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Source: *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (May, 1988), pp. 160-177

Published by: Blackwell Publishing on behalf of the American Anthropological Association

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# Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson in Bali: Their Use of Photography and Film

Ira Jacknis

*African, Oceanic, and New World Art*  
*The Brooklyn Museum*

In 1939 Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead returned from three years of research in Bali and New Guinea, where they had innovated in their use of photography and film as ethnographic media. A world at war soon drew them away to other concerns, but not before they had produced a photographic ethnography in 1942. Around 1950 Mead returned to the material, assembling another photographic study and a series of six films.

Although in its time Bateson and Mead's Balinese work was greeted with some puzzlement, by now these books and films have achieved the status of classics. In many ways they began the field of visual anthropology, and to this day there is little that can be compared to their work. Despite this landmark status, their project has been subjected to surprisingly little reconsideration (Collier 1967:5–6; de Brigard 1975:26–27; Heider 1976:27–30). As the first extended treatment of their use of photography and film in Bali, this essay offers a historical overview of their project, and then turns to a consideration of one out of the many relevant theoretical issues—the objectivity of their record.<sup>1</sup> Though involved mainly with a visual medium, Bateson and Mead faced the same problems of representation as their colleagues relying solely on words. Thus, this essay will trace their process of turning “raw” field notes into finished ethnographies (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

## Why Bali?

Why did Bateson and Mead ever go to Bali in the first place, and what kind of problems did they bring with them into the field?<sup>2</sup> It seems clear that the primary motivation was theoretical. When Mead and Bateson met in New Guinea in 1933 they came up with a schema for characterizing cultures by temperament and gender. However, they had generated one category for which they had no known example. On the basis of some films she had seen of child trance, Mead suggested Bali as the missing type. Back in New York, Mead went over more Balinese material, including films produced by a former student, Jane Belo. It is not insignificant that Mead's earliest knowledge of Bali was primarily visual.

Mead's next fieldwork was stimulated by conversations and inquiries from psychologists. The chairman of the Committee for the Study of Dementia Praecox (schizophrenia, as it was then called) asked Mead to suggest a field expedition in which to study the problem, and the Balinese appeared to her to be an appropriate choice. They seemed to have culturally institutionalized dissociative and trance-like behavior, which in our culture is regarded as schizophrenic. The Committee supported much of the research and write-up, supplemented by funds from the American Museum of Natural History, Cambridge University, the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), and personal resources.

Continuing her interest in child development and its relation to cultural themes, Mead also proposed to follow the growth of children over an extended period. For this Bali was as good a place as any. An interest in new ethnographic techniques was a final motivation. In her grant proposal to the SSRC, justifying the use of photography on a massive scale, Mead cited the camera's imperviousness to progressive theoretical sophistication over the course of the fieldwork.<sup>3</sup>

Apparently Bateson played a relatively minor role in the selection of the field site. Between New Guinea in 1933 and Bali in 1936, the couple spent two periods together: the summer of 1934 in Ireland and the spring of 1935 in New York. While Bateson was in Cambridge writing *Naven* (1936), Mead was in New York preparing her monograph on the Arapesh. In his own grant proposals, written during the summer of 1935, Bateson stressed the investigation of the relative influences of personality and culture, extending his analysis of *Naven*. The available evidence suggests that Mead had the first inclination to go to Bali, and that having agreed to marry and work together, Bateson followed along.

In judging the completed record, it is useful to note the couple's contrasting research styles. Despite a background in natural history, Bateson was uncomfortable with an essentially empirical approach. Rather, he preferred just enough observation to supply a basis for his logical and theoretical interests. Mead, on the other hand, had a passion for specific detail and intricate pattern. As Mead explained to Bateson's mother, "Our minds are quite different; I do not mind the masses of concrete detail which bore Gregory and he introduces order and method into my rather amorphous thinking." This contrast was brought out vividly as they learned Balinese: "Gregory doesn't believe the language is real until it is spoken and I don't believe it is real until it is written down."<sup>4</sup> The Bali research effectively combined these talents; Mead was responsible for much of its substantive focus, as well as its vast scale and level of detail, while Bateson took all the pictures, devised innovative forms of notes, and did most of the final photoanalysis.

