Multiplicity of *Balinese Characters*

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Abstract
Photography as main research data has not been used in anthropology
to the extent that it was by Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson in the late
1930s. This paper takes a critical examination of their use and analysis of
photographs in their research in Highland Bali, to demonstrate that their
subsequent conclusions may be misrepresentative of the people they were
studying. By reviewing analyses by Ira Jacknis and Gerald Sullivan, along
with more historical and theoretical considerations, it will become apparent
that although the couple exhaustively used the photographic medium, their
analysis and conclusions seem to have been manipulated to suit their original
hypothesis. Their conclusions being drawn from a small portion of the
unprecedented corpus of material, the bias from one of their funding bodies,
and their lack of collaborative analysis with the research subjects may have
been the causes of this possible misrepresentation, although further research
would be needed in order to support this claim. The paper concludes with a
brief analysis of how the Mead and Bateson project should be viewed by
contemporary students of visual anthropology, specifically with respect to
reflexivity, collaboration, and contemporary ethical considerations. Finally,
the paper calls for further research to be done with this material.

Margaret Mead's and Gregory Bateson's *Balinese Character:
A Photographic Analysis* (1942) is considered to be as influential to
visual anthropology as Bronislaw Malinowski's *Argonauts of the
Western Pacific* was to contemporary anthropological fieldwork.
Although said to have achieved the status of an anthropological classic
(Jacknis 1988:160), the work, conducted from 1936 to 1939, has not
been given as much attention as Malinowski's. The monograph has
been mentioned as being influential in visual anthropology in a variety
of texts (Collier 1967:5-6; MacDougall 1997:290), but has only been
subject to a few critical analyses. By examining the critiques done by
Ira Jacknis (1988) and Gerald Sullivan (1999) I argue that *Balinese
Character* is flawed in many respects, but continues to be an
unsurpassed work. Although the project was an exhaustive one, I will
demonstrate that *Balinese Character* is better viewed as a cautionary
tale of how *not* to conduct visually based research today, rather than as

something to be emulated. Fundamental issues of theory, methods and analysis in relation to the research findings are the main points that will be discussed. Additionally, I believe Bateson's, rather than Mead's, original ideas and goals for the use of visuals and argue that they are more in line with contemporary visual theory. Before beginning, it is important to contextualize the Balinese fieldwork by presenting an overview of Mead's and Bateson's experiences on the project.

Romancing the Anthropologists

Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson met for the first time along the Sepik River in New Guinea during the early 1930's. Mead was studying the Mundugumor with her second husband, Reo Fortune, an anthropologist from New Zealand (Howard 1984:156-7). Bateson, who knew Fortune from Cambridge University, was conducting his second term of research among the Iatmul. Like his young colleagues, he was feeling rather overwhelmed by the amount of information he had been gathering and met the other two at a government station along the Sepik River over Christmas 1931 (Lipset 1980:135-6). They all became fast friends, relaxing and discussing various anthropological theories related their respective research (Lipset 1980:135-6). The relationship between Mead and Bateson soon developed into more than one of mutual respect. The two would stay up talking into the night, long after Fortune had been asleep, establishing between themselves "a kind of communication in which Reo did not share" (Howard 1984:158). After the completion of the fieldwork the three went their separate ways: Mead to the United States, Bateson to England, and Fortune to Australia. Mead and Fortune were not to see each other again till long after their divorce (Howard 1984:166).

Mead and Bateson later met in Ireland in 1934 and the United States in 1935, agreeing to be married upon Mead's divorce from Fortune (Howard 1984:177, 182). At this time they also began planning to conduct collaborative fieldwork in Bali. Mead had an interest in studying mental disorders and, having heard about Bali from artist and anthropologist friends already residing and researching in Bali, decided to study there as the "culture had many elements that suggested it would be a suitable one in which to explore the presence — or absence — of schizophrenic behaviour" (Mead 1977:153). The inspiration to study this phenomena came from The Committee for the

Study of Dementia Praecox (schizophrenia) who was looking for anthropologists, psychiatrists and psychologists to study the disorder statistically deemed to be on the rise (Mead 1977:153). At the outset, their "rather elaborate proposal" for funding from the Committee was rejected, yet Mead and Bateson managed to find alternate financial assistance for their planned research (Mead 1977:153).

