

From Documentation to Representation: Recovering the Films of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson

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Although the seven films made by Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, based on footage shot in Bali and New Guinea during 1936–39, are identified as a landmark in various histories of ethnographic film, these films have been the subject of remarkably little analysis in the anthropological literature. In contrast, their photographic work has received much more extended commentary. Making a close reading of the films in their final edited form, this article aims to recover this aspect of Mead and Bateson's work from its relative neglect. We consider the circumstances under which the films were made, the theoretical ideas that informed them, and the methods employed in shooting and editing. Notwithstanding recent skepticism about both the theoretical ideas and the quality of the research on which Mead and Bateson's work in Bali was based, as well as the naiveté of some of the filmmaking ideas found in the films themselves, when considered as a group, they continue to be interesting examples of a particular transitional phase in the history of ethnographic film.

The films based on footage shot during the fieldwork done by Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson in Bali and New Guinea during 1936–39 are almost always mentioned in historical accounts of ethnographic film, usually being identified as the most important examples of the genre between the work of the early 20th-century pioneers and that of the filmmakers who came to prominence in the 1950s, such as Jean Rouch, John Marshall and Robert Gardner. One of Mead and Bateson's films, *Trance and Dance in Bali*, is one of only eight "ethnographic" films selected for preservation in the U.S. Library of Congress [Durlington and Ruby 2011: 205]. Although the ethnographic status of some of the films in that collection is debatable, the inclusion of *Trance and Dance* is still a significant indicator of its seeming importance.¹ And yet, despite their landmark status, the Mead and Bateson films have received very little detailed commentary or analysis in the anthropological literature. In comparison, their photographic work has

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received more extensive commentary, particularly *Balinese Character*, a book published seventy years ago but still unrivaled in its scale and its ambition to present an anthropological analysis through the medium of photographs.

The first lengthy discussion of these films appears to be an article published by Ira Jacknis in 1988. In this article, which remains a valuable source of reference, Jacknis considers their photographic work and their film work as they themselves did, that is, as merely different aspects of a systematic methodology based on the use of visual media as recording instruments. Jacknis suggests that “in many ways” Mead and Bateson “began the field of visual anthropology” [1988: 160]. Although some specialists in the history of anthropological photography might contest this assertion, a strong case could be made that it is correct insofar as filmmaking is concerned. While for predecessors such as Alfred Haddon, Baldwin Spencer or Franz Boas, filmmaking was merely one peripheral strategy, it was absolutely central to Mead and Bateson’s fieldwork methodology.

In total, they worked together on the production of seven films; all relatively short, between 10 and 21 mins. long, and none of them edited until the early 1950s. In addition to *Trance and Dance*, which concerns a theatrical performance, there are five films that focus on parent–child relationships and another about learning to dance in Bali (not edited until 1978, the year of Mead’s death). Altogether they have a total running time of barely 2 hours, thus only a fraction of the 24 hours of original footage. Some 16 hours of this material were shot in Bali and another 8 hours in New Guinea amongst the Iatmul of the Sepik region, where Bateson had previously done the fieldwork that was the basis for his celebrated monograph, *Naven* [Bateson 1980].²

The footage was almost entirely shot by Bateson, with some brief though significant help from Jane Belo, a painter, amateur filmmaker and *de facto* anthropologist who was one of their circle of friends in Bali.³ Bateson however took no part in the editing of the films, since by the early 1950s he and Mead had gone their separate ways, both professionally and personally. Nevertheless each film does begin with a series of title cards in which Bateson’s name figures prominently as one of the joint authors: immediately after the main title each film is said to have been “produced by Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead,” though later it is stated that they were “written and narrated” by Mead. Given that my ultimate concern in this article will be with the final edited films for which Mead alone was editorially responsible, I have intentionally inverted the conventional practice of referring to the makers of these films with Bateson’s name first. Not only was Mead the final author of the edited films but it is also arguable, as I shall discuss here, that both the original methodology on which they were based and the theoretical inspiration lying behind them came predominantly from Mead.

Although their photographic work has received considerable attention since Jacknis’s ground-breaking article, Mead and Bateson’s film work continues to be relatively neglected in the anthropological literature. With the signal exceptions of the tantalizingly brief commentaries by David MacDougall [1997: 290–292] and by Faye Ginsburg in an online publication [2003], Mead and Bateson’s films have generally only been mentioned in passing in anthropological publications. In fact, in recent years they have been given rather more attention by authors from film studies, postcolonial studies or intellectual history backgrounds.⁴

My immediate aim then is to recover the Mead and Bateson films in two rather different senses: first, to recover them in the sense of drawing them out of their relative obscurity, and secondly, to cover them again, as Jacknis and a number of other authors have done, but in a degree of detail and in a manner that is, to the best of my knowledge, unprecedented. In the first part of the article I will consider the general circumstances—personal and political, practical and intellectual—under which the films were made, before moving on to the production methods that Mead and Bateson employed in the field. However, these preliminary sections are intended merely as a platform from which to engage in the main purpose of this article, namely, an analysis of the relationship between, on the one hand, the specific textual features of the various films in their final edited form and, on the other, the concatenation of theoretical ideas, subject matters, production methods, fieldwork circumstances and, eventually, editorial strategies from which these films emerged. In the light of this analysis I will then conclude with some remarks on the place of their work in the history of ethnographic film. I shall be arguing that, taken together as a corpus of films, their work represents an interesting transitional moment: while some of the films look back to the period of the 1930s and before, when film was conceived of primarily as a means of supposedly objective scientific documentation, others anticipate, almost despite the intentions of their authors, the event-based forms of documentary representation, structured by a real or constructed chronological narrative, that began to emerge in ethnographic filmmaking later in the 1950s.

Although I shall discuss the ethnographic content of the films and how this is presented too, I should stress immediately that I am not a specialist on either Bali or New Guinea, and would not claim to be able to reach any authoritative assessment of the content of the films. I will however report the views of those who do have regional expertise. As we shall see, as with other aspects of Mead's work of late, attitudes towards the projects that she carried out with Bateson, particularly in Bali, have become quite skeptical in recent years. Yet whatever troubling questions may now be raised about their broader project, I would argue that Mead and Bateson's films continue to be worthy of our attention as exemplars of a particular phase in the evolution of ethnographic film. This perhaps represents a third sense in which this article could be considered a form of recovery, and in this case, a recovery of the films from the aura of doubt and skepticism surrounding Mead and Bateson's broader study of Balinese character.

SEX, CHARACTER AND CULTURE

Mead and Bateson's fieldwork in Bali took place during two visits, one from March 1936 for two years, the other six weeks in early 1939 [Figure 1]. For comparative purposes they also spent 8 months in the latter part of 1938 in New Guinea with the Iatmul. As soon as they arrived in Bali—by special dispensation on Nyepi, the Balinese New Year's Day when silence is supposed to reign and no one should move—they were received into the extensive community of expatriate artists, performers and intellectuals on the island. This community had been developing since the late 1920s, attracted by Bali's burgeoning reputation in



Figure 1 Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, taken by C. H. Waddington, probably in Ireland in the summer of 1934. (Mead 1972: 221; by kind permission of Professor Caroline Humphrey)

international European art circles as a “paradise island” on account of its cultural complexity, physical beauty and temperate climate, not to mention the then-prevailing liberal sexual mores, at least amongst Europeans, and the political stability seemingly guaranteed by the Dutch colonial presence [Pollmann 1990].

Those of this community with whom Mead and Bateson were closest were the German painter and cultural impresario Walter Spies, the dancers Beryl de Zoete, who was English, and Katherine Mershon from California, as well as the Canadian modernist composer and musicologist Colin McPhee who was then studying *gamelan* music. However, from an intellectual point of view, undoubtedly their most important interlocutor was Jane Belo. Since arriving in Bali with her husband McPhee in 1931, Jane Belo had been actively studying ceremonial life, trance performances and children’s art. Although without formal qualifications as an anthropologist, she had published a number of articles about

Bali in anthropological journals. Ten years previously, she and Mead had briefly been contemporaries at Barnard, a liberal arts college that is part of Columbia University, and probably they first encountered one another then. However, meeting Belo again in 1934, when the latter was visiting New York, was a decisive factor in contributing to Mead's determination to work in Bali herself [Jacknis 1988: 162–163; Metraux 1968].⁵

Many of these expatriates became engaged in some way in Mead and Bateson's work, particularly in relation to their films. However, while most of the expatriates lived in the lowlands or around the coast of southern Bali, Mead and Bateson chose as their fieldwork base Bayung Gedé, a poor mountain village in the center of Bali. Here, they reasoned, they would find a more authentically traditional version of Balinese culture, one relatively free of the influences from Java, India and China that over centuries had impacted on the culture of the lowlands, not to speak of more modern European colonial influences [Bateson and Mead 1942: xiv–xv].⁶

The overarching intellectual agenda for the project was developed primarily by Mead, though it also incorporated ideas that Bateson had been developing while among the Iatmul.⁷ Central to this agenda was a cluster of theoretical ideas that Mead had been working on since she starting her research in Samoa in the 1920s, and which she had later developed in conjunction with her close friend and colleague Ruth Benedict. These theoretical concerns turned centrally on the relationship between biological sex and culture, and were strongly informed by the ideas of certain leading psychologists of the day. Mead and Benedict saw the relationship between sex and culture as being mediated through a number of other variables including, on the one hand, aggregations of innate psychological predispositions which, following the psychologist William MacDougall, they referred to as "temperament" and, on the other, certain learned attributes of both individuals and groups, which they variously termed "character" or "personality." Furthermore they sought to link these learned attributes to cultural norms and institutions, and particularly, following Erik Erikson, to child-rearing practices. Having explored the inter-relationship between these variables among a number of Polynesian and Melanesian peoples, Mead developed a four-part typology, inspired by C. G. Jung's fourfold scheme for grouping human psychological types, that purported to show how they were combined and recombined in a limited number of ways across these societies. Although she had yet to set foot on the island, she hypothesized that Bali could represent a particular configuration of these variables that she had not encountered before [Mead 1972: 255–257; Sullivan 2004].