There were few methodological models for their Bali project, but both of the pair's anthropological mentors were pioneers in the use of film in anthropology. Bateson's teacher, Alfred C. Haddon, in 1898 shot what are believed to be the earliest ethnographic films made in the field (de Brigard 1975:16). Bateson's ambitious proposal for a team expedition to Bali (never funded), clearly based on Haddon's Torres Straits Expedition to New Guinea, included still and motion photography.<sup>5</sup> Film was even more prevalent among Mead's colleagues. In 1930

Franz Boas recorded Kwakiutl Indian crafts, games, and dances with a 16 mm camera (Ruby 1980), and during the thirties his students Melville Herskovits and David Efron used the movie camera to capture ethnographic data. However, as Ruby admits (1980:11), there is no evidence for Boas's direct involvement in the Bali study, other than a suggestion to study gesture (Mead 1977:212).

### **Parameters of the Fieldwork**

Mead and Bateson arrived in Bali in March 1936 for a two-year stay.<sup>6</sup> By all accounts it was the most successful period of fieldwork for either of them. Balinese culture was rich, complex, and beautiful. The recently married couple found that their interests and skills were perfectly balanced, and so over their stay they generated a prodigious amount of data—including about 25,000 stills and 22,000 feet of film.

Their first two months were spent in orientation, in the artists' colony of Oeboed.<sup>7</sup> Here they worked on their Balinese. Although they both used the language in the field, Bateson made a special study of classical Balinese. Neither learned Dutch, the principal scholarly language of the region (Mead 1972:232). In fact, all of their research evinces a marked nonverbal bias (cf. Mead 1939), one quite amenable to a study of gesture and interpersonal relations, recorded photographically.

In June of 1936 they moved to Bajoeng Gede, a small village in the mountains. Here, away from the heavy Indic influence of the southern plains, and in a village slowed down by a widespread goiter condition, they made their most extensive records. In this village they worked continuously for a year, and intermittently for another eight months. In November 1936 they began to establish other camps, where for short stays they could review different strata of Balinese life.

In March of 1938, feeling the need for comparative material, they returned to Bateson's former field site among the Iatmul on the Sepik River in New Guinea. Here over eight months they shot about 8,000 stills and 11,000 feet of film, searching for material that could match their Balinese data. Finally, in February and March of 1939, they returned to Bali for six weeks, in order to fill in missing behavioral records and to continue their longitudinal record of child development.

### **The Team**

This research was very much a result of collaborative, team effort. Not only did Mead and Bateson work together, but they were assisted by several Euroamericans and Balinese (Belo 1970; Boon 1986). Bali in the 1930s was a cultural paradise for disenchanting Westerners, one especially attractive to artists. The leader of this colony, with whom Mead and Bateson stayed for their first two months, was Walter Spies. Spies, a German painter and musician, was then writing a book on Balinese dance and drama with the Englishwoman Beryl de Zoete. His views of the culture became the foundation for the understandings of Bateson and Mead. As Boon points out (1977:186–189), while this crowd, including Bate-

son and Mead, felt they were witnessing the swan song of a dying civilization, their presence actually sparked a cultural revival.

Most important to Mead and Bateson were Jane Belo and her musician husband, Colin McPhee. Belo, who had known Mead at Columbia University, combined an interest in the arts with research on Balinese culture and personality. McPhee, a modernist composer, did the definitive research on Balinese music. Two others who assisted were Katharine Mershon and Claire Holt. Mershon, a dancer and stage director from California, and her husband Jack, a dancer and photographer, lived on the Balinese coast for the decade of the thirties. Holt, like many of this community, was multitalented. Interested in both sculpture and dance, she had also done some archaeology on Java and Bali.

Significantly, virtually every member of this community was a skilled photographer, and both Belo and McPhee made movies. In fact, photography was largely responsible for drawing these artists to Bali. The lush images by the German Gregor Krause had attracted the painter Miguel Covarrubias, whose work, in turn, stimulated many of the others.

The core team consisted of Bateson and Mead, working mostly in their mountain village, Belo living in a plains peasant village, and Mershon, reporting on her coastal village. Each group worked closely with a Balinese interpreter-secretary. I Made Kaler proved to be an especially valuable assistant to Bateson and Mead. His language facility in Malay and English, in addition to his native Balinese, was combined with sharp observational skills. Although each group worked more or less independently, at times they would converge for the recording of a special event, such as a large cremation or temple festival, planned for weeks in advance.