Mead wrote most of the proposals, as she was a the more seasoned of the two in proposal writing and fieldwork. (Her fiancé had yet to complete his first research project.) The couple finally secured funding from the American Museum of Natural History, the Social Science Research Council, and by the Committee for Research in Dementia Praecox who financed the resulting monograph (Howard 1984:189).

Bateson, at work on his ethnography on the Iatmul, *Naven*, had also written a proposal concerning his interest in wanting to continue his studies of "schizmogenetics", a theory developed during his Iatmul research (Sullivan 1999:11). Schizmogenesis was a term Bateson developed to describe the "cumulative, intensifying, and mutually provocative encounters between two parties or persons that terminate in one or another of a variety of climactic dispersals of tension" (Bateson 1936:175; Sullivan 1999:11). Bateson felt his intended research direction would be suitable for cross-cultural comparison with the Balinese. However, the Balinese, according to Mead, were not subject to such outbursts as they were a "loose" people, having "no affective attachment to anyone" (Sullivan 1999:11-12). The couple's divergent views were not reconciled till after an argument during the early part of their time in Bali, lasting several days, where Bateson gave in to Mead's statements that schizmogenesis would not be found in these people (Sullivan 1999:11-12). This conflict is but one example of their differing perspectives and illustrates an imbalance of power and respect which eventually led to their later divorce.

After marrying in Singapore, the couple arrived in Bali in April 1936 (Mead 1972:223). For the first two months in Bali they stayed in Oeboed, a village outside the capital, Den Pasar, where their friend Walter Spies lived (Mead 1977:159). Spies, a German artist, had secured them a house, with a full set of servants, in which to settle until their home in Bajoeng Gede was built (Mead 1977:160). While in Oeboed they trained in some of the Balinese languages with their

newly hired Balinese secretary and research assistant, I Made Kaler, (Mead 1972:230).

Bajoeng Gede was chosen as their research site because of its relatively small size (population of 500) and great distance from the "heavily Indic influences of the southern plains" (Jacknis 1988:162). According to Mead the village "was one of those lucky accidents that have accompanied me all my life" as its inhabitants, among other qualities, suffered from hypothyroidism which slowed their activities down, making observations easier to record (Mead 1972:232-3). Additionally, since the newcomers were not excluded from having to abide by the many religious rules, the villagers were open to discussing their taboos and ceremonies, an openness quite in opposition to the experiences of those who previously conducted fieldwork in New Guinea (Mead 1972:227, 232-3).

As their funding proposals had outlined, the couple wished to use photographs and film extensively in their research. Both anthropologists had mentors who were well known for their uses of visual media in the discipline. Bateson's instructor, A.H. Haddon, was one of the members on the famed Torres Strait expedition of the late 19th century in which film was used ethnographically for the first time (Jacknis 1988: 161; Lipset 1980: 114). Mead's mentor, Franz Boas, used film and photographs extensively at the turn of the 20th century, while working with North American Natives (Jacknis 1992:143; 1988:161). Bateson had previous experience taking pictures in the field while working among the Baining of New Britain in 1927, though it was not to the extent of his work in Bali (Lipset 1980:plate 11). During his earlier frustrations with presenting field work material, which he discussed in *Naven*, Bateson saw the use of film and photography as the best manner in which to present "naturally occurring behaviour [which] was violated when represented verbally" (Lipset 1980:157).