Mead was still developing this typology in 1932–33 while doing fieldwork, together with her second husband, the New Zealander, Reo Fortune, amongst the Chambri of the Sepik River region. (The Chambri were often referred to as the 'Tchambuli' in the literature of the time, including in Mead's own work.) It was around this time too that she met and became attracted to Bateson, who was a colleague of Fortune's at the University of Cambridge and who happened to be working with the neighboring Iatmul. As Mead would later relate in her autobiography, the three scholars would meet up in Fortune and Mead's small fieldwork bungalow where, inside a narrow cell of mosquito nets, they would

have long theoretical debates about the relationship between sex, character and culture. These took on a great intensity, not only because of the complicated emotional web that linked the three but also because they had with them the as-yet-unpublished manuscript of Ruth Benedict's seminal work, *Patterns of Culture*, a book [1934] that would go on to lay out the foundations for the Culture and Personality theoretical paradigm. While Mead and Bateson were very enthusiastic about the manuscript, Fortune was not, feeling that it misinterpreted his prior work among the Dobu [Pollmann 1990: 22–23]. The end result of this extraordinary field symposium *à trois* was that Mead left Fortune in favor of Bateson and after a three-year interlude, during which Bateson returned to Cambridge to write *Naven*, and Mead went to New York to write up her work on yet another Melanesian group, the Arapesh, they joined up again as husband and wife to begin their research on Bali [Figure 1].

TRANCE AND SCHIZOPHRENIA

Significantly, at least for our purposes, Mead formed her pre-fieldwork ideas about the Balinese partly on the basis of film footage of ceremonial performers in trance shot by Jane Belo [Jacknis 1988: 160; Pollmann 1990: 24]. In the 1930s, and indeed for at least two decades after that, the dominant tendency in academic research was to interpret any form of trance or spirit possession, even when in entirely traditional ceremonial contexts, in terms of some form of individual psychiatric disorder. It was in the spirit of the times then that Mead proposed that the transformed state of consciousness of Balinese dancers in trance might be a manifestation of the same sort of dissociative behavior that had been identified by North American psychiatrists of the time as characteristic of those suffering from schizophrenia or, as it was then known, "dementia praecox." In line with her Eriksonian theoretical inclinations, Mead further suggested that the trance into which Balinese dancers fell during ceremonial performances represented the cultural institutionalization of a particular form of schizoid personality encouraged by child-rearing practices. It was on these grounds that she applied for funding to the Committee for Research in Dementia Praecox, a recently set-up body that dispensed liberal amounts of money. There is some doubt as to how much this Committee funded her actual field research, but its support is certainly extensively acknowledged both in the films and in the photographic monographs that came out of it [Lakoff 1996: 12, 14 n.2; Sullivan 2004: 203; 2007: 66 n.10].

Once arrived in Bayung Gedé, Mead and Bateson began their intensive documentation of parent-child interactions, in which photography and film played a central role, as we shall see. They had barely been there two months when, one afternoon in July 1936, they suddenly felt that they had "got the culture" (as related by Hildred Geertz and cited by Ira Jacknis [1988: 172]): for on that day, as on many previous occasions, they had observed—and photographed—Balinese mothers stimulating their children so that they moved towards some sort of emotional climax, only for the mothers to prevent them from reaching that climax. As a result of this practice, Mead and Bateson argued, Balinese children learnt progressively to control their emotional responses so as

to avoid any sort of climax. They became emotionally withdrawn and unresponsive, resulting, as Mead would later put it, in “a culture in which the ordinary adjustment of the individual approximates in form the sort of maladjustment which, in our own cultural setting we call schizoid” [Bateson and Mead 1942: xvi].

Although the inhibition of emotional climaxes was perhaps their key finding, they also identified a number of other features of child-rearing practice that they believed impacted in a negative fashion on what they called Balinese “character.” One was the systematic use of fear as a means of obliging children to conform to socially acceptable norms. Unless they did conform to these, the children were threatened that either bad spirits or foreigners such as Europeans or Chinese would come and “get” them. In order to induce this fear Balinese mothers would themselves often pretend to be afraid. A similar combination of theatricality and emotional manipulation was detected in the frequent use of teasing to encourage children to control their emotions. This too caused emotional repression, since children sought to protect themselves from the anxiety caused by the teasing. It was particularly the mothers who were seen to treat their children in this way. Indeed, in general, Balinese mothers come in for the most severe criticism from Mead and Bateson for being “narcissistic,” more interested in themselves than in their children. By contrast, they reported that fathers were generally much more indulgent and would step into the breach when a child had been emotionally rejected by its mother [Bateson and Mead 1942: 31–33, 47–48].

In their view these child-rearing practices accounted not just for certain key aspects of Balinese character but for the tenor of Balinese social life generally. They acknowledged that harmony and tranquility were promoted through highly ritualized adherence to precisely formulated norms that pervaded every sphere of life, from social relations and religious ceremonial to eating habits and the movements of the body. But these seemingly positive attributes of Balinese life, they suggested, were based on emotional suppression and a fear of disorder instilled in childhood [Bateson and Mead 1942: 6–11]. They also believed that child–parent relationships, and the schizoid tendencies associated with them, were played out in formal ceremonial activities, notably in the Tjalonarang, a theatrical performance based on a story about the struggle between two characters, Rangda the Witch, whom they identified with the Balinese mother, and Barong the Dragon, whom they identified with the father [Bateson and Mead 1942: 34–39]. It was for this reason that they made the Tjalonarang the subject of their most celebrated film, *Trance and Dance in Bali*.

Even before their ideas had been committed to print, there were those who challenged Mead and Bateson’s theories about Balinese character. Not least amongst these was their friend and collaborator, Jane Belo. Although she worked with them professionally, and usually thanked them generously in the prefaces to her own publications, she was renowned as a person of independent mind. In two monographs published in the post-war period (1949, 1960) though evidently mostly written in the 1930s, she actively, though politely, contested both their views about the schizoid nature of Balinese character and their associated interpretation of Balinese trance performances. In 1938, Belo reported, she had invited a leading Dutch psychiatrist, P. M. van Wullften Palthe to come to Bali and study trance experience. He had examined Balinese trance dancers before, during and after

their trance episodes, and had concluded that, if anything, their behavior had more in common with hysteria than schizophrenia, but that given that outside their trance experience they were perfectly normal, he would not have classed them clinically as “hysterics” either [Belo 1949: 12; 1960: 5–10; Pollmann 1990: 34].

In an argument that was remarkably progressive for its time, Belo herself proposed that Balinese trance should not be interpreted as evidence of individual abnormality but rather should be understood in local Balinese terms as one of several ways in which the gods might enter the human realm. Nor did she agree with Mead and Bateson’s entirely negative portrayal of Balinese mothers and their association with Rangda the Witch. Although Belo conceded that Balinese mothers could use fear in dealing with their children, she claimed that they were also appreciated for many more positive qualities, including their “loving, beautiful, food-giving aspect” [1949: 38].

However, apart from the politely dissenting voice of Belo, Mead and Bateson’s ideas about the culture and character of the Balinese initially enjoyed widespread acceptance in anthropology. In 1966, for example, Clifford Geertz, a leading specialist on Bali among the following generation of anthropologists, incorporated their ideas about the lack of climax in Balinese culture into an influential early paper about Balinese concepts of time [Geertz 1966: 60–61]. Even as late as 1988, in the article alluded to already, Ira Jacknis is essentially respectful of Mead and Bateson’s work, even when duly noting that subsequent anthropologists had seen Balinese culture “in a different light” [Jacknis 1988: 172–173].

But more recently Mead and Bateson’s work on Bali has come in for the most devastating criticism, and from a broad variety of perspectives. Not only has the wider Personality and Culture theoretical paradigm that they were working in been largely discredited but their own particular findings have been criticized on numerous grounds. It has been claimed that their conclusions are based on an inadequate understanding of schizophrenia and an unwarranted extrapolation from the features of an individual condition to a collective cultural phenomenon. It has also been claimed that their findings are simply empirically false, since neither within the confines of mother–child interaction nor in wider Balinese society is it true that climaxes, emotional or otherwise, are generally suppressed. Their view that Balinese mothers did not attend to their children has been described as “patently absurd” [Jensen and Suryani 1992: *passim*].