### **Field Methods and Recording**

Perhaps more significant than their ethnographic findings *per se* were the new methods of field recording devised by Bateson and Mead. These methods were made necessary by the vast scale of their work. They had to find some way to document thousands of still images, thousands of feet of film, and a vast collection of artifacts, with written records extending over two years.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, they needed a way to coordinate the work of many separate investigators.

Drawing upon her experiments among the Arapesh, Mead came up with a system of "running field notes," essentially a chronological narrative of observations (for a sample, see Mead and Macgregor 1951:195–197). The basic model was a theatrical or film script, and in fact, the team soon came to call these notes "scenarios." Contextual information included the day of observation (and of write-up), a summary title of the action, a complete list of Balinese present, the kind of photography used (cine or still, with identifying numbers), and the general cultural themes or behaviors exhibited. Then came the ethnographic record proper. Along the left edge was a running time note (measured against synchronized watches), and on the right the actual descriptions, with notes on the involvement of the ethnographer. Each bit of photography was noted in this record, with

its place in the ongoing social action, as well as the photographer's relative position.

The running field notes were supplemented with a daily diary in which were recorded all the different kinds of activities in the field: photography, events observed, births and deaths, illnesses, letters and visits, etc. Although parts of this system of record keeping were present from the start, it was not until 12 May 1936 that the scenario method was begun, and not all these categories were noted in all notes.

Bateson took the principal photographic record,<sup>9</sup> both still and motion (supplemented by Belo's pictures), while Mead kept verbal records which documented them. In fact Mead acted as a kind of director, alerting Bateson to particularly interesting behavior to be filmed, behavior which he tended to lose track of with his eye to the viewfinder. Integrated with this were the records of I Made Kaler: transcriptions of the Balinese conversations and other native texts and lists of kin relations between the participants (Figure 1). Native visual documents—in the form of paintings and carvings—were also viewed as essential parts of the ethnographic record.

Native perspectives were even applied directly to the photographic record. Anticipating currently popular reflexive methodologies, they used a hand-powered projector to show films to their subjects. The Balinese viewing the films were



**Figure 1**  
**An Ethnographic Interview.** Bateson and Mead's Balinese secretary, I Made Kaler, takes notes during Mead's talk with Nang Karma and his son, I Gata. Bajoeng Gede, Bali; 1937; Gregory Bateson, photographer.

able to comment on “whether or not they believed that a trance dancer was ‘in trance’ ” (Mead 1975:8, cf. Belo 1960:vi, 192), and in July 1936 they filmed several carvers watching films of themselves.<sup>10</sup> This use of what has been called the “film elicitation” technique (Krebs 1975) supplemented their predominantly nonverbal methods.

### Selectivity and the Photographic Record

Bateson and Mead were not the first anthropologists to use the camera in the field. In fact, each had taken pictures on earlier trips. But their Bali work was among the first uses of photography in anthropology as a *primary* recording device, and not merely as illustration.

One afternoon early in their research, after a normal 45-minute session of recording parent-child interaction, they realized that they had taken three of the seventy-five rolls of film meant to last for two years (Figure 2). Deciding that the results justified the expansion from their already heavy use of photography, they sent for more film and equipment (Mead 1972:234).

In writing about their project Mead and Bateson were sensitive to charges of subjectivity. As Bateson claimed: “We tried to shoot what happened normally and spontaneously, rather than to decide upon the norms and then get Balinese to go through these behaviors in suitable lighting. We treated the cameras in the field as recording instruments, not as devices for illustrating our theses” (Bateson and Mead 1942:49).

A number of procedures were used to lessen the intrusion of the camera in natural behavior. First, with the vast quantity of shots taken and footage exposed, they claimed that it was very hard for their subjects to remain camera-conscious after the first dozen or so shots. Second, they “never asked to take pictures, but just took them as a matter of routine, wearing or carrying the two cameras day in and day out, so that the photographer himself ceased to be camera conscious.” Third, they “habitually directed attention to [their] photographing of babies, and the parents overlooked the fact that they were included in the pictures.” And finally, they “occasionally used an angular view finder for shots when the subject might be expected to dislike being photographed at that particular time” (Bateson and Mead 1942:49).