In *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972) Bateson further elaborated his thinking on the use of more expressive means of representation. In the book he outlines that thought is much more productive and fruitful when there is a *"combination of loose and strict thinking"* (Lipset 1980:148, emphasis Bateson's) of which loose is more expressive thought and strict is more ordered, scientific thought. Thereby photography could be used as a useful mode of thinking when combined with ordered thought to create new theoretical grounds, and

not solely as an illustrative or observational tool. Yet this line of thinking is not how photography was used in *Balinese Character* as it ran counter to Mead's theoretical views.

In her earlier ethnographies, Mead preferred the use of plain English in order to reach larger audiences, and felt that photography could accomplish a similar end (Sullivan 1999:29). Her proposed use of cameras was to eliminate the biases inherent in the researcher and allow for clearer recollection and substantiation of theoretical arguments (Sullivan 1999:15-16). For her, concerns over future re-analysis and comparison work was of utmost importance and could be attained with photographs as "the wholeness of each piece of behaviour can be preserved" (Bateson and Mead 1942:xii). Mead agreed with Bateson to the extent that photographs were able to better illustrate where words "dissect the living scenes so that only desiccated items remain" (Bateson and Mead 1942:xxii), but generally saw the usefulness of photography simply as an observational tool.

For the expedition, Bateson brought a new Leica camera, seventy-five rolls of film, and several hundred feet of film which was to last them for two years (Mead 1972:234). However, during a fateful forty-five minute shooting session upon their arrival in Bajoeng Gede, Bateson used three rolls of film on a parent and child interacting, dramatically altering the course of their methodology (Mead 1972:234). After examining the numerous photos, Mead and Bateson noticed they had "clearly...come to a threshold — to cross would be a momentous commitment in money, of which [they] did not have much, and in work as well" (Mead 1972:234). They decided to embrace the decision to use photography as a primary research tool with great enthusiasm.

Although Bateson ended up photographing nearly every member of the village, Mead and Bateson determined it would be most beneficial to focus their photography on one extended family within the village so as to reduce confusion. Their images and observations revolve around the family of Men and Nang Oera, paying close attention to the interaction between the parents and two of their small children, I Karsa and I Karba (Sullivan 1999:9). Franz Boas had suggested that Mead pay close attention to gesture "to figure how gesture and trance and schizophrenia might be interrelated" (Howard 1984:193). Mead followed this advice as best she could while focusing also on posture within the activities between the adults and

children (Sullivan 1999:9).

Mead developed a continuous method of note taking in her previous New Guinea research which she called "running field notes" (Jacknis 1988:163). This style of field notes, where a continuous string of information is written without questioning its relevance at the moment, worked as an excellent companion to the photos that Bateson was taking. Mead, who did not have one eye locked on a camera viewfinder, was able to see more of the action and surrounding activity. Therefore, she directed her husband to photograph certain scenes or people while, at the same time, recording the non-visual elements of the events (Jacknis 1988:163). The couple worked at a feverish pace, photographing and making notes during the day, developing the negatives and typing out fieldnotes in the evening, and finally going to bed after washing their faces with the water left over from that day's film processing (Mead 1972:236).

After almost two years, the couple realized they had "an unprecedented amount of material" with which "there was nothing anywhere to compare with" (Mead 1972:236). In response to Mead's belief that "the essence of anthropological work is comparison", the couple decided to head to New Guinea (Bateson's previous research area) to gather some data for comparison (Mead 1972:236-7). After residing with the Iatmul for six months, the couple felt as though they had enough material on behaviour between parents, children and siblings (Mead 1972:237). They then returned for six weeks to Bejoeng Gede to round out their research and, finally, with 25,000 photos and 22,000 feet of film, they returned to America (Bateson and Mead 1942:51; Howard 1984:210).