From an ethnographic point of view they have been criticized for allowing themselves to be taken in by the surface calm of Balinese culture and for paying too little attention to the underlying emotional turmoil. They have also been criticized for ignoring the way in which the colonial context of their enquiry impacted upon their relationships with their subjects and hence on the nature of the results obtained. Their command of the Balinese language has been questioned, and this in turn has been used to explain their lack of respect for indigenous explanations and their over-reliance on purely visual data [Pollmann 1990; Wikan 1990].

While some of these criticisms appear to be better founded than others, and their validity might be the subject of contention amongst Bali specialists, it is nevertheless the case that the general tendency of the present-day literature is to dismiss Mead and Bateson’s ideas about the schizoid nature of Balinese

character as no longer persuasive, to put it mildly. To the non-specialist, given the elaborate nature of Balinese ritual and theatrical performances, or the subtle and drawn-out complexities of *gamelan* orchestral music, some of Mead and Bateson's observations about the Balinese—such as Mead's comment that "most Balinese" were less capable of carrying out three consecutive verbal orders than a North American 3-year-old, or Bateson's observation that the Balinese were incapable of following a story or a speech to its conclusion—now seem utterly preposterous [Bateson and Mead 1942: 15; Wikan 1990: 306 n.6]. It is comments like these that suggest that their postcolonial critics may indeed be right in asserting that although Mead and Bateson were amongst the most progressive cosmopolitan intellectuals of their day they remained burdened by colonialist attitudes [e.g., Rony 2006].

But even if one does not accept the full range of criticisms of their project, nor point a finger of blame at them for being creatures of their time, the general skepticism that currently attends their project as a whole cannot but influence the way in which we now "read" their films. However, before going on to analyze these we should first consider the methodological processes through which they came to be made.

USING CAMERAS AS RECORDING INSTRUMENTS

None of the footage on which the Mead–Bateson films were based was shot in order to make a documentary, whether in the sense of that term in the 1930s or in the sense that it is used today. In the 1930s the primary exemplars of ethnographic documentary as a genre, at least in the English-speaking world, were the works of Robert Flaherty, notably *Nanook of the North* [1922], *Moana* [1926] and *Man of Aran* [1934]. Apart from the fact that they were about "other cultures" and thus "ethnographic" according to the criteria of the day, the defining characteristic of all these films was that they had been constructed around a narrative that followed the activities of a small group of central characters over a given period. Even though these films were not made in accordance with a formal script, they nevertheless involved a considerable degree of direction on the part of Flaherty, albeit in regular consultation with the films' subjects. They also involved substantial elements of fictionalization and romanticism, so much so indeed that despite their iconic status in the history of the ethnographic film genre it is debatable whether they would be classed as documentaries when judged by present-day criteria.

Today one expects the material presented in a documentary to involve a much higher degree of spontaneity on the part of the subjects and, more generally, a greater correspondence to everyday reality than was the case in the 1930s. But it remains a defining feature of documentary as a filmic genre that it consists not merely in the direct copying of the world but rather involves the manipulation of the material filmed in order, primarily, to generate a structured narrative through which the filmmaker can make some kind of comment upon the world, while at the same time engaging the audience. Moreover, this process of manipulation of the material filmed—or "creative treatment," as it was

famously described by John Grierson, a leading figure of documentary film in the 1920s and 1930s—takes place not only after the fact, in the editing suite. Even though not working with a formal script, any experienced documentarist, even when on location, is likely to have in mind the requirements of the eventual narrative structure and will shoot material accordingly.⁸

All this is a very far cry from the methodology that Bateson describes in an introductory chapter of *Balinese Character*:

We tried to use the still and the moving-picture cameras to get a record of Balinese behavior, and this is a very different matter from the preparation of 'documentary' film or photographs. We tried to shoot what happened normally and spontaneously, rather than to decide upon norms and then get the 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]

However, notwithstanding this later claim to have used the cameras only as recording instruments, in his original grant application for the project Bateson had also envisaged using his 16 mm camera (a spring-wound Zeiss-Ikon Movikon that was later much appreciated by the Second World War German combat cinematographers) to shoot a series of what he called "scenarios." By this he meant short plays, performed by the Balinese themselves, structured around plots based on traditional myths, or preferably on incidents from the lives of the individuals who would be the principal subjects of their research. The subjects themselves would be encouraged to take part in the formulation of these "scenarios" [Sullivan 1999: 5; 2007: 61].

This is intriguingly reminiscent of Flaherty's use of participatory methods, but Bateson is quite uncompromising in stating that he had no intention to produce "a European day dream in a native setting"—which could well be some sort of side-swipe at Flaherty, whose work he would undoubtedly have known. Also like Flaherty, Bateson proposed to screen the material back to the subjects, though here too there was a difference in the sense that the purpose of these feedback screenings would not have been to decide what to film next, as had been Flaherty's aim, but rather to identify those areas of Balinese life where major points of psychological tension might lie and which should therefore become the focus of deeper investigation.

But once in the field Bateson appears to have abandoned the more ambitiously participatory aspects of his proposal: the only element that he appears to have retained was the strategy of screening material back to the subjects. Using a hand-cranked projector he and Mead used such "feedback" screenings to ask their informants whether they thought that the trance dancers whom they had filmed were really in trance. In July 1936 he took this one step further, filming a group of woodcarvers watching some footage of themselves at work, thus giving us perhaps the first example of such a doubly "reflexive" strategy [Jacknis 1988: 165].⁹

Far from being the result of any kind of participatory methodology, much of Bateson's material arose rather from a method of detached observation based on the "running field notes" that Mead had developed during her earlier fieldwork in Melanesia. This consisted of a continuous textual tracking of parent-child



Figure 2 The “running field notes” method in action. I Madé Kalér (center) and Mead (far right) take notes as Bateson takes the photograph. (Mead/Bateson collection, Library of Congress)

interactions written by Mead, barely looking down at her notebook as she did so, while Bateson recorded these interactions on film or, more usually, for cost reasons, in the form of sequential photographs, using a newly developed power-drive on a Leica still camera. Meanwhile their multilingual Balinese assistant, I Madé Kalér, would take his own notes and act generally as their interpreter [Figure 2]. This team typically worked in intensive bursts of around 45 minutes, with their various activities being logged by Mead with a stopwatch so that they could be coordinated later when the notes were written up [Jacknis 1988: 163–164].¹⁰

For the most part they aimed to carry out these observations without influencing what was going on. Bateson would attempt to shoot without drawing attention to himself, sometimes going so far as to use a right-angle viewfinder if he suspected that the subject would object [Bateson and Mead 1942: 49]. This practice would now be regarded by most ethnographic filmmakers as ethically unsound but, given the ideology associated with detached scientific observation in that era, Bateson is unlikely to have felt any qualms about it. However, on certain occasions he would ask the subjects to pose or perform something specifically for the camera. Similarly, though Mead also mostly engaged in detached observation, she would sometimes aim to provoke particular forms of behavior by giving children dolls to hold, by throwing balls to them, and the like.

All this material would then be logged in a series of three columns, one for the time log, the textual material in a second, and the moments when visual images were taken, whether photographs or film, in the third column. Further information such as the date, the names of all the Balinese present and general themes raised by the interaction, would also be added. Here an element of Bateson’s

original proposal resurfaces since they used the term “scenarios” to refer to these columnated notes. In addition to all this, using his own series of abbreviations, Bateson would jot down further details in his notebook, such as whether an image had been posed, whether the subject was aware of the camera, and whether it was likely to be publishable [Jacknis 1988: 163–165; Mead 1972: 269–270].

Remarkably, though—unlike earlier ethnographic field researchers, going as far back as Haddon, Spencer and Pösch at the turn of the century—Mead and Bateson did not try to make any sound recordings. There are a number of possible explanations for this, but one of these may have been that by the 1930s, the quality of sound recordings that could be achieved with a mechanical wax-cylinder phonograph, such as the earlier anthropologist filmmakers had used, was no longer seen as adequate, while the more modern equipment for sound recording, based on cutting grooves into a shellac-based disk, was dependent on a source of electricity and would therefore have been too complex and expensive to operate in the field.¹¹

EDITING THE FILMS

According to Jacknis [1988: 170], within a year of returning from the field in 1939, both Bateson and Mead had begun to support public presentations of their theoretical arguments with informally edited selections from their film footage. Indeed, Bateson was still using this material as late as 1947–48 when teaching at Harvard. But by 1950, the year of their divorce, when Mead began to edit the material for wider distribution, Bateson had lost interest and took no further part in the post-production process.

All but one of the seven films that finally emerged from the original footage were presented as part of a series, “Character Formation in Different Cultures.” Although Mead oversaw the editing and in this sense was the primary intellectual author of the films, the rolling credits at the beginning of each film in the Character Formation series show that in practical terms the editor was a certain Josef Bohmer. At the time, Bohmer was a filmmaker connected with the Department of Child Study at Vassar College, a liberal arts college in upstate New York, where Mead had held a visiting lecturing post immediately after her return from Bali [Stone 1952: 230].