In his field notebook Bateson devised a system of abbreviations indicating the state of the subject: if the photographer did or did not pose the subject (some pictures were posed, as Bateson admitted [1942:49]), if the subject was or was not conscious that his photo was being taken, and if the subject was or was not conscious of the moment of the taking itself. There were also notations for the scale or probable distance of subject from the camera, as well as of the publishable quality of the image.

However, in many cases they did create the *context* in which the notes and photos were taken. Mead often asked for children to act in a certain way—crawl, for example (Mead and Macgregor 1951:197), and in several of the films (e.g., *Childhood Rivalry*) children can be seen playing with dolls and other toys intro-



**Figure 2**

**A Girl's Tantrum.** "This picture, in 1936, gave us the first clue for the formulation that the Balinese mother avoids adequate response to the climaxes of her child's anger and love" (Bateson and Mead 1942:163). Men Karma and her daughter, I Gati; Ba-joeng Gede, Bali; 31 July 1936; Gregory Bateson, photographer. *Balinese Character*: plate 54, fig. 2.



duced in order to provoke a reaction. The most notable instance of this “arrangement” was for their film of trance dances, usually performed at night, but staged during the day for the camera. The bulk of the footage that went into *Trance and Dance* was filmed at a commissioned performance on 16 December 1937, Mead’s 36th birthday (cf. Belo 1960:159–169; Figure 3). Bateson and Mead justified their payment for such performances by citing the normal Balinese practice of cultural patronage.



**Figure 3**

**The Witch Dances. A scene from the Tjalonarang, or Rangda and Barong play, presented in *Trance and Dance in Bali*. Pagoetan, Bali; 16 December 1937; Gregory Bateson, photographer. *Balinese Character*: plate 55, fig. 5.**

Although one may find important clues in their field notes, nowhere in their publications did they consider the effect of the artists and tourists on what they were recording (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Bruner 1985). Again, the most interesting example concerns their film of trance. The particular ritual they filmed was not an ancient form, but had been created during the period of their fieldwork (Belo 1960:97–98). In 1936 a group of Balinese had combined the Rangda or Witch play (Tjalonarang) with the Barong and kris-dance play, which was then popularized with tourists through the efforts of Walter Spies and his friends (Belo 1960:124–125).

Even more interesting was the influence of the anthropologists. As reported by Bateson,

We had seen women dance with krisses at temple festivals at night and had observed that their dancing, though nominally the same as that of the men, was fundamentally different (cf. Pl. 57). We wanted to get a motion-picture record of the women's dancing, and therefore suggested to the dancing club of Pagoetan, in 1937, that they should include in their performance some women with krisses. This they did without any hesitation, but by 1939 the women were an established part of the performance. [Bateson and Mead 1942:167; cf. Belo 1960:103, 155–159; Figure 4]<sup>11</sup>

There was also selection on a technical basis. Because movie film was limited and expensive the pair “reserved the motion-picture camera for the more active and interesting moments,” intending their complete visual record to be made up of both types of image (Bateson and Mead 1942:50). Consequently the book of still photographs was not fully representative of their observations.

Finally, there were, of course, selections from all possible ethnographic subjects. They acknowledged an interest in familial relationships and ceremonialism, but within this they tried to be as inclusive and random as possible (1942:50). Moreover, Mead and Bateson intended their work to be coordinated with that of others in their team. As Mead admitted in a letter to Belo, “We always supinely counted on the existence of that film [on Daily Life] you know instead of doing daily life for ourselves.”<sup>12</sup>

### **The Finished Product: Books and Films**

Whatever the selective status of their field recording, there can be no question that their final results—two books, seven films, and several essays—certainly were. Upon their return Bateson and Mead worked intensively at the analysis and publication of their data.<sup>13</sup> Just as their research had been cooperative, so was their analysis; many psychiatrists, sociologists, and others examined their visual materials, offering theoretical insights. The outbreak of the Second World War prevented them from fully working up their material, but Bateson and Mead were able to publish in 1942 *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis*.

