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Sprouting Photographic Lotuses: On the Visual Return of Gregory Bateson's Photographs to Iatmul Villages

Abstract

This article discusses the recent visual return of photographs made in Iatmul villages (East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea) between 1929 and 1933 by British anthropologist Gregory Bateson to those communities. It introduces the project and its methods, focusing on the specificities of returning culturally sensitive images to the region. It then discusses Bateson's photographic practices in relation to the broader history of anthropology and its uses of the camera, highlighting the ways in which photography can be seen as cutting its subjects from their original context. It also uses the metaphor of a lotus growing, comparing the return of photographs to Iatmul communities to a horticultural "striking" process and the researcher to a gardener placing a "cutting" in a fertile environment in which it can sprout and grow anew.

Keywords: *visual return, photography, Papua New Guinea, Iatmul, Gregory Bateson*

Introduction

Between April and September 2024, I visited six Iatmul villages (Kanganamun, Palimbei, Malingei, Yentschan, Kaminimbit, and Mindimbit) along the Sepik River, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea (PNG), following the path of British anthropologist Gregory Bateson. I brought with me printed copies of Bateson's photographic collection (462 images) and digital copies of his fifty field notebooks; the originals of both have been central to my doctoral research on his archives.[1] Bateson's photographs mostly depict ceremonial life, material culture, villagers (men, women, and children), and landscapes. The collection is the result of his first two trips to the Iatmul region: between 1929 and 1930, when he mainly resided in Mindimbit, and between 1932 and 1933, when he was based in Kanganamun. In this article, I focus on the processes through which I examined Bateson's photographs with my collaborators upon their "visual return" to these Iatmul villages during my fieldwork.

Figure 1. Collaborators looking at copies of Bateson's December 1932 photographs of a male initiation in Kaminimbit. Kaminimbit, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea, August 2024. I invited the men to circulate the images among themselves. They often looked at them silently for some time before discussing them together. On the stools in the foreground are customary gifts to the men's house–*buai* (betelnut) and money–that I had brought and presented. Photograph by the author and published with the consent of the collaborators in Kaminimbit

In the last thirty years, returning historical photographs to their related communities has become a relatively common practice in museum anthropology. Scholars in the field have emphasized the potential of (re)connecting communities with photographs as documents of and from the past.[2] By reproducing ethnographic photographs of Indigenous people held in Western archives and disseminating them among the descendant communities of those originally depicted, these images are freed "from their institutional and Western cultural expectations,"[3] allowing for them to be re-placed "into the network of relations from which they were cut."[4] By doing so, photographs act as springboards for new discussions, stories, and knowledges, which in turn activate "new or dormant relations."[5] As photography integrates local modes of telling, seeing, and being through its relational ontological nature,[6] visual return becomes a means to render existing and new relations both visible and salient through photographs.

While anthropologists Christian Coiffier and Eric Silverman previously returned part of Gregory Bateson's photographic collection to specific villages, my project is the first extensive return of Bateson's archives produced between 1929 and 1933 to the Iatmul region.[7] While Coiffier and Silverman showed Bateson's images to Iatmul descendants, their visual returns were not the primary focus of their research. The aim of my project was specifically focused on the return of both written and visual archives derived from Bateson's research in the Iatmul region.

In this article, I focus on the ways in which relations between photographic collections and communities are created through visual return. To highlight how relations are often assumed and prefigured, I bring Marilyn Strathern's perspective on ethnographic descriptions of relations to the context of visual return.[8] In this case, relations are not only considered as a prerequisite for any visual return but are simultaneously considered its result and what provides its meaning. Visual returns are often made to a specific community with the assumption that the community has retained dormant or active connections to the photographic collections.[9] In returning images, research not only tends to assume prefigured relations; it is also thought to create new connections between the past visual material and the contemporary community, thus validating such projects as meaningful.[10]