Vassar, along with the American Museum of Natural History, Mead’s long-time employer, and the University of Cambridge, to which Bateson was attached, are all credited in the introductory rolling credits with “support.”¹² So too is the “33rd Degree Scottish Rite, North Masonic Jurisdiction.” This seemingly bizarre credit is in fact very apposite, being a reference to a wealthy Freemasons’ organization that was a leading supporter in the United States of research into mental disorders at that time. Amongst the beneficiaries of its largesse was the Committee for Research in Dementia Praecox, one of the principal sponsors of the publication of Mead and Bateson’s project, even if not of the field project itself.

Five of the films in the Character Formation series concern early childhood, with particular emphasis on mother–child interaction. Two of these—*A Balinese Family* [released in 1951, 20 mins.] and *Karba’s First Years* [1952, 20 mins.]—are set in Bali, while a third, *First Days in the Life of a New Guinea Baby* [1952, 15 mins.]

was shot amongst the Iatmul with whom Bateson had done earlier fieldwork. Two later films are comparative in nature, drawing extensively on material already presented in the first three films: *Childhood Rivalry* [1954, 16 mins.] compares material from Bali and the Iatmul, while *Bathing Babies in Three Cultures* [also 1954, 12 mins.] adds North America into the mix with material from two different decades, the 1930s and the 1940s.¹³ The only film in the Character Formation series that does not directly concern parent–child interaction is *Trance and Dance in Bali* [1952, 22 mins.]. This is about the Tjalonarang theatrical performance which, as noted above, Mead and Bateson saw as a metaphorical enactment of parent–child relationships. The essentially academic conception of the series is signaled by the further reading listed at the end of each film—usually some combination of *Balinese Character* or *Naven* with one or more of Mead’s later books, such as *Male and Female* [1949] and *Growth and Culture* [1951], a joint work with the documentary photographer Frances Macgregor.

The only Mead–Bateson film that does not form part of the Character Formation series is the very late work, *Learning to Dance in Bali* [1978, 10 mins.]. It was completed only a few months before Mead died, apparently as some kind of afterthought, for it is separated by a gap of almost 25 years from the last film in the Character Formation series. This film deals only passingly with parent–child relationships: although it does show children and young adults learning to dance, they are mostly being taught by a professional dancer rather than by their parents. It also had a different editor, Richard Washburn, and there are some stylistic differences in the presentation of the film. Although, as in all the other films, it is held together by Mead’s voice-over commentary, she performs this in a more ponderous, hesitant voice, sometimes repeating herself, a troubling sign of her increasing infirmity. The film also ends with a “bibliography,” though this time it includes *Traditional Balinese Culture*, edited by Jane Belo, and *Dance and Drama in Bali*, by Beryl de Zoete and Walter Spies.¹⁴

VIEWING THE MEAD–BATESON FILMS TODAY

As Jacknis [1988: 170] notes, Mead left few indications of the principles governing her selection of material for editing. However, it is clear from viewing the films themselves that while all of them (with the exception of *Learning to Dance*) were intended to provide visual evidence to support theoretical views about the relationship between child-rearing practices and character that Mead enunciates either in the voice-over commentary or in *Balinese Character*, there are some films in which these theoretical intentions are subsumed to some degree to the need to follow the intrinsic chronology of a series of events.

Most of the footage in the two early films, *A Balinese Family* [1951] and *Karba’s First Years* [1952] clearly derives from material shot as part of the method of “running field notes.” The first follows parent–child interactions in a family by the name of Karma over a three-year period. The second is very similar except that it was shot over two years only and concentrates on the interactions between just one small boy called Karba and his parents. We see the Karma children and Karba being variously breast-fed, bathed, learning to walk with the aid of a rail, and frequently being teased by their mothers. We see the Karma boy being taught

to play the xylophone and Karba being taught to dance by their respective fathers. We see both the youngest Karma girl and Karba going through the feast that traditionally takes place 210 days after birth, with the attendance of a priest in the case of Karba, since all his siblings had died and his father wanted to ensure special protection for him.

As one would expect, given the detached observation that was an integral feature of the “running field notes” method, the cinematography is generally disengaged in both these films. The subjects are often shot at an oblique angle, poorly framed and from a distant vantage-point. From time to time Mead throws a ball to the children or offers them a doll. At one point a mother throws some marbles at the researcher’s request to see what her child will do. At another, Mead suspends a pencil above Karba’s head to see if he will grasp it, and if so, with which hand; while at yet another point he is offered a piece of cake by someone off-screen, probably Mead. All this gives the impression that one is watching some kind of open-air behavioral psychology experiment [Figure 3].

The general sense of objectification is further enhanced by Mead’s commentary, which although quite lively and accomplished in delivery is heavily burdened with theoretical purpose. She loses no opportunity to point out the emotional tribulations endured by Balinese children. If one only had these films to go by, one could be forgiven for believing that Balinese children’s lives consist of nothing but one long series of emotional rejections by their mother, to which they respond with jealous tantrums when a sibling appears to be getting preferential treatment. The joy and playfulness of children’s lives, usually present even in the direst of circumstances, is almost entirely missing from these films. But to have allowed these qualities to have entered the films would have undermined Mead’s theoretical agenda which was to demonstrate, by visual means, that Balinese child-rearing practices, particularly those of Balinese mothers, produced the supposedly schizoid Balinese character. Both films thus end with Mead lamenting in stentorian tones that although the children whose lives the films have followed may grow up to be adults who are “gay and attractive” they are doomed forever to remain “essentially unresponsive.”¹⁵

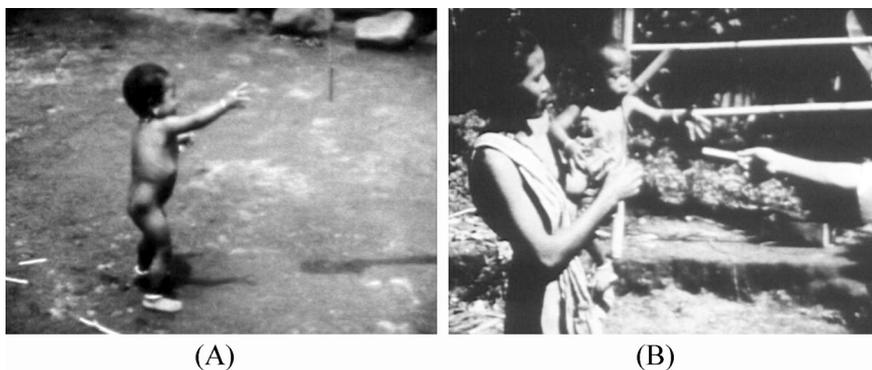


Figure 3 Karba reaches out for a pencil (A) and later for a cake (B). (Frame grabs from Karba’s First Years)

But to the present-day viewer the attempt to prove these theoretical points on the visual evidence presented in the films is far from convincing. A good example is to be found in Mead's various attempts to provide evidence of the tendency of Balinese mothers to inhibit their children from achieving an emotional climax, either by preventing such a climax directly or by responding to emotional occasions with "detachment." In the Karba film she seeks to make the point on two separate occasions. On the second of these, about halfway through the film, we see Karba's mother giving him a bath in a pottery bowl on a stand. Mother and child are clearly having a great deal of fun. Even Mead is prepared to offer the rather backhanded compliment in the commentary that "in Bali, a bath is more a matter of pleasure than of hygiene." The scene ends with the mother cradling Karba in her arms and smiling at him. But as he enjoys himself sucking his big toe, she looks up and her smile fades. For Mead, this constitutes another example of an emotional moment in Karba's life being choked off as the mother "stares into vacancy," as she puts it. But to this viewer what that stare seems to be is the mother returning the gaze of the camera in an inquisitive manner, though before she fully does so, the image fades to black [Figure 4].

The shooting style of *First Days in the Life of a New Guinea Baby* [1952] is altogether different from that of the first two films. In part this may have been due to the fact that Bateson, the cameraperson, would have had a much closer relationship with the subjects, since he had previously worked with the Iatmul for several years, whereas he was a relative newcomer to his Balinese subjects.



Figure 4 Karba's mother—"staring into vacancy" or returning the gaze of the camera? (Frame grab from Karba's First Years)

But it can also be attributed to the fact that his shooting was not part of the “running field notes” method of detached observation as described above. Instead, as is explained in the opening title card, this film came about unexpectedly when Mead was suddenly advised that a young woman had just given birth in a clump of trees on the outskirts of the village where the couple were staying. They rushed out with the camera, arriving at the spot only “three or four minutes” after the birth had taken place.

Although the camera is initially respectful, keeping its distance as the new mother is washed by an older woman, it is soon in the midst of the action, providing a close shot of the newborn baby lying on the ground in dappled shade. This intimacy continues for the remainder of the film, as the baby begins to breast-feed, first with a wet-nurse and then with its own mother. We also see the baby being covered in a protective clay and then later washed. The mother heats a leaf to squeeze out the matter in the birth cord. She warms her hands with the leaf and then attempts to straighten the baby’s nose in order to give it “the desired aquiline shape,” as Mead puts it in the commentary. At some points the shots of mother and child are extremely close: there is nothing to compare to this degree of intimacy in the Balinese parent-child films [Figure 5].