“Selection of data must occur in any scientific recording and exposition,” wrote Bateson, “but it is important that the principles of selection be stated” (1942:50). And Bateson proceeded to describe how they went about composing



**Figure 4**

**Women Enter With Krisses.** By the time this scene from *Trance and Dance in Bali* was photographed in 1939, women were an accepted part in this village's presentations of the dance, though the custom had been first suggested by Bateson and Mead in 1937. Pagoetan, Bali; 8 February 1939; Gregory Bateson, photographer. *Balinese Character*: plate 56, fig. 8.

their monograph. With the help of Claire Holt and others, they viewed all 25,000 photos in order to select the final 759, which were grouped into 100 plates. As time was limited they ended up taking most of their final illustrations from the first three-quarters of their corpus, with later ones selected to make special points not present in the earlier group.

Following an essay on "Balinese Character" by Mead, and Bateson's notes on the selection of photos, come the 100 plates, each containing from four to twelve pictures and each facing a page of captions, credited to Bateson. The plates were grouped into ten sections: Introductory, Spatial Orientation and Levels, Learning, Integration and Disintegration of the Body, Orifices of the Body, Autocosmic Play, Parents and Children, Siblings, Stages of Child Development, and *Rites de Passage*. The culture-and-personality focus should be apparent.

Mead and Bateson intended an interplay between the photographs and the text. "Each single photograph may be regarded as almost purely objective, but

juxtaposition of two different or contrasting photographs is already a step toward scientific generalization. . . . The introductory statement on each plate provides, in many cases, an extreme of generality, whereas the detailed captions contain a blending of objective description and scientific generalization' (1942:53).

While acknowledging that they were using the photos to illustrate a general theoretical interpretation of Bali,<sup>14</sup> Bateson and Mead strove to allow alternative viewpoints:

There would be some photographs making one half of a psychological generalization, and others making a converse or obverse point. In these cases, we have tried to arrange the photographs so that most of the plate is occupied with the most typical aspect, while a statement of the obverse is given by one or two photographs at the bottom . . . of the plate. . . . In other cases, it has seemed worth-while to devote two plates to the contrasting aspects of the same generalization. . . . [1942:51]<sup>15</sup>

Mead and Bateson each worked on their own presentations of their Balinese data. During his time at the Museum of Modern Art Bateson prepared an exhibition on Bali (employing their carvings, paintings, still photos, as well as a short, general film), which opened at the Museum in 1943, traveling to other museums over the next year. In 1947 Mead returned to the Balinese research in a group analysis of child development, coauthored with Frances C. Macgregor and finally published in 1951 as *Growth and Culture: A Photographic Study of Balinese Childhood*.

Bateson and Mead began to order and analyze their films as soon as they returned to New York. Within a year they had selected certain footage as particularly illustrative of the theoretical points they wished to make. Throughout the 1940s they used these informally edited versions in lectures to students and the general public, resulting in precursors for the final films.<sup>16</sup> Although Bateson had used these films in his teaching at Harvard (1947–48), by 1950, when Mead began editing the films for public distribution, he had lost interest.

Mead worked with film editor Josef Bohmer in the final preparation of six 10- to 20-minute films made from their field footage. Forming a series called "Character Formation in Different Cultures," they were: *Bathing Babies in Three Cultures*, *Karba's First Years*, *First Days in the Life of a New Guinea Baby*, and *Trance and Dance in Bali* (all released in late 1951), *A Balinese Family* (late 1952), and *Childhood Rivalry in Bali and New Guinea* (early 1953). Although all six were photographed by Bateson, Mead was the editor, scriptwriter, and narrator for these films, as well as for a seventh released in 1979: *Learning to Dance in Bali*.<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately Mead left few indications of the principles of selection behind the edited films. Quite aware of the distinction between research field footage and edited films for public presentation, she felt each had its place. All the films were edited to portray a definite theoretical interpretation of the material, perhaps the first films in anthropology to do so. Two of the Bali films are chronologically ordered—*Trance and Dance* and *Karba's First Years* (by event and by life history, respectively), while the others are all comparative in some way. The images

might have served to illustrate a number of theoretical points, but Mead (with Bateson in the 1940s) chose to arrange them according to issues of culture and personality.

