.[18] The village trancers, Karno, and Gay each had different interpretations of purpose, experience, and potential resolution. The images they employed are essential to understanding not only the steps leading to possession, but the features of experience and potential for resolution. Therapy becomes dubious when there are ambiguities generated by competing images. In the first case ambiguity was minimal. Use of Indonesian by those possessed indicated the obvious — that Javanese villages are no longer a world in themselves. Intrusion of non-Javanese culture may account for some added strain on ritual procedure, but the ambiguity remained an undercurrent rather than central element in the case. By contrast, in Karno's experience ambiguity was central. Villagers assumed possession; he and his associates declined to think in spirit terms. The Sumarah posture eliminated the possibility of traditional shamanic healing. At the same time even within the Sumarah notion of *evolusi* no fixed solutions were offered. Karno's case was viewed as severe, yet more subtle and complex than those of the past. As a result, the healing journey was protracted, the instant reversals of earlier days gone.

In Gay's case complexity was multiplied by the potential relevance of Western psychiatric, traditional Javanese, Sumarah, and Yogic schemes. Facing the welter of possibilities, she failed to fit any one and the resulting therapeutic efforts were weak. In this context the significance of the Javanese stress on consistently following one guru makes sense. By mixing practices the effectiveness of each is undercut. Without implying that a shared image guarantees therapeutic success, which it clearly does not, it is worth suggesting

that having common ground is as important to the potential success of therapy as it is to ordinary social communication. I am not suggesting a relativism that would place all conceptualizations of altered states on equal ground. I am pointing out the fluid and dynamic nature of the interplay between experience, conceptualization, and therapeutic interaction. That dynamic is not a simple slight of hand based on faith, but a subtle dialectic.

Finally and perhaps most obviously, the cases suggest that socially the primary function of terminology is containment rather than explanation. By containment I mean that the terms insulate the experiential dimension from the social forms it so often threatens. Rituals themselves are geared to do that — providing a space within which the suspended reality of timeless and uncultured experience is touched, perhaps transforming the awareness of some, but preserving stability in the face of anarchic energies.[19] When functioning properly the dangerous energy is released; when failing the boundary between social and spirit realms weakens and the feelings of people become unsettled and anxious. Throughout the cases presented, use of concepts, whether possession or *evolusi,* served to ease the minds of those confronted. Having a neat category for the experience they faced, they could sit comfortably without having to examine the relevance it may have had within themselves.

The force of this comment becomes greatest when combined with my first conclusion — that those possessed are expressing not just inane babble, but often powerful truth. The problem is that truth, when unrefined, stands in raw contrast to everyday realities. Those whose awareness is rooted in culturally conditioned realms cannot help but feel radically threatened in the face of it. This is why the Javanese claim that insanity is mysticism *without* science. Insanity may reveal truths, but without discipline it can only result in imbalance and a lack of harmony with society. Those possessed are taught to either forget the truth or learn discipline. For those observing from the sidelines, from the viewpoint of cultural norms, their concepts serve not so much to explain as to defend the often fragile boundary of their own sanity.

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Footnotes

1. Though having substantially different emphasis, my point here is linked with Geertz's point that . . . "For those who hold them, religious beliefs are not inductive, they are paradigmatic: the world . . . provides not evidences for their truth, but illustrations of it." *Islam Observed*, Chicago, 1971, p.98.
2. For the still standard, though much criticized, amplification of Javanese religious categories, see Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, Chicago, 1976. It provides background detail relevant to many points which follow.
3. For a description of this preoccupation see Niels Mulder, *Mysticism and Daily Life in Contemporary Java*, Amsterdam, 1975, pp.80–87.
4. Implicitly I am limiting discussion here to ancestral spirits, leaving out the less immediately relevant devic, demonic, and other types.
5. See Soemarsaid Moertono, *State and Statecraft in Old Java*, Ithaca, New York, 1968, p.64 for the traditional logic of this connection. This belief is by no means dead — the rituals are upheld and references to the spirit realms frequent, even in the context of contemporary national politics.
6. This terminology is borrowed in many cases from the Theosophical Society, which had considerable impact on urban mystics during the colonial era.