Again there is an objectifying voice-over commentary by Mead, also laden with an ulterior purpose; but this time, it is often to speak approvingly of Iatmul child-rearing practices. As a proponent of on-demand breast-feeding in the United States, Mead is particularly concerned to draw attention to the vigor with which the new-born baby sucks only 20 minutes after birth. “He is not forced to wait 24 hours, as many of our babies are,” she observes. Moreover, as Faye Ginsburg [2003: 2] puts it in a memorable phrase, throughout this film, “the



Figure 5 The new-born Iatmul baby prepares to suckle. (Frame grab from *First Days in the Life of a New Guinea Baby*)

poetry is fighting with the science,” that is, the power of the images contends with the voice-over commentary to gain the viewer’s attention. Sometimes the poetry even comes out on top: not only is Mead’s commentary less intrusive than in the Balinese films but there are even certain passages in the film in which the viewer is simply allowed to observe in silence the assured competence with which the Iatmul mother handles her child.

The two comparative films, both released in 1954, draw in large measure upon material already presented in the three earlier films. *Childhood Rivalry* purports to show that the Balinese mother first foments sibling rivalry, only to suppress it, while the Iatmul mother valiantly reassures her children that she is concerned for them at all times, even when attending to another child. But again the use of visual evidence is contestable. For example, a comparison of ear-piercing ceremonies supposedly shows that while Iatmul children are concerned over the pain that their sibling is going through, Balinese children merely get sulky at the attention that their sibling is receiving. But in other films in the series we see plenty of examples of Balinese children, particularly girls, showing concern for their siblings, even to the extent of carrying their younger siblings around for a whole year in a sling.

In *Bathing Babies* the Balinese mother again comes in for criticism on the basis of debatable visual evidence. On account of her supposed “staring into vacancy” at the end of the scene in which she gives her son a bath, Karba’s mother’s behavior is contrasted negatively both with that of some Iatmul mothers shown brusquely sluicing down their children at the edge of a river and with two American mothers bathing their babies in a bathtub. These two latter scenes, one shot in the 1930s, the other in the 1940s, are contrasted internally as well. Mead asserts that the more relaxed manner of the American mother from the 1940s can be put down to the fact that she had been allowed to feed her baby not when the clock said she could but when “mother and baby together decided what was to be done” [Figure 6].

This clearly conformed to another of Mead’s ideas about best practice in child-rearing, but to the uncommitted viewer it is difficult to see any clear evidence from the film itself that the second American mother is more relaxed than the first. Indeed, if any differences between the two sequences do exist, they could perhaps be attributed to the babies, particularly since the 1930s baby is a boy and the 1940s baby is a girl.¹⁶ But Mead does not linger over such details, instead asserting confidently that although “scientific insights” may have led to improvements in ways of bringing up children, cultural patterns endure. She then concludes by declaring, grandly, that “In this simple act of bathing a child, we see how strong the cultural contrasts are between the playful, teasing but inattentive Balinese mother, the careful conscientious American mother and the casual, brisk, matter-of-fact New Guinea mother.”

Unsurprisingly perhaps, given that it was edited some 25 years later, *Learning to Dance in Bali* is different both in content and style from the films of the Character Formation series. It begins and ends with what are evidently two different sections of the same sequence of Mario, a renowned professional dance teacher of the era, who is shown performing the *kebyar*, a particularly difficult dance, in front of a *gamelan* orchestra. This divided-up sequence serves to frame a number



Figure 6 The “relaxed” 1940s American mother dries her baby girl after her bath. (Frame grab from *Bathing Babies in Three Cultures*)

of sequences of dance instruction. There is a brief reprise of the sequence from *Karba's First Years* in which Karba's father teaches him to dance, but mostly the film shows Mario instructing a variety of pupils: first Katherine Mershon's adopted Balinese son on a beach near her house, then an anonymous “regular pupil” in front of the orchestra [Figure 7]. Finally Mario instructs a young adult dancer from South India, one Navaraj, who in turn teaches Mario and his assistant some of the hand movements from his own tradition prior to giving a full demonstration in front of the orchestra.

The quality of the cinematography in this film is generally much higher and more engaged than in the Balinese child–parent films; which, as in the case of the New Guinea film, can be related to the fact that Bateson, as the cameraman, was mostly following an unfolding series of events rather than recording short passages of behavior on the basis of the “running field notes” method. But what most distinguishes this film from the earlier works, both in Bali and New Guinea, is the soundtrack. In the commentary Mead does not attempt to grind any theoretical axes but just provides names and contexts. However, by far the greatest difference is the music, which has clearly been superimposed at the editing stage. At the end of the film there is a credit to Gong Pangkung, a *gamelan* orchestra, as well as to a certain I Madé Bandem for “special music.” This latter credit may refer to a moment of chanting, partly in English, that occurs over the instruction sequence on the beach with Katherine Mershon's adopted son.

Yet although the music in this film was not recorded in sync it has clearly been edited in such a way as to provide a complement to the images. Not only does it provide continuity from one sequence to the next but it has been very carefully



Figure 7 The renowned dancer Mario instructs one of his “regular” pupils. (See *Balinese Character*, pl. 16.6, p. 86)

edited so as to support the action within particular sequences directly. Thus, for example, when the young Karba falls over in the midst of the sequence with his father, the music briefly pauses, and when the *gamelan* orchestra is having difficulty supporting the Indian dancer, Navaraj, because his dance style is so unfamiliar, the music is hesitant. This sophistication in the use of music to support particular points in the narrative of the film, plus the use of the same sequence to frame the film as a whole, gives it a certain aesthetic quality that the parent–child films lack.

VIEWING *TRANCE AND DANCE IN BALI*

But of all the films made by Mead and Bateson it is their film about the Tjalonarang theatrical performance that surely stands out as the most distinctive. In common with *First Days* and *Learning to Dance*, but in contrast to all the other films in the Character Formation series, *Trance and Dance* is not based on material shot in the detached observation mode of the “running field notes” method. Rather than being a series of isolated incidents held together loosely by an intermittent chronology, its subject is a complex event that unfolds systematically over a restricted period. Although Mead may have originally intended it to be a film of documentation similar to the others in the Character Formation series, it has certain qualities that clearly set it apart from the latter.

The Tjalonarang performance represented in *Trance and Dance* occurs on an open plaza in front of a temple. As explained in the lengthy introductory titles it involves a struggle between Rangda the Witch and Barong the King’s emissary. Rangda, performed by a man, is represented as a monstrous old woman with hairy legs, pendulous breasts, long fingernails and a terrifying mask. Very



(A)



(B)

Figure 8 The principal figures of the Tjalonarang: Rangda the Witch (A) and Barong the Dragon (B). (See *Balinese Character*, pl. 55.5 and 66.3, pp. 165 and 186)

significantly for Mead and Bateson, she carries an *anteng*, the name given to the sling in which Balinese women carry their babies. Barong, meanwhile, has the form of a Chinese dragon, played by two men, one representing his front legs and wearing a large mask, the other making up the body and the hind legs [Figure 8].

The play begins when Rangda, incensed at the King's refusal to marry her daughter, sends out her "disciples"—played by young girls, dancing in a highly formal classical Balinese manner—to spread plague across the land. The King's emissary, Barong, then sends a group of his accomplices, bearing long *kris* daggers, to attack Rangda; but she is able to repulse them easily by the sheer power of her personal presence and they fall to the ground, writhing in trance. They then look as if they might kill themselves with their daggers but they are prevented from coming to any harm by other performers, before being carried into the temple courtyard. Here they are revived by the priests accompanying the Barong character, who minister to them with incense and holy water.

For Mead and Bateson this theatrical performance represented a ceremonial enactment of the parent-child relationships that they had observed in everyday life. For them Rangda the Witch, "a figure both frightening and representative of fear itself," as Mead puts it in the film's commentary, represented Balinese motherhood: in rejecting the assault on her by Barong's accomplices she mirrored the everyday rejection by Balinese mothers of the emotional climaxes of their



Figure 9 *Repulsed by Rangda, the dancers fall to the floor in trance. Barong in the distance, extreme left of picture, seeks to revive them, assisted by a priest further to the right.* (See *Balinese Character*, pl. 56.7, p. 166)

children; similarly, in falling into trance, the dancers were mirroring the “dissociative” state into which Balinese children learnt to withdraw in order to protect themselves from maternal rejection [Figure 9]. The Chinese dragon, Barong, on the other hand, who provides comfort to the dancers, either directly or through his priests, they identified with the supposedly indulgent Balinese father.