Though Mead intended their publications to supplement these films, she never prepared a detailed film guide explaining how and why the films were made. As it is not apparent from the final product, a viewer could not know that *Trance and Dance* was composed of footage from two separate events, similar trances from the village of Pagoetan shot on 16 December 1937 and 8 February 1939. The film also includes footage shot by Belo, particularly that in slow motion.<sup>18</sup> This practice, called “editing for continuity,” is quite common in ethnographic film (Heider 1976:66–68), but must be borne in mind when attempting to use the film as a document of native behavior. Moreover, one must remember that this 20-minute film is only a selection from a ceremony that usually lasts several hours (the performance commissioned by Bateson and Mead lasted three-and-a-half hours). It is easy to slip into the belief that the film *is* the ritual.

In the latter decades of their lives Mead and Bateson continued to build on their Bali experiences. Mead encouraged colleagues and students such as Theodore Schwartz, Paul Byers, Ken Heyman, Asen Balikci, Alan Lomax, and Allison Jablonko to use visual media in ethnography. She spread her views on visual anthropology through teaching at Columbia and in several programmatic articles. Unlike his former partner, Bateson was less inclined to propagandize for the use of photography in anthropology. However, he continued to use film in his research in psychiatry and animal communication (Lipset 1982). Though both looked back at their Balinese work with special regard, Mead and Bateson, at one of their last meetings, expressed divergent opinions on the role of the camera in anthropology (Bateson and Mead 1976).

### Conclusion: “From Intuition to Analysis”

The recent controversy over Mead’s first fieldwork in Samoa has served to raise again the problem of objectivity in ethnography. Both Bateson and Mead opposed what they saw as an overly positivistic conception of anthropological science.

Like that of her mentor, Franz Boas, Mead’s anthropology was predicated upon the race to record unique cultural material, subject to inevitable change. Cameras and other recording devices are so valuable because they can “provide us with material that can be repeatedly reanalyzed with finer tools and developing theories” (1975:10). Like all recorded field material, the photograph could be shared among researchers, as Mead did in writing her book on Balinese childhood, achieving an intersubjective status, if not an objective one.

Both Bateson and Mead advocated what their daughter, Mary Catherine Bateson, has called “disciplined subjectivity” (1984:163). Research involving human subjects attains objectivity not by ignoring the role of the observer, but by explicitly considering it as part of the investigation. In *Naven* Bateson continually called attention to how and why he thought what he did about the Iatmul. As Mead vividly put the matter,

There is no such thing as an unbiased report upon any social situation. . . . It is comparable to a color-blind man reporting on a sunset. All of our recent endeavors in the social sciences have been to remove bias, to make the recording so impersonal and thereby meaningless that neither emotion nor scientific significance remained. Actually in matters of ethos, the surest and most perfect instrument of understanding is our own emotional response, provided that we can make a disciplined use of it. [1968:15–16]

Despite these basic attitudes, which now find resonance in contemporary anthropology (cf. Marcus and Fischer 1986), both maintained opposing ambiguities in their thought. Both had strong inclinations toward objective data. In *Naven* Bateson rooted his study in observable behavior, avoiding native intentions as derived from testimony and texts (cf. Marcus 1985). Toward the end of her life Mead often maintained that the camera could be used to avoid observer bias—essentially by taking long, middle-distance shots, presented with minimal editing (cf. Mead 1975:9–10). While Bateson gradually retreated from empiricism, Mead seems to have accentuated her faith in it, though neither resolved these intellectual tensions before they died.

In a lecture on Mead's work in Bali, Hildred Geertz (1983) called attention to the moment when Mead and Bateson felt that they had "got the culture." It was that afternoon when they used up so many rolls of film, and hypothesized that among the Balinese arousal is followed by frustration, resulting in a gradual lack of emotional climax. They spent the rest of their time trying to document this insight. This moment came on 31 July 1936, four months after their arrival, and after just two months of living in their mountain village.

Both Bateson and Mead approached cultural data through a focus on pattern, discernible even in a small sample (Lipset 1985). Hoping to find in Bali their hypothesized fourth psychological type, they were alerted to certain patterns by Spies and Belo. Feeling they had discovered such structures, they spent the rest of their fieldwork documenting their perceptions. Even at the time they were aware of the problem of selectivity, making strenuous efforts to obtain as wide a sample of Balinese culture as they could.<sup>19</sup>

Mary Catherine Bateson has characterized this sequence from insight to documentation (cf. Mead 1969) as "one in which subsequent attention has been shaped by a moment of recognition. It is justified by the conviction finally carried by the evidence collected," but she adds, "another fieldworker might focus attention at some other point and come up with a different emphasis" (1984:166).