It was not until nearly a year later, after their daughter was born, that they began working on the Balinese material. The first step was to convert all the negatives into positive slides for easier viewing (Bateson and Mead 1942:51). Then, after a careful selection process, Bateson made some 4,000 prints to be used in publications and presentations (Bateson and Mead 1942:51). The couple reviewed the images repeatedly with many scholars including psychiatrists, sociologists and other anthropologists. (Jacknis 1988:168). With time and money running out, a final 759 pictures were selected from the first three-quarters of the viewed images for the book (Jacknis 1988:168). *Balinese Character* was published with Mead having written an introductory essay divided into the same ten sections as the

100 plates holding the images, and Bateson wrote the photo captions and a technical piece on the making of the pictures.

Mead and Bateson concluded that "the ordinary adjustment of the individual [Balinese] approximates in form the sort of maladjustment which, in our own cultural setting, we call schizoid" (Bateson and Mead 1942:xvi). The need for this monograph, Mead writes, is the "need to know how such predispositions can be culturally handled [in cross cultural situations], so that it does not become maladjustment" (Bateson and Mead 1942:xvi). Through careful interpretation, supported by Bateson's photographs, actions occurring naturally for the Balinese were presented as deviant. Such actions as the malleability of children's bodies during physical activity training, the postures and reactions by audience members at a cockfight or ceremony, and the way an infant's feeding time "becomes a sort of attack" are deemed 'schizophrenic behaviour' (Bateson and Mead 1942:15, 20, 27). However, the villagers may be seen as well-adjusted amongst themselves as, according to Mead, their deviant actions are kept under control by a "dreamy-relaxed disassociation" and numerous religious restrictions (Bateson and Mead 1942:47).

An initial review notwithstanding (Murphy and Murphy 1943), *Balinese Character* arrived without much fanfare. Mead attributes this lack of recognition to the fact that the photographic equipment Bateson used in Bali was hard to come by, thereby detracting others from attempting this style of work or from being able to comment on its usage. It also meant they "had to wait almost twenty-five years before [their] work had much impact on anthropological field work" and "still no records of human interaction [have been made] that compare with those that Gregory made in Bali and then in Iatmul" (Mead 1972:234).

Balinese Character Revisited

In the wake of Derek Freeman's controversial critique of Mead's Samoan fieldwork, Ira Jacknis took a fresh look at the Balinese work to determine its merits. Almost ten years after that, Gerald Sullivan took a closer look at the work by reviewing their field notes and diaries, now part of the Library of Congress material (Sullivan 1999:VIII). Both present a deeply researched and astute understanding of the work, and both feel that despite some flaws, *Balinese Character* is still a piece worth examining for inspiration and instruction.

Ira Jacknis does not concern himself about the conclusions

made by Mead and Bateson about the Balinese and schizophrenia, but
rather focuses on "the objectivity of their record" and the "process of
turning 'raw' field notes into finished ethnographies" (Sullivan
1999:160). He highlights Mead's and Bateson's awareness of their
subjective biases and their attempts to curb them by using photographs
and by honest presentation of their research. For them, film was to
counteract human faults as they "tried to shoot what happened
normally, and spontaneously, rather than to decide upon the norms and
then get Balinese to go through these behaviours in suitable lighting"
(Bateson as quoted in, Jacknis 1988:165). Bateson stated that he,
along with the villagers, became unconscious of the fact that a camera
was present "after the first dozen or so shots" were made (Bateson as
quoted in, Jacknis 1988:165). He also made clear within the
monograph the few instances where images were posed or instances
where subjects were or were not aware that the camera was trained on
them (Bateson as quoted in, Jacknis 1988:165). The couple are also
said to have "anticipated currently popular reflexive methodologies"
by presenting the films to the Balinese in order to get their statements
and impressions of whether people in the films were actually in trance
(Jacknis 1988:164).