Although there are certain indirect references to this interpretation in Mead’s voice-over commentary, it is not expounded in the film itself but rather in the analysis of the Tjalonarang in *Balinese Character* [Bateson and Mead 1942: 34–39, 164–189; also Lakoff 1996: 12]. As noted above, this interpretation was immediately contested by Jane Belo even before it had been published. Certainly, both Belo’s own later publications and the study of the Tjalonarang and Barong dances done by Beryl de Zoete and Walter Spies at the same time as Mead and Bateson were there, demonstrate unequivocally that whether or not one wants to ascribe any validity to the Mead–Bateson interpretation, there is certainly a good deal more going on in these performances than merely some pantomime of parent–child relationships [De Zoete and Spies 1973: 86–133].¹⁷

However, my concern here is not with the hermeneutics of the Tjalonarang as such but rather with the filmic representation of this event. The first point to make is that the performance shown in the film was far from being a traditional rite preserved from ancient times. As the introductory titles explain, it was shot not in Bayung Gedé, Mead and Bateson’s principal field site in the mountains, but in Pagutan, a village some distance away in the lowlands. The performers were members of a local theatrical troupe who had been “discovered” by their friend, the cultural impresario and painter, Walter Spies. Pagutan was a village

already much frequented by tourists and this troupe was quite used to putting on performances for them: Belo reports that sometimes they would stage three trance dances a week for expatriate visitors. Indeed, she claims that the particular performance given in the film, combining two previously independent plays about Rangda the Witch and Barong the Dragon, had been developed for these tourist audiences as recently as 1936 [Belo 1960: 98].

Moreover, although the filmed performance is presented as a single unitary event, in fact it is based on footage shot at two separate performances of the newly composite Rangda–Barong story, one of which took place in Dec. 1937 and the other in Feb. 1939. Most of the material in the film was shot during the 1937 performance, which was specifically commissioned and paid for by Bateson and Mead, and took place on the occasion of her birthday. It was also the case that the performances in the film were adjusted to fit their requirements in a number of pragmatic regards. Normally, such performances only took place at night while the scene in which the dancers threaten to stab Rangda, only to fall back in trance, usually involved only men. However, in putting the event on in the day-time so that it might be filmed, “the man who made the arrangements,” as Mead describes him, not only introduced women into the stabbing scene but instead of recruiting the “withered old women” who generally danced in other trance events at night, he arranged for this entirely new role to be played by beautiful young women, presumably because he thought they would look better for the film [Belo 1960: 150; Mead 1972: 269; see Figure 10 here].¹⁸

These beautiful young women complement the handsome young men shown in the film. But they too, according to Belo, again represented something of an innovation, since traditionally it would have been more experienced male



Figure 10 For the film, young women replaced the older women who normally danced at trance events. (See *Balinese Character*, pl. 56.8, p. 166)

dancers who performed on such occasions. Belo suggests that for the purposes of these performances commissioned by Europeans, the young men would have been preferred since they would have been “more comely in the role . . . dressed only in a strip of loincloth” [Belo 1960: 150]. Interestingly, by the time of the second shoot in 1939, this innovation involving mixed-gender dancing had become an established feature of the performance [Bateson and Mead 1942: 167; Jacknis 1988: 167–168].

In that it involves the presentation of two separate events as if they were one, *Trance and Dance* is significantly different in representational terms from all of the other films that make up the rest of the Character Formation series. In those films short passages of visual material are presented as supposedly objective empirical evidence in support of Mead’s voice-over commentary which, in effect, provides the principal narrative backbone of these films. By contrast, in *Trance and Dance*, the narrative backbone of the film is provided by a synthetic version of the Tjalonarang performance, constructed in the editing suite, while Mead’s voice-over is reduced to providing reactive commentary on the significance of this event as it unfolds over the course of the film.

There are certain stylistic features of the cinematography that mark this film as different too. The early part of the film documents the event in a very simple and limited manner, mainly from a point at some distance from the action. Only a small fraction of the play is presented and there is no coverage of the preparation or organization of the performance. There are no more than a couple of establishing shots of the orchestra right at the beginning of the film. There are also no direct shots of the audience, though given that at least one of the performances had been commissioned by the filmmakers it could be that there was no substantial audience. Indeed, in the background of some shots, one sees local people walking by, seemingly not at all interested in what is going on. At one point two men walk through the midst of the performance nonchalantly carrying a table or possibly a bed. It could be that the difficulty was that as this was a spectacle aimed at tourists, the audience would primarily have been made up of Europeans, and to have filmed them would have been conceptually impossible given the conventions of ethnographic filmmaking at the time.

But as the performance builds towards its climax the cinematography becomes progressively more engaged until, in the trance sequence itself, the camera is directly involved in the action, right in front of the dancers as they throw themselves back and forth, threatening to stab themselves, and again later, as they are carried into the temple courtyard [Figure 11]. This intimacy continues in the scene immediately following, as the priests seek to bring the dancers out of their trance state. Instead of looking down at the now-seated subjects, as is generally the norm in all the other films, the camera has been brought down to their eye level. From a purely cinematographic point of view these sequences are without doubt by far the most accomplished in the whole Mead–Bateson film canon. Some of the images are of an extraordinary quality, beautifully framed and executed. Significantly, at least some of this material was shot by Jane Belo, most notably the slow motion shots that are particularly prominent in the climactic moments of the trance scene, since Bateson, who was shooting simultaneously, had run out of film at this vital point [Rony 2006: 26 n.47].¹⁹



Figure 11 A man in trance is carried into the temple courtyard (A) and a woman is reluctant to emerge from her trance state (B). (Frame grabs from *Trance and Dance in Bali*)

However, what really differentiates *Trance and Dance* from the other films in the Character Formation series is the music. Despite the fact that it is somewhat smothered by Mead's explanatory commentary, this music plays a major role in the impact of the film on the viewer and yet works so subliminally that most of the academic authors who have written about the film do no more than refer to it in passing, if at all. We learn from the film credits at the beginning of the film that this music has been "arranged" by Colin McPhee, the modernist composer who was in Mead and Bateson's circle in Bali. It is not clear quite what "arranged" means in this context: it could mean that McPhee merely sound-edited the music, though as his own work often involved fusions of Western and Balinese music it could possibly have been made up of pieces of his own composition.

But even if he had only acted as a sound editor, as seems most likely, McPhee would not have been working with music recorded on location in Pagutan at the time of filming. For at that time, as he himself explains in his posthumously published book about Balinese music, there was no adequate field equipment for recording such elaborate music as that of the Balinese *gamelan* [McPhee 1966: xiv]. The music in the film would therefore have been recorded in a studio, probably in Bali itself, though maybe even elsewhere. What seems most likely is that the music was taken from a series of recordings that McPhee had in his personal possession and which were made by two German gramophone companies operating in Bali in 1928. McPhee describes purchasing these recordings in Den Pasar, the Balinese capital, in 1932, towards the end of his first visit to Bali [McPhee 1947: 71–72].²⁰

It would require a Balinese music specialist to identify the various passages of music on the soundtrack with any authority. But even to the untrained ear they are clearly of various kinds, with each passage being intended to encourage a different set of sentiments in the viewer and thereby contribute to the narrative arc of the film. Over the main title of the film and the lengthy introductory inter-titles the music is orchestral but also lively and fluent, as if to encourage the viewer to anticipate what is to come with a certain expectation. As the film itself begins

and we see the establishing shots of the orchestra (plainly out of sync, it has to be said), the formal dancing commences and the music becomes more sedate. It then gradually fades out under the preliminary scenes of the play and Mead's commenting voice becomes the only feature of the soundtrack.

However, when Rangda appears for the first time in her mask, about a quarter of the way into the film, the off-screen orchestra strikes up again, playing once more in a lively manner, though the melody is clearly different from that of the music over the opening titles. This music serves to reinforce a sense of the power of Rangda that Mead is then describing in the commentary. But when the Dragon's followers appear shortly afterwards, intent on stabbing Rangda, the music suddenly changes and becomes more dramatic. Now it consists of what sounds like a two-tone gong echoing repetitively over an insistent and rapid drum roll. This continues throughout the ensuing trance scenes, strongly enhancing the sense of hysteria communicated by the images of gyrating figures in trance.

The last quarter of the film is set in the temple courtyard where the dancers are being brought out of trance. It begins with an explanatory title and the orchestral music returns. This is both melodious and relatively slow, as if to calm the viewer as well as dancers. It gradually fades out to silence, but only to be replaced by an echoing female chanting voice emerging from a background of tinkling gongs. This comes in at the point at which a number of women are seen struggling to throw off their state of trance by immersing their heads in clouds of smoke emanating from the priests' incense braziers. This extraordinary music, mysterious and highly beguiling in its effect, is very different from any other music in the film. If any passage of music in the film was indeed created by McPhee rather than recorded locally in Bali, this would be it. Certainly, it seems likely that he has manipulated the original recording by introducing a reverberant echo into the chanting.

Finally, in the last passage of the film, as all the participants come out of trance, the *gamelan* orchestra returns once more, again playing in a melodious fashion, reinforcing the sense that normality has returned. As the actor who played Rangda finally comes out of trance, and then walks off with his paraphernalia, Mead concludes the commentary with a grandiloquent statement about how the Balinese will go on re-enacting this struggle between life and death for evermore. The music then terminates the film with a loud clash of gongs, as the title announcing The End comes up on the screen. However, Mead's academic orientation has clearly not been entirely overwhelmed by a more artistic film aesthetic, since this title also offers the viewer a bibliography of further reading.