While discussions on the relations between archival/museum collections and descendant communities are central for a better custodianship of these collections, I argue that the return of Bateson's archives to Iatmul villages highlights that these relations are processual and constructed rather than readily given. Additionally, in her discussion of networks, Strathern warns of the temporality of these relations; they do not exist by themselves, but need maintaining by their

actors.[11] Photographs, as well as other museum collections, have been described as powerful agents because of their ability to "outlive us thus becoming bridges into the future where they have continuing effects."[12] While I agree with the discourse, I would like to challenge this ever-expanding agency of photography as a way of condensing and preserving relational networks. Using the example of my collaboration with Iatmul communities on Bateson's archives, I argue that photographs alone were not sufficient to (re)activate these relationships.

When discussing my preparatory methods for returning Bateson's photographs to the Iatmul region, I highlight local protocols around culturally sensitive knowledge. I then present the historical circumstances in which Bateson's photographs were made, focusing on the ways in which pictures were "cut" and removed from their original contexts. Finally, looking at two photos made by Bateson in 1933, I rethink visual returns through the botanical metaphor of the "striking" of a lotus, in which a new lotus and its rhizomes sprout from a cutting. I argue that the visual return of Bateson's photographic archives can be likened to a striking process, in which the researcher, like a gardener, places a "cutting" (a historical photograph) in an environment in which it can "grow" anew.

Methods and Practicalities of a Visual Return

As a medium, photography records the past in a specific way: it fixes a moment from the past onto the present.[13] Photographic images typically include details beyond what the photographer intended to capture. This "rawness" of photography, as described by Elizabeth Edwards, creates a characteristic open-endedness of meanings, which makes the medium unique and arguably the perfect candidate for a return project.[14] As opposed to written texts, bound by languages and literacy, photographs can be "read"—though subjectively—by all who can see them.[15] Looking at photographs in a context different from when they were taken, elements that remained overlooked can be reassessed and, therefore, have the potential to uncover new perspectives, meanings, futures, and connections. This perspective framed my initial approach when returning Bateson's collection to Iatmul communities.

Following similar projects of visual returns, and in order to re-engage Bateson's photographic collections with their contemporary descendant communities, I conducted preliminary research on Bateson's photographic collection and its related documentation at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA) in Cambridge, UK. This research, done between January and May 2023, was

necessary to identify and organize Bateson's photographs according to the villages where they were taken. Through close attention to and visual analysis of details in the photos, I was able to recreate photographic series from similar times and locations. This identification process was assisted by available documentation—both published and unpublished—related to the photographs. For example, I identified a series of images at the MAA taken during a *wagan mbuanggo* (wagan ceremony)[16] as the performance made in Yentschan village discussed and illustrated in Bateson's book *Naven*.[17] Another important reference tool for my identification of Bateson's photographs was a guide of the Middle Sepik collections at the MAA in Cambridge written by Alfred C. Haddon based on Bateson's comments. It enabled me to identify the man in photograph P.16633.BAT and the sculptor of a *samban* (hook) in the MAA collections as being the same individual: Asmankowi.[18] Other identifications of Bateson's pictures—made by anthropologist Andrew Moutu in 2003 after his field research in Kanganamun—were available in the museum's photo database.

Additionally, I compared the photographic collections at the MAA with Bateson's photos and written documents in the Margaret Mead Papers and South Pacific Ethnographic Archives (MMPSPEA) at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. Most of the images in the MMPSPEA were the same as the ones in Cambridge, though the captions differed. There were two sets of photographic prints: a first set made in the 1930s and another set made between 1974 and 1976.[19] The second set was printed following Margaret Mead's selection by a team at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, its creation prompted by the deterioration and destruction of the original nitrate negatives.[20] In addition to Bateson's photographs, the MMPSPEA also holds his field notebooks for his two ethnographies in the Sepik (1929–30 and 1932–33). While Bateson rarely mentions his photographs directly in his field notes, the notes provide essential information regarding the context in which the photographic encounters took place. For example, Bateson's mention of the performance of a *wagan mbuanggo* in Yentschan enabled me to identify with certitude the date and location of the photographs mentioned earlier as having been taken in Yentschan in late May or early June 1932.[21]