The only fault Jacknis notes of the work is how the images were
compiled for the final book. As noted in *Balinese Character*, the
motion film recorded "more of the active and interesting moments" of
Balinese affairs (Bateson and Mead 1942:50) meaning that the images
in the text are "not fully representative of their observations" (Jacknis
1988:168). This skew in representation along with the selection of
only 759 images coming from the "first three-quarters of their corpus"
leads to a potential misrepresentation of Balinese activity (Jacknis
1988:168-9). However, in his conclusion, Jacknis states the important
elements of the research was "not that it is biased, but that the biases
are so well recorded" and that Mead and Bateson should be
commended for "we know the acuity of their vision and the distortion
of their lenses" (Jacknis 1988:172-3).

Gerald Sullivan, in his deftly researched analysis, takes a much
more in depth look at the project. His essay, accompanied by a large
number of previously published and unpublished images from Mead's
and Bateson's collection, examines how the photos are notes, signs,
and shadows. In so doing he brings to the fore many of the technical
and conceptual problems the couple dealt with in their time working

with the Balinese material and their selection of the images to suit Mead's original hypothesis.

Describing the photos as notes, Sullivan presents the use of photography as a tool for the field working process. They serve the anthropologists as "aide-memoire or record of what he or she sees" (Sullivan 1999:1). At this level, the photographs were useful methodological tools for Mead as she no longer needed to note the names, detailed locations, etc. of the scene as they were recorded on film (Sullivan 1999:16). Regardless of how meticulous the note taking by Mead was said to be, Sullivan has located discrepancies between what in included in her notes and the actual images that are said to correspond to them (Sullivan 1999:17). In hopes of reconstructing events through the photographic and written records, more often than not, Sullivan's inability to do so has led him to the conclusion that "Mead and Made Kaler [their Balinese secretary] seem to have been looking one way while Bateson was taking photographs facing in a somewhat different direction" (Sullivan 1999:17). Despite the discrepancies, to which it is virtually impossible to know their full extent within the body of work, the photographs can still be seen as notes. As such the images are reference points for the anthropologist who must, through proper analysis and presentation, attach meaning to make them into signs.

To view pictures as signs, symbols or referents of an object or idea, means to accept them according to the rhetoric created by the anthropologist (Sullivan 1999:1). In photographing postures and gestures of villagers in trances, parents teaching their children various tasks, or how children play, Mead and Bateson were making notes on Balinese character. Through selective editing and placing of photographs within the book, accompanied by Mead's textual analysis, the images are transformed into signs and symbols of specific arguments about Balinese culture that Mead and Bateson wished to promote (Sullivan 1999:31-2). They wanted to illustrate how activities and circumstances understood as normal to the Balinese would be deemed "schizoid" by a western audience (Sullivan 1999:24).

Throughout her text on Balinese characteristics, Mead makes references to activities which she deems as deviant. As illustrations of the abnormality of Balinese life, she discusses at one point the manner in which "two two-year-old boys were bouncing puppies as if they were rubber balls" (Bateson and Mead 1942:25). At another point,

spectators "at the climax of a cockfight... [curve] in upon themselves in the postures typical of schizophrenic dreaming" (Bateson and Mead 1942:27). The fact that no specific pictures are referenced to these acts, and no such images can be located within the book, leads readers to one conclusion: all the image in the "Autocosmic Play (Plates 38-44)" section, in which the descriptions above are included, are assumed to be demonstrations of schizophrenic activity. On their own, the photographs as notes are not restricted to any definitions. But when turned into signs, though captioning and careful editing, the photos take on a more powerful role (Sullivan 1999:33). In this case, the images became symbols of a schizophrenic culture.

As shadows, the photographs are only allusions to the real Balinese whose life, history, and beliefs cannot be captured on film. The Balinese, at the time Mead and Bateson studied them, were people much regulated by their religious beliefs. Taboos and restrictions of purity and pollution governed their every action from the building of a house to giving birth. These are qualities that cannot be photographed (Sullivan 1999:35). The actions surrounding them may be pictured, but the images lack the emotion, meaning, and depth of definition these strictures have for the Balinese. The pictures taken by Bateson can only be shadows of these people's "dignity and vanity shaped by all the events of their lives in a world which by their own account they can only partly know" (Sullivan 1999:40). Again, pictures can become signs of these ethereal qualities, but it is only though proper contextualization such as captioning and editing.