7. For elaboration of this point see my article, "Mystical Symbolism in Javanese Wayang Mythology", *The South East Asian Review*, Vol. 1 No. 2 (February 1977).
8. Disapproval is hardly unanimous. It is forced to some degree by government regulations against *klenik* (black magic), and by Islamic purism. The elements within *kebatinan* which most disapprove of spirit contacts are both reflecting concern in the face of outside pressures and revealing that Islamic notions have penetrated deeply into some spheres of *kebatinan* life. There is still a large element within *kebatinan*, the traditionalist, which is explicitly and strongly directed toward spirit relations.
9. Presence of trance dancing is a fair index correlating to the most solidly Javanist regions. It is emphatically an *abangan* art. For an inventory of troupes in the Yogya area see Soedarsono, ed., *Tari-Tarian Rakyat di Daerah Istimewa Yogya-karta*, Yogyakarta, 1976. For a thorough treatment of one variant see Margaret Katomi, "Performance, Music, and Meaning of Reyog Ponorogo", *Indonesia*, N 22 (October 1976).
10. On the special significance of this site within Javanese dynastic history see B. Schrieke, *Indonesian Sociological Studies*, Volume II, The Hague and Bandung, 1957, pp.305–307.
11. Soedarsono (op. cit. p.10) suggests that *jatilan* is the oldest form of Javanese dancing and that traditionally it was performed by young men. It is quite likely that elements of age grade and initiation underlie such performances.
12. I am perhaps stretching a point here, but it is at least possible that, given the thoroughly Javanist roots of the drama, the use of Indonesian reflects the intrusion of the non-Javanese thought world of the nation into a context which ideally built on pure and wholly Javanese elements.
13. The tension between Javanist and Islamic elements is pervasive. It constitutes a background against which this case, in particular, acquires several dimensions of meaning I am not making explicit here. For a synopsis of the historical roots to that conflict see Robert Jay, *Religion and Politics in Rural Central Java*, New Haven, 1963, pp.1–30.
14. For a suggestion of the changes within Sumarah practice see my article on "Javanese Mysticism in the Revolutionary Period", *Journal of Studies in Mysticism*, Vol. I No. 2 (1978).
15. This point was one of contention among those interacting with Gay and John. To many involved it seemed that their guru's posture revealed an unwillingness to take responsibility, an unwillingness which complicated efforts at therapy. Despite wavering on the couple's part, their guru was the only person with substantial influence. His satisfaction with the powers demonstrated in their behavior was both a reflection of the initial problem and a limit to its potential resolution.
16. Here my point comes close to that of R. D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience*, New York, 1967, pp.124–129, 137. In arguing the link between some schizophrenic experiences and the experience of transcendence underlying religion, Laing lays a basis on which my point can be built; a basis which is consistent with the Javanese notions of a link between insanity and mysticism.
17. For an illustration of this assumption see Melford Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism*, Engelwood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1967, p.64. The Burmese tradition Spiro deals with is similar to the Javanese in many respects and his handling of it is in many respects exemplary. On this point I take issue, as he states that "our immediate task — on the assumption that supernatural beings have no objective existence — is to examine the bases for their putative existence."
18. Much the same point is made by E. Bourguignon, "Hallucination and Trance: An Anthropologist's Perspective", in Wolfram Keup, Ed. *Origin and Mechanisms of Hallucination*, New York, 1970, p.185. As I put the point here, it may be quite relevant to the whole question of trans-cultural psychiatry (as discussed for example by I. M. Lewis in *Ecstatic Religion*, Penguin, 1971, pp.178–205). With

this point it becomes clear that comparison cannot rest on symptomatic features of psychotic states.

19. This view of ritual functioning draws in part on the views of Victor Turner, particularly his notion of the "liminal" (*The Forest of Symbols*, Ithaca, New York, 1967, pp.93–111). The broader point about containment I am making also conforms neatly to Mary Douglas' arguments in *Purity and Danger*, Penguin, 1966.

REVIEWS

THE JAINA PHILOSOPHY OF NON-ABSOLUTISM

Satkari Mookerjee
Delhi; Motilal Banarsidass, 1978. xvi + 289 pages (including index). Rs. 75.

This book was first published in 1944. Its genesis lies in the twelve lectures on Jaina philosophy delivered by the author under the auspices of the Bhāratī Jaina Pariṣad. This second edition appeared in 1978 and is to be welcomed for the same reasons for which Professor S. N. Dasgupta welcomed the original edition in his foreword, namely, that Jainism is neglected by Indologists as a field of study and hence a work on Jaina philosophy deserves attention, more so when the author is conversant not only with Sanskrit but also European philosophy so that he possesses "the facility of transvaluing old Indian thoughts in modern ways in a correct manner" (p. viii).

A student of religion has an additional reason for welcoming the book. The author claims it as a special feature of the present work that "I have kept my philosophical convictions completely in the background and have endeavoured to give as thorough and powerful an exposition of Jaina thought as could be done by an adherent of the Jaina faith" (p. xii). A phenomenologist of religion could ask for little more. One is even tempted into remarking that one has heard much of the philosophy of phenomenology; here we may have an example of the phenomenology *of philosophy* if that expression is understood in the same way as the 'phenomenology of religion'. The author suceeds in conforming to his ideal, sometimes admirably (pp. 275–277). He devotes special attention to the question of universals in Jainism (Chapter IX). J. D. Bettis has drawn pointed attention to the implications of the universals in interpreting religious experience *(Phenomenology of Religion* [London: SCM Press Ltd., 1967], pp. 202–2) so that the question of their ontological status in Jainism may not be as stratospherically rarefied a philosophical issue as might appear at first sight. There are further reasons for being receptive to the book. It is sometimes said that "primitive animistic ideas" led Jainism into ascribing "living activity to matter" and that "for all the subtlety with which many of its doctrines have been elaborated, the primitive heritage of Jainism is very evident". The book strengthens a point of view which takes a *reverse* view of the relationship between Jain philosophy and its so-called primitive heritage, namely that although one may regard Jainism as animistic and as "a sort of folk-philosophy interested in overstraining the moral aspects without any theistic bias", this "folk-philosophy had . . . elements in it which in the hands of later writers were connected into logical doctrines remarkable for their originality, acuteness and subtlety" (p. vii).

This commendable book, however, is not immune from some criticisms. The blurb of the book gives the impression that the author is a Jaina whereas the author states in the preface that he was "born in an orthodox Brahmin family" and that his "personal philosophical convictions are rather enlisted on the side of Śaṅkara's Vedānta"! More substantially, the author deliberately eschews a historical treatment of the doctrine of Syādvāda (p. 117). Yet the philosophical importance of such a historical treatment is clearly demonstrated by his