In order to organize the visual return of Bateson's photographs to PNG, I made a preliminary trip to the villages of Kanganamun, Yentschan, Palimbei, Malingei, and Kaminimbit between August and September 2023. I selected these specific villages based on the locations I had identified in the photographs in the MAA's collection. During this trip, I visited the men's houses in all five villages, presented the customary gifts of *buai* (betelnut) to the community,[22] and asked for their

permission to conduct this research on Bateson's photographs and bring them to the village.[23] After they granted me permission, I decided to bring all 462 photographs known from his two visits to the region, regardless of their subject and whether or not their precise location had been identified. I sorted the photos based on their attributed location and returned them to each village accordingly.

Photos in which the location was unclear to me formed a separate set of images, which I showed to each village; my collaborators identified the locations of some of these photographs and, subsequently, I included them with photographs taken in that place. I printed the photographs, without any captions, on A4 paper and laminated them for durability. For practical and economic reasons, I grouped and printed copies of Bateson's photographs in pairs when they depicted the same object, person, or event. For these groupings, I also respected the local restriction protocols regarding culturally sensitive knowledge, especially with regards to images in a ceremonial context.

My preliminary trip was central to organizing the subsequent collaboration on Bateson's archives. During this trip, I met and stayed with Jack Kapi in Kanganamun; he and his family provided me with invaluable support in developing this project. Upon my return in 2024, I was adopted into Jack's family and given a name from his clan, Uliap. During my 2023 visit, I also met several men of Kanganamun who later became my main collaborators. They were men in their fifties and sixties who had varying perspectives on the village's past, especially on its relationship with spirits. Some were greatly involved in the local Seventh Day Adventist Church, while others were not attending church. Due to my adoption into the Uliap clan, I became intimately involved with the community of the Minjimbit men's house while also maintaining close relationships with the other two men's houses in Kanganamun.[24] The Minjimbit community was also central in helping to organize my stay and research in the other villages.

When preparing for the visual return of Bateson's photographs, I paid special attention to local protocols regarding culturally sensitive knowledge, especially due to the many photos' recording of men's initiations. Such initiations are culturally sensitive as they are processes and moments for transmitting secret knowledge and are restricted to those who are initiated. Thus, circulating images of such ceremonies had to respect local protocols of secrecy. Previous research conducted by Andrew Moutu has highlighted the secrecy and sensitivity of Bateson's collection. When documenting pictures of an initiation ceremony held at the MAA, Moutu noted:

> Some of the photographs about men's initiation as well as the ethnographic description provided by Bateson or myself are secret information known only by men who have access into the ritual. I therefore request that the researcher be sensitive and careful when asking Iatmul informants about the ritual—particularly women and uninitiated men.[25]

As they are records from and of the past, I treated *all* the photographs with attention and care, not just those representing men's initiation ceremonies. Following advice from my local collaborators—elders and initiated men—the showing of Bateson's photographs could only be done when the moment and the place were deemed appropriate. Both place and time determined the nature of the discussions possible when looking at images. In the Sepik region, talking about spirits and calling their names is a highly sensitive activity, as doing so may summon spirits to the village and cause potential harm to and/or retaliation against both the speaker and the audience.[26] As men's houses were traditionally the spaces where the past and spirits were discussed, they were considered safe spaces in which I could carry out research on former and contemporary ceremonial life as well as on Bateson's photography. Furthermore, such conversations had to take place during the daytime, as the spirits would wake up and become active at sunset.[27]

We also arranged for private showings of Bateson's pictures in residential houses throughout day and night, but what could be seen and discussed was often limited due to the presence of women and children. In each of the villages, the first collaborators to view Bateson's photographs were elders or initiated men.[28] Following these viewings in the men's house, and based on the elders' advice and approval, I selected images that could be shared with women and children. The strictest taboo was placed on the images showing men playing ceremonial flutes and the scarification of initiates.[29] Other ceremonial images were subject to debate; some men argued that they should not be shown to the noninitiated at all. Other men claimed that the noninitiated could look at the images because they did not have the related knowledge and therefore would not be able to make connections between the different elements depicted and understand what they showed.