THE MEAD–BATESON FILMS IN THE HISTORY OF ETHNOGRAPHIC FILM

Even though Mead and Bateson may not have set out with the specific intention of making a series of documentaries, in their final edited form all seven films could be classified, without major controversy, as being in the general category of documentary film on the grounds that in all cases the original footage has been manipulated for the purpose of producing a narrative structure. However, even though one might acknowledge that all are documentaries in this sense, there are

clearly some significant differences between them, particularly in relation to precisely how the structuring narrative relates to the original footage.

In this regard, the various films in the Mead–Bateson canon may be placed along a spectrum. At one end one can situate the parent–child interaction films based largely on material shot in association with the “running field notes” method. These films are heavily structured narratively by Mead’s voice-over commentary, the visual material merely providing support for the arguments she is seeking to make verbally, in the manner of an illustrated lecture. Minimal attention has been paid to the visual aesthetic qualities of the images, since that is not their primary function: their presence in the films is due to the fact that they offer confirmatory evidence for Mead’s propositions, not because they have any intrinsic aesthetic merit. Although the material may be presented in a broadly chronological manner in a number of these films, the periods to which they relate extend over a year or more and the chronological effect is diffuse: there is no strong sense of the sequence of events itself providing the driving force of the narrative. That comes rather from the intellectual coherence of the argument that Mead is making in the voice-over commentary.

However, there is one parent–child film to which these observations do not so readily apply. This is *First Days in the Life of a New Guinea Baby*. Significantly, it is the only parent–child film that was not based primarily on footage generated through the “running field notes” method. While in all the other parent–child interaction films the narrative structure is largely *extrinsic*, arising primarily from Mead’s voice-over, in *First Days* it is largely *intrinsic*. That is, in this film the narrative structure consists, in effect, of an abbreviated digest of the series of events that make up its subject matter. These events were clearly related to one another closely in real time and provide the principal driving impulse behind the narrative. Although Mead’s voice-over commentary is also extensive in *First Days*, it is more reactive to the unfolding events of the film than itself providing the structure. Sometimes it even falls silent as the structure of the event predominates. At the same time, the highly engaged camerawork of this film serves to reinforce the intrinsic, event-based, nature of the narrative. On these grounds *First Days* can be placed somewhat more towards the other end of the spectrum of films in the Mead–Bateson canon.

Further along this spectrum and at the opposite end from the parent–child films in the illustrated lecture mode would be *Trance and Dance in Bali*: here too Mead’s voice-over commentary is mostly reactive, assisting the development of the narrative rather than being constitutive of it. Moreover, in this case, as we have seen, the intrinsic narrative of the film, based on the unfolding of the Tjalonarang theatrical performance, is not merely of a digest of a series of events occurring in real time, as in *First Days*, but rather the amalgamation of two separate performances. This editorially fabricated intrinsic narrative is then supported by a musical sound-track which although ostensibly merely evocative of the music typically played on such occasions, was clearly edited carefully by Colin McPhee so as to reinforce the progressive unfolding of that narrative structure.

Finally, the late work, *Learning to Dance in Bali*, falls somewhere between the two poles of this hypothetical spectrum. In some ways it is cast in the same illustrated lecture mode as the majority of the parent–child films, with an extrinsic

narrative provided by Mead's voice-over commentary serving to link together a number of somewhat disparate sequences without any necessary chronological connection. But it also has features that might lead one to associate it with the films at the other end of the spectrum. Not only is Mead's overarching commentary much less dominant than in the illustrated-lecture films, prompting rather than leading the narrative unfolding of the film, but also, within each of the sequences showing different aspects of dance instruction in Bali, the material is structured around a series of events, each of which has its own intrinsic narrative. Meanwhile, the local music on the sound-track has been edited in such a way as to maintain the continuity between the various shots that make up each of these sequences and at the same time to influence the audience's appreciation of them.

It is in these terms then that the Mead–Bateson films, taken as a whole, can be seen as representing an interesting transitional phase in the development of ethnographic filmmaking. While the parent–child films in the illustrated-lecture mode look back to earlier attitudes concerning the use of film for ethnographic purposes, wherein the ciné-camera was conceived of as a scientific instrument supposedly capable of recording objective ethnographic data that could then later be used in support of a theoretical argument, *Trance and Dance* and, to a lesser extent, *First Days* and *Learning to Dance*, anticipate the development of the more event-based narratives that characterized ethnographic filmmaking in the later post-war period, as exemplified by such works as *Les Maîtres fous* [Rouch 1955], *The Hunters* [Marshall 1957] or *Dead Birds* [Gardner 1963]. As such, *Trance and Dance*, whatever its intrinsic strengths or weaknesses as an authoritative ethnographic account of a certain form of Balinese theatrical performance in the 1930s, represents a valuable historical artifact in itself and on these grounds alone, one could argue, deserves its place in the U.S. Library of Congress collection.

However, it is somewhat ironic that as a filmmaker Margaret Mead should be most remembered for *Trance and Dance in Bali*, since both the way in which it was shot and the way in which it was later edited are in direct conflict with her frequently stated ideals about the use of visual media in ethnographic research. For her, as outlined in the methodological statement from *Balinese Character* quoted above, the ideal was to use the ciné-camera as a recording instrument and in as objective a manner as possible, so that it could act as a control on human observer bias and thereby produce material that could later be used, even by third parties, as the basis for the elaboration of theoretical arguments. To that end Mead believed that when used for ethnographic purposes the ciné-camera should be placed in a single static position, on a tripod, and left there to take shots that were as long as technically possible, without any variation in framing or angle of view.²¹

In later life Bateson would completely reject the idea of setting up a camera on a static tripod to “grind” away, as he put it. In a celebrated exchange with Mead recorded in 1976, he declared that a “dead camera on top of a bloody tripod...sees nothing.” If the filmed material was to have any meaning, he argued, it should be shot in a creative manner, with the cameraperson moving around shooting material from a variety of angles, in accordance with what they thought relevant at that particular moment. Mead was alarmed that Bateson

should repudiate their earlier work in such a radical fashion and advocate instead "artistic" practices that would reduce what she saw as the scientific potential of the material recorded [Bateson and Mead 1977]. She preferred to think that technological advance could increase the ability of a camera mounted on a tripod to "see": she looked forward to a time when a camera with a 360° lens could be set up on a tripod in a single strategic location within any given human community and then set to run indefinitely without requiring any visible intervention by an operator. Only in this way, she claimed, would it be possible to preserve large "batches" of film material about communities undergoing rapid cultural change that would be of sufficient objectivity to be useful for future analysis in the light of yet-unknown theoretical frameworks [Rony 1996: 193].

Although the Balinese parent-child films may have been shot in a fashion that approximated to Mead's ideal (and Bateson even questioned whether this had in fact been the case in practice), *Trance and Dance* certainly was not. Although the camera remains on the fringes of the Tjalonarang at the start of the film and may even have been on a tripod, when the dancers go into trance at the height of the performance, it is right in the midst of the action, moving around with the dancers and adjusting its angle of view to the eye-line of the performers as they attempt to come out of trance. In cutting the film back in the editing suite, Mead herself must in effect have condoned the very "artistic" practices that at other times she condemned. Not only did she include the highly "artistic" shots that Bateson and Belo took of the trance dancers, sometimes even in slow motion, but she also used Colin McPhee's musical arrangements to enhance the narrative structure of the film, even though they were in all likelihood based on recordings made ten years prior to the shooting of the film and at a variety of different locations around Bali. Perhaps most significantly of all, she combined two performances of the same event, shot more than a year apart, and presented them as if they were one without making this clear in the presentation of the film.

Nor did Mead clarify a number of other important contextual factors that could be considered a limitation on the status of the film as an objective scientific document. These would include such matters as the fact that at least one of the performances was commissioned by Mead and Bateson themselves, that the play represented in the film was the result of the recent amalgamation of two separate plays so as to make such performances more attractive to audiences of European tourists, that for aesthetic effect the dancers chosen to dance for the film were younger than was normally the case in trance dancing, and that these dances normally took place at night but had to be filmed during the day because Bateson and Belo did not have the possibility of lighting the performances.

Underlying these contradictions between theory and practice in Mead's filmmaking is the long-running tension in the history of ethnographic filmmaking between the camera conceived as a means of objective scientific documentation and its use as a means of ethnographic representation involving a narrative structure and some degree of "creative treatment." Mead, like many others since, naïvely believed that the two functions could be reconciled with one another by the simple expedient of taking the material shot in a neutral, supposedly objective manner in the field and then using it for representational purposes later. But as the case of *Trance and Dance* demonstrates, the reconciliation of these

two functions is not quite so straightforward in actual practice. This tension between documentation and representation continues to reverberate in various forms through both the theory and practice of ethnographic filmmaking to this day.