Sullivan's multiple interpretations of the pictures are important to understand their different uses and ways of representing cultures. Additionally, this multiplicity is analogous with the concept of how cultures may seem on the surface to be one entity, but are also made up of polysemantic elements — elements that can be interpreted in various ways. In presenting the Balinese material in this light, Sullivan brings to the fore the understanding that images in general, Bateson's in particular, do not possess only the meaning given to them by the scholars but have a life of their own, a life breathed into them by each viewers' individual interpretations of them. Sullivan cautions contemporary readers of *Balinese Character* to not assume that all that is presented in the text is unarguable truth.

A variety of other points of contention concerning the processes involved in the creation of the publication have not been raised by

these two critics. The analyses presented above look at either the process of creating an ethnography out of raw data, or examining the multiple ways of understanding images. Below are points that contemporary readers of the material should take into consideration for future reference in conducting or analysing visual anthropology works. The main points are the danger of essentializing the subjects and a need for a respect between collaborators (researchers, and/or subjects), leading to a call for more reflexivity, cooperation and expressiveness in creating visual representations. Visual anthropologists today are more accepting of pictures as shadows and are more explicit in their awareness of the power of captioning and contextualization.

In one of Mead's funding application for this project, the couple's planned use of film and photography was, according to Mead, to "provide a constant record of the behaviour of individuals which will act as an *automatic correction on the variability of the human observer* whose cultural understanding is necessarily slow in developing" (Sullivan 1999:4-5, emphasis mine). Present in this statement is Mead's perspective that photography and film were tools that recorded reality, a popular view at the time, but one that was being called into question by other contemporary visual anthropologists (de Brigard 1995:36). Mead's use of photography with this understanding led to the conclusions being representative of the inhabitants of Bali.

Balinese Character is said to be a book not "about Balinese custom, but about the Balinese — about the way in which they...embody that abstraction which (after we have abstracted it) we technically call culture " (Bateson and Mead 1942:xii). Although Mead was aware "that no single concrete statement about Bali is true of all of Bali" she expounded the belief that "through this diversity runs a common ethos" which is outlined in the photos and text of *Balinese Character* (Bateson and Mead 1942:xii). In so doing, Mead and Bateson have essentialized the Balinese people to all be equal exhibitors of the deviant behaviour their research concluded.

Mead and Bateson went to Bali under the assumption that the culture was made up of a schizophrenic people and that is the conclusion they presented through careful presentation of their images. Through selective editing of the images and presenting them along with Mead's text, readers are channelled into coming to her same conclusion. Mead's statement that the Balinese ethos is schizophrenic is difficult to accept as many of the examples included in the book of

this behaviour do not have related photos. As stated above, the children "bouncing puppies" and the spectators in "schizophrenic dreaming" postures (Bateson and Mead 1942:25, 27) have no images to support them. Sullivan has also located an instance where Mead discusses the manner in which children learn sexual frustration from their mothers pulling on their penises after urinating (Bateson and Mead 1942:26), however only vague field note references have been found and no images were recorded (Sullivan 1999:26-7).

If photographs have meaning attributed to them though textual support, then one is left questioning whether the couple suited the evidence to their original beliefs or in order to gain funding from the Committee for Research in Dementia Praecox. This is something almost impossible to prove or disprove. However, it is note of caution for anyone using visuals: the meaning of images can be manipulated or misinterpreted. It is for this reason than many visual anthropologists, even ones contemporaneous to the *Balinese Character* project, stress collaborative interpretation and captioning with the people being represented (Elder 1995; Rouch 1995).