Local protocols for the viewing, sharing, and reproduction of ceremonial images are often challenged and reassessed, especially because of tourism and the Internet. While tourism in the Sepik region represents important opportunities for economic and personal development, it is also a threat to cultural protocols.[30] Because tourists publish images of culturally sensitive images online, especially of the scarification process,[31] they directly affect the efficacy of *kastom*s (customary

ways).[32] As a response to tourism, Iatmul communities implemented different rules to negotiate the presence of tourists and their cameras in villages and men's houses.[33] However, even with these rules, the local communities have no control over the sharing of ceremonial images once tourists have left the village.

In contrast, my collaborators were not upset that Bateson published culturally sensitive images of men's initiations, including some of the most restricted moments, in his book *Naven*. For them, because of the time he spent in the region, his learning from local men, and his involvement in people's lives, Bateson had a different status that made this publication less problematic. In addition, my collaborators considered this book to be one of the main reasons for the popularity of the region globally, which, in turn, brought tourism.

Photographing as Cutting: The Historical Context of a Visual Collection

As has been written about extensively, the uniqueness of the photographic medium lies in its capacity to extract the referent from the world and turn it into a fixed image.[34] Conventionally, the camera is conceived as a fragment-making technology, where the shutter acts as a tool for separation, thus (re)producing people and images as disconnected.[35] As a result of this process, the photographic print operates as a stand-alone object, cut from the photographic event, its participants, and its contexts—a "cutting" of a moment in time and space by the camera.[36] Thus, the camera creates a disconnection between the object depicted and the depiction.

From this perspective, looking back at Bateson's photographs today brings new attention to the relational networks—global and local—in which a photograph is cut from its original context and referent. Here, I offer to place Bateson's photographic collections in their historical context, both in Bateson's personal and professional life and in the general history of anthropology and its uses of the camera.

In February 1929, frustrated by his ethnographic experiences with the Baining and Sulka groups in New Britain (PNG),[37] Bateson joined Jack A. T. Thurston, the captain of a schooner working for colonial plantations, during one of his (forced) recruitment trips along the Sepik River. Bateson stopped at Tambunum (a Iatmul village) and stayed for some days while Thurston continued his trip farther upstream. In Tambunum, Bateson began collecting genealogies "from force of habit" and became aware of "a curious kinship system—one of the most anomalous that [he] ha[d] ever heard of."[38] Returning from this trip, he decided to change

his area of research and focus on the Iatmul region. First established in Mindimbit, Bateson not only collected objects, but also stories and names, and he photographed the region. He described his time in the Sepik as "halting . . . ineffectual and haphazard."[39] At the end of this first fieldwork research in 1930, Bateson returned to Cambridge, UK, where he wrote his master's dissertation later published in the journal *Oceania*.[40] In 1932, Bateson went back to the Sepik River, but this time settled in Kanganamun. The reason for his choosing this village remains unclear, yet he mentioned his desire to compare and analyze the variations between the Eastern and Central Iatmul systems.[41]

Figure 2. Gregory Bateson, photographic portrait of Wolimbei, Mindimbit, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea, 1929. Black-and-white print, P.141806.CHB, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge. This photograph was first published in the journal *Oceania* in 1932. I identified the subject as Wolimbei based on Bateson's description in his field notes and archives. My identification was endorsed by villagers in Mindimbit in August 2024, and the photograph is shown here with their consent. Courtesy of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge