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NOTES

1. The other films in the collection are *In the Land of the War Canoes* [1914/1972] by Edward Curtis; *Nanook of the North* [1922] and *Louisiana Story* [1948], both by Robert Flaherty; *The Hunters* [1957] by John Marshall; *Dead Birds* [1963] by Robert Gardner; and *The Drums of Winter* [1988] by Sarah Elder and Leonard Kamerling. Despite the iconic status of the films by Curtis and Flaherty as early examples of the genre of ethnographic film, it is debatable whether they can be considered “ethnographic” in a modern sense.
2. The time durations offered here for the footage that Bateson shot (22,600 ft. in Bali, 11,000 ft. in New Guinea) have been calculated on the assumption that he was shooting at 16 fps (frames per second), which according to Ira Jacknis “appears” to have been the case [1988: 174 n.9]. If Bateson had been shooting at the subsequently more conventional 24 fps, these durations would have been approximately 10 hours and 5 hours respectively. Even on this calculation, the edited films represent a relatively small fraction of the total footage.
3. Bateson also took all the photographs: 25,000 of them in Bali and a further 8,000 in New Guinea. Although this photographic work may be better known than the films, again only a small fraction has ever been published. The published images are mainly restricted to three volumes, all relating to the Balinese phase of the project. The most substantial is *Balinese Character*, which contains 759 photos. Less well-known is *Culture and Growth* [1951], which Mead published in collaboration with the documentary photographer Frances C. Macgregor and which contains 380 photos. Much more recently, a collection of 200 photos was published under the editorship of Gerald Sullivan [1999]. Even adding in the few additional images published here and there in the academic literature, the overall number of published photos therefore comes to no more than 1,500. Out of a possible total collection of 33,000, this represents less than 5 percent. In 1983, after Mead and Bateson had both died, a large quantity of their fieldwork materials, including notes and sound-recordings as well as all the visual media, was deposited in the U.S. Library of Congress archive. Here a prolonged process of inventoring and film preservation remains ongoing. See <http://www.interculturalstudies.org/film-preservation.html> (accessed January 7, 2013).
4. Authors from outside anthropology who have commented in detail on Mead and Bateson’s film or photographic work include Russell [1999: 99–106], Rony [1996, 2006] and Sullivan [1999, 2007]. Although the anthropologists Marc-Henri Piault [2000] and Fadwa El Guindi [2004] do discuss the Mead–Bateson films in their respective general surveys of ethnographic film, Piault does so very briefly, over three pages [2000: 119–121], while El Guindi does not so much discuss the films as provide a commentary on a celebrated exchange about cinematographic methods between

- Mead and Bateson that was recorded in 1976 [2004: 61–73; cf. Bateson and Mead 1977]. In a recent collection of articles on the history of visual anthropology, their photographic work is discussed recurrently, but the film work is mentioned only in passing (cf. Edwards [2011] with Durlington and Ruby [2011] in the same book).
5. Belo had a complicated personal life in Bali. She was the wife of McPhee and the lover of Spies, both of whom also had homosexual relationships with third parties. When the Dutch authorities finally cracked down on European homosexuals as the Second World War approached, Spies was interned as a German national, McPhee left the island, and Belo was interrogated. One of the reasons that Mead and Bateson returned to the island in 1939 was to try and help their friends who had been caught up in this process [Pollmann 1990: 2 n.4, 35 n.94].
 6. Pollmann [1990: 25] suggests that Mead and Bateson may have been influenced by a long-standing premise of Dutch scholarship that the mountain villages represented “the deepest layers of Balinese civilization.”
 7. Some authors have stressed the particular importance of Bateson’s contribution to the project as a whole, even if it was secondary [e.g., Sullivan 2007: 61].
 8. The literature on Flaherty as well as on what Grierson actually meant by “creative treatment” is abundant. For a particularly cogent summary, see Winston [1995].
 9. This material has never been released as a film, but Jacknis reports that it is to be found on Roll 22 at the Library of Congress. This example of filming subjects watching footage of themselves shot by the same filmmaker anticipates the work of Timothy Asch and his colleagues, also coincidentally in Bali, by more than 40 years [Connor, Asch and Asch 1986].
 10. When Bateson first saw Mead and Fortune at work amongst the Chambri in early 1933, he was rather shocked by their systematic data-gathering methods, which contrasted so markedly with his own very much more casual approach. As he later confided to his mother, “They bully and chivvy their informants and *harry* them till they don’t know whether they are on head or heels. But in the end I was converted and I am going to do some bullying too . . .” [cited in Grosskurth 1988: 46]. Mead for her part commented in her autobiography that she found Bateson “floundering” as far as field methodology was concerned, since his British training had not prepared him “for sustained, systematic observation of the minutiae of behavior” [Mead 1972: 242].
 11. An anonymous reviewer of this article made the interesting suggestion that perhaps the reason why Mead (and by association Bateson) did not make audio recordings was not so much technological as epistemological, given that generally in her field research Mead was much more of a “watcher” than a “listener.” As providing confirmatory evidence of this tendency, the reviewer cited the work of Dobrin and Bashkow [2006].
 12. Both Mead and Bateson were former students of pioneers of ethnographic filmmaking: Boas in the case of Mead, Haddon in the case of Bateson. But I know of no evidence that would suggest that either was directly encouraged by their former supervisors to use filmmaking as a fieldwork method (in relation to Boas’s influence on Mead, cf. Ruby [1980: 11]).
 13. The release dates given here follow those given by the current distributors of the films, the Audiovisual Services of Pennsylvania State University; <http://www.medianet.libraries.psu.edu> (accessed January 7, 2013). These seem to make sense in that they suggest that, in editing the films, Mead and Bohmer started with the films set in one particular society before moving on to the more comparative films. Jacknis, on the other hand, gives a somewhat different series of release dates [1988: 170]. The running times that I give here differ from both these sources, but having established them through playing the films on a computer, I am confident that they are correct to the nearest minute.

14. The on-screen bibliography attributes the authorship of *Dance and Drama in Bali* to “Spies, Wane, de Zoete,” but the middle “name” is surely an error on the part of the film titler, perhaps arising from a mistaken reading or hearing of “Spies, W. and de Zoete.” In any case, the ordering of the authors is inverted, since the principal author of this work was De Zoete [De Zoete and Spies 1973]. This inversion is perhaps symptomatic of Mead’s personal dislike of De Zoete, whom she equates in her autobiography with Rangda the Witch [1972: 270].
15. David MacDougall [1997: 290–291] describes Mead’s narrational style as “unrelentingly didactic” and, as such, he suggests that it is typical of the conventions of North American educational film in the 1950s.
16. Given that Mead arranged for the early life of her daughter Catherine to be extensively documented, including the filming of her birth (which was very unusual at the time), one might reasonably wonder whether the “relaxed” U.S. mother who appears in the 1940s sequence and who is said to practice the approved breast-feeding on demand, might be none other than Mead herself. Certainly the child in the sequence, who appears to be about one year old, is of the right age, for Catherine was born in December 1939 [Bateson 1985: 22–24]. However, although one is given only a fleeting glimpse of the face of the mother in this sequence, it does not, in fact, appear to be Mead.
17. See also the more recent interpretation of Hildred Geertz [1995: 75–81]. Mead and Bateson’s interpretation has been more explicitly and extensively criticized by Jensen and Suryani [1992: 80–84]. Amongst many other points they claim that Rangda can sometimes be seen as a force for good and her mask as a means of protecting the village, while Barong can be a fear-inducing figure who is not identified by the Balinese themselves with the idea of a loving father. They also contest the specific association that Mead seeks to make in the commentary between the cloth carried by Rangda and the sling in which Balinese mothers carry their babies. *Anteng*, they report, is simply a general word for cloth, and while it can be used to refer to a baby-sling, it can also be used to refer to the cloths that Balinese women customarily wear around their waists or heads.
18. Mead does not specify who this “man who made the arrangements” actually was but it seems very probable from Belo’s account that it would have been a certain Rawa, an in-married temple priest who was used to arranging theatrical events for tourists and who was well-known for being over-zealous in seeking to curry favor with Europeans [Belo 1960: 124].
19. In view of the smoothness and image quality of the slow-motion sequences, it seems very likely that the decision to cover the trance sequences in slow motion would have been taken on location rather than back in the editing suite. Given the nature of the 16 mm film technology that Bateson and Belo were using, it would have been a relatively simple matter to produce slow-motion footage on location, since all that it would have required would have been an increase in camera speed. To produce slow-motion footage once 16 mm film stock has been exposed is very much more problematic, since it requires an expensive process of “step printing” and the results rarely look as smooth as slow motion generated in the camera.
20. The master versions of these recordings, made by the companies Odéon and Beka, were destroyed during the Second World War. So shortly before his death in 1965 McPhee deposited his personal collection of these records, comprising 84 titles, in the Institute of Ethnomusicology at the University of California, Los Angeles [McPhee 1966: xiv, 421].
21. Professor A. P. Elkin, who had several discussions with Mead in Sydney, once outlined to the current editor of *Visual Anthropology* precisely the same thing, and even made a (rather turgid) film of a ceremony in Central Australia by this unfortunate method—though admittedly not with 360° coverage.

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