Indeed they might. Since Mead and Bateson, Clifford and Hildred Geertz, James Boon, J. Stephen Lansing, and other anthropologists have seen Balinese culture in a different light. This should not surprise us. What is noteworthy about the Bateson-Mead corpus on Bali is not that it is biased, but that the biases are so well recorded. On the page illustrating the pivotal photographs (plate 54, pictures 1 and 2) the authors state the significance of these pictures in developing their approach. Bateson and Mead both knew that their finished books and films advocated a particular interpretation.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, they always intended that their voluminous field materials would one day be accessible (as they now are)

for future researchers to examine, to form the basis for alternative interpretations.<sup>21</sup>

As Sol Worth wrote in an essay considering Mead's place in visual anthropology, "Film is not a copy of the world out there but someone's statement about the world" (1980:20). What he had learned from Mead was that anthropologists' images were also statements about and not copies of the world. The reason the photographs and films of Bateson and Mead are usable ethnographic records, he thought, is that "they were taken in ways which allowed them to be analyzed so as to illuminate patterns observed by scientists who knew what they were looking for" (1980:17). Of course, those who know what they are looking for usually find it, but Worth's point was that it is naive to assume that "ethnographic truth" could come without a critical analysis, or, in other words, a *disciplined* subjectivity.

In their Balinese research Bateson and Mead worked on a large scale. It was massive (extending over two years, with thousands of pictures and feet of film), collaborative (Mead and Bateson, as well as their team), comparative (intra-Bali, among several regions and castes, and extra-Bali, including New Guinea), and intermedia (verbal and visual, still and motion picture, plus a range of native artifacts and texts). Bateson and Mead's work was ahead of its time, but circumstances left much analysis undone or unpublished. The fact that neither was a full-time teacher undoubtedly blunted the recognition their work demanded. The Balinese work of Bateson and Mead was like a vividly colored view of a sunset. We can know the sunset all the better because, from their records, we know the acuity of their vision and the distortion of their lenses.

### Notes

*Acknowledgments.* This essay originated in a paper prepared in 1976. A revised version was presented in May 1985 at the Conference on Visual Communication, held at the Annenberg School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania. I would like to thank the following for information and comments that have been incorporated in this and earlier versions: Mary Catherine Bateson, James Boon, Edward Bruner, Hildred Geertz, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Patrick Loughney, Jay Ruby, Shari Segel, Wendy Shay, George Stocking, Mary Wolfskill. I also wish to acknowledge the Department of Anthropology of New York University for their assistance in screening the films. All manuscript material and still photographs reproduced are from the Margaret Mead Papers and South Pacific Ethnographic Archives, held in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress. The original film footage is preserved in the Motion Picture Division of the Library. I would like to thank the Institute of Intercultural Studies for allowing me to consult and reproduce this material. All references to manuscript material cite the box location used by the Library of Congress.

<sup>1</sup>Other topics that could be profitably explored are the substantive relation of their visual record to their Balinese ethnography, or their activity in and attitudes toward a visual anthropology, both before and after Bali.

<sup>2</sup>This section is based on several of Mead's accounts (cf. note 6) and the prefield files (N 5 and 6).

<sup>3</sup>M. Mead, Application to SSRC, 13 January 1936. Pre-Field Preparations, N 6.

<sup>4</sup>M. Mead to Mrs. Beatrice Bateson, 6 April 1936. Balinese Field Trip, General Correspondence, N 5.

<sup>5</sup>G. Bateson, [Proposal for Rockefeller Foundation], 20 September 1935. Preparations for the Bali Trip, N 6.

<sup>6</sup>For reviews of their Balinese fieldwork, cf. Mead 1972:223–240, 1977:153–238; Howard 1984:180–210; Lipset 1982:149–159, as well as their actual ethnographies—Bateson and Mead 1942 and Mead and Macgregor 1951.

<sup>7</sup>Following Mead's own policy, for purposes of historical consistency Balinese names have been given here in their former, Dutch orthography, rather than their current, Indonesian, forms.