Additionally, Mead's insistence that leaving a camera in a fixed location renders it more objective, has been challenged by contemporary anthropology. Anthropologists such as David MacDougall (1997) and Chris Wright (1998) see a benefit to incorporating more expressiveness in visual representation an idea that coincides with Bateson's original intentions for using photography (Lipset 1980:157). According to MacDougall, this inclusion could turn photography and film into "extensions of the mind" becoming a "medium of enquiry and discourse" leading to "different ways of understanding [and] also different things to understand" (MacDougall 1997:287, 292). Creative visual elements can more clearly present themselves as shadows of actual lived reality, instead of the static images which are presented as being concrete conclusions about the culture. Although both the traditional and expressive images are still signs, in that meaning in still mainly attributed by the anthropologists, the assigned meaning in contemporary works is less binding or essentializing as reflexivity and collaboration make more explicit the polysemantic nature of images (MacDougall:284; Wright 1998:17).

By extension, contemporary discussions stressing a more collaborative research methodology for visual representation is also more in line with current ethical debates (Ruby 1991). Anthropologists

interested in what has been termed 'ethnophotography', such as
Marcus Banks, suggest that a collaborative approach including
research participants in the creation of the visual material, or at least in
the interpretation of the data, is necessary in this increasingly post-
colonial era. Additionally, it allows for a finished product that offers
more "strength and value" in its analysis (Sapir 1994:867; Banks
1995:4).

On the other hand, Mead and Bateson did not collaborate with
the Balinese villagers beyond assistance in clarifying whether
photographed persons were in trance or not (Jacknis 1988:164). By
not including the members of the village in the analysis stage, the
Balinese subjects were not able to inform, assist, validate or invalidate
the anthropologists' interpretations and subsequent representations.
Not only is this lack of interaction methodologically flawed in that it
can lead to misinterpretations of data thereby rendering conclusions
invalid, it also leads to potentially harmful misrepresentations. This
last point is seen as a major ethical concern in contemporary visual
anthropology. Seen through the eyes of the present, where those
traditionally represented by anthropologists are increasingly more
vocal, this monograph seems thin in terms of description on the
richness and depth of Balinese (or Bajoeng Gede) life in the 1930's
and one wonders how the conclusions would have been different had
Mead and Bateson allowed their Balinese subjects to be more
involved. However, as *Balinese Character* was produced at a time
when anthropologists were for the most part seen as the ultimate
authorities and unquestioned experts in cultural analysis, such
arguments are merely valid as pedagogical tools.

Conclusion

This seminal work exposes and highlights some important
cautionary points that can benefit current and future visual
anthropology. By taking a look at the processes of conducting the
Balinese fieldwork in the late 1930s, the conflicting topical and
methodological viewpoints between Mead and Bateson were
presented. The historical overview also established that the couple
rushed to complete the monograph and in so doing may have
misrepresented their research and the Balinese people. Jacknis praised
the work for the anthropologists' self-awareness, but his statement of
their work being of a reflexive nature is not in line with present

theories on this point. Sullivan's most important points were the understanding that Mead and Bateson supported their argument through sophisticated editing of images and textual support, and that all images are polysemantic, not bound to one definition.

The final section discussed how the manner in which the couple presented their research essentialized and misrepresented the Balinese by stating that their conclusions reflected the ethos of the entire culture. Finally, the discrepancies between Mead's examples and the lack of supporting images called into question the overall conclusions of the project. Despite these criticisms *Balinese Character* is still a classic work for it is the first one to use photography so extensively. This type of ethnography lends itself well to representations of cultures, as images do allow for a variety of interpretations and, in many instances, can reveal more than words. However, anthropologists presently taking advantage of visual media should look at the problems encountered in creating *Balinese Character* and in its later analyses. More collaboration with the subjects is a must so as to eliminate misrepresentations and the dangers of essentializing the cultures as much as possible. Presently, it would be a very fascinating endeavour to return to Bajoeng Gede, Bali for a contemporary rereading of both *Balinese Character* and the boxes of pictures and film footage to get their interpretations of this outstanding historical collection.

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