<sup>8</sup>For an excellent and indispensable review of their field documentation, cf. the statement prepared by Mead upon their departure from Bali for New Guinea, enclosed with the letter to Clark Wissler, 22 March 1938. Bali Field Trip, General Correspondence, N 5.

<sup>9</sup>Note on the technical aspects: All of their images were in black and white—the stills taken with a 35 mm Leica camera, mostly with a 50 mm lens, supplemented with 35, 73, and 200 mm lenses, and the films made with a 16 mm Movikon, with a hand-winder. Most of the film appears to have been shot at 16 frames per second. There was no means for recording sound. Bateson developed the stills himself, while the films were processed in Java.

<sup>10</sup>Roll 22, in the Library of Congress.

<sup>11</sup>This was a situation of mutual cultural creativity. Mead claims that it was the Balinese impresario (possibly out of a desire to please the Europeans) who substituted “young beautiful women for the withered old women” who usually performed at night (1972:231).

<sup>12</sup>M. Mead to J. Belo, 3 October 1941. Teaching—Sarah Lawrence, Correspondence, J 52.

<sup>13</sup>In the fall of 1941 Mead offered an innovative course at Sarah Lawrence College, dedicated to the “demonstration of the use of visual materials” in the study of culture and personality. In this methodological course she considered the various ways in which photographs, films, native art, and texts differed in their ability to present ethnographic information (J 52).

<sup>14</sup>Responding to the review of Lois Murphy and Gardner Murphy (1943), Bateson wrote: “It's difficult to define the edge between “records” and “illustrations.” The photographs here shown are in general *not* the evidence on which the analysis was based. They are a selection from our records of which the photograph collection is only a part. . . . None of this material is of a sort to handle statistically—but it *is* the evidence on which the analysis is based.” G. Bateson to L. and G. Murphy, 16 May 1943. Balinese Character, Correspondence, I 22.

<sup>15</sup>For examples of plates with contradictory material Bateson lists pls. 22, 27, and 45; while for contrasting plates he gives pls. 6 and 7, 45 and 98.

<sup>16</sup>In fact, for her 1941 course Mead had already selected material that would later form *Trance and Dance*, *Bathing Babies*, and *Karba's First Years*.



<sup>17</sup>The New York University Film Library distributes all seven films.

<sup>18</sup>The identification in the scrolling title is quite ambiguous. Mead writes there that “this story, which has many versions, was given this way in the village of Pagoetan in 1937–1939.” One could easily assume that this was the general *kind* of performance given during the term of their fieldwork, not that the footage was shot over this span. Neither Bateson or Mead called much attention to this use of multiple events, but they did discuss it clearly when combining images of these two trance dances in *Balinese Character* (1942:164). Mead later acknowledged, though only in a brief caption, the combined editing in the film (1970:pl. VI). Contrary to Lipset’s statement (1982:151), echoed by Howard (1984:191, 194), none of the footage used in *Trance and Dance* was shot during their first months in Oeboed, despite the fact that they did film the Rangda-Barong and kris dances during this time.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Bateson and Mead (1942:xiii–xv) and Mead’s summary of their Balinese documentation, cited in note 8.

<sup>20</sup>However, as M. C. Bateson admits, Mead’s work could sometimes have “benefited from another layer of self-consciousness and self-criticism” (1984:172). Boon (1985) also calls attention to Mead’s tendency to deductiveness and premature closure. In her defense, one could acknowledge that if she herself was not as self-aware as she might have been, her biases are amply recorded in her field notes and publications.

<sup>21</sup>Among those who used their Balinese visual materials during their lifetime were A. Gessell, F. Ilg, M. Deren in the 1940s, and R. Birdwhistell, P. Ekman, B. Thompson and O. Werner in the 1960s. All were interested primarily in psychology and nonverbal communication. Unfortunately, it should be noted that all this study has left much of the material with gaps and misattributions (P. Loughney, personal communication). As Sorenson has noted (1967:445), despite her interests in preservation, Mead, too, was “plagued with the lack of adequate archiving facilities and a research film method which would preserve her original film from the disorganization which results from the use of professional film laboratories, editors, and equipment for the production of the needed demonstrative or documentary film.”

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