Bateson took photographs during both his trips in the Sepik region. Those from his first visit (1929–30) have a static aesthetic that is similar to earlier ethnographic images from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They are stand-alone depictions of objects, individuals, and places, cut from the contexts in which they were rooted. Out of the entire photographic collection of 462 images, I could only identify twenty-five pictures as having been made in Mindimbit. Most of them are portraits of villagers posing for the camera or photographs of staged material culture. While Bateson observed a few ceremonies in Mindimbit, he only made portraits of men in full regalia, depicting them outside of any ceremonial actions. Two of these portraits were published in the journal *Oceania*. They each show a man holding his lime gourd and stick, posing for the camera (see Fig. 2). Each man's face is painted, their hair is adorned with feathers, and they are each wearing several body ornaments. Though these portraits were made at a ceremony, probably the inauguration of a *tegal* (junior men's house),[42] they cut their subjects from the context in which they took part and therefore tell the observer nothing about the actual ceremony.

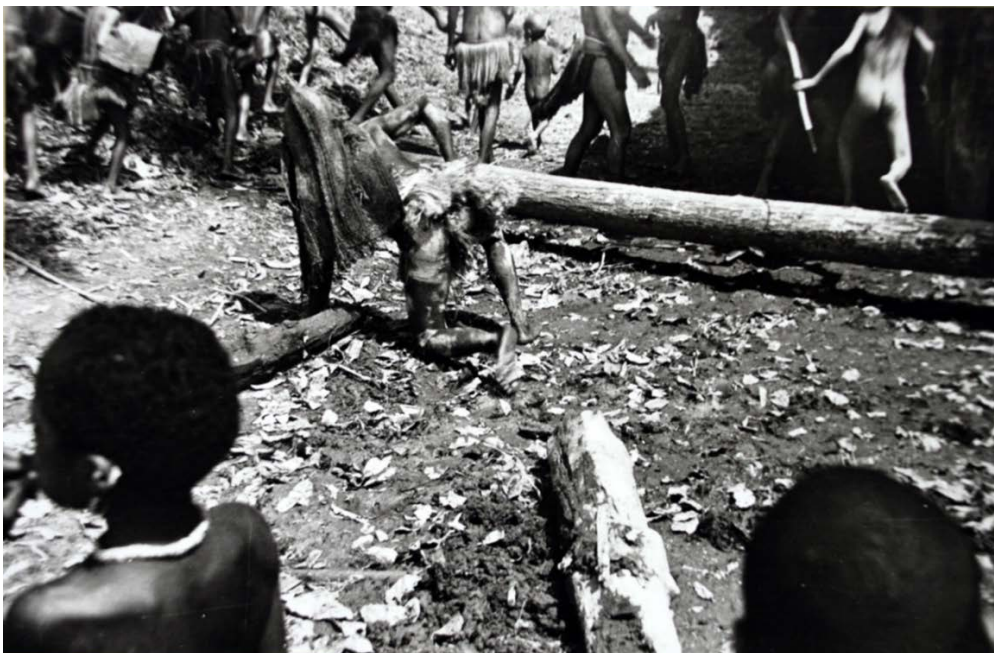

Figure 3. Gregory Bateson, photograph taken during a *naven* ceremony, Palimbei, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea, 1933. Black-and-white print mounted, P.16764.BAT, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge. Characteristic of Bateson's photographic practice during his second visit to the Sepik River, this photograph is one of about twenty photos (some blurry due to movement) that follows the ceremony's action. The series provides information about the ceremony itself as well as the context, including the audience's reactions. The photograph is reproduced with the consent of my collaborators in Palimbei. Courtesy of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge

During his second visit to the Sepik region (1932–33), Bateson's engagement with his subjects and his use of a camera shifted. His photographic practice became more dynamic and began following the flow of events taking place rather than staying static. While he still made photographs of material culture and portraits, most of the images he took in Kanganamun were produced in series (Fig. 3). His taking multiple photographs at one event demonstrates his new concern for grasping phenomena and their contexts in their totality, as opposed to in a single snapshot. In doing so, Bateson intended to work against the fragment-making mechanism of the camera by producing photographs that provided additional context and knowledge of the subject depicted.

Bateson's new interest in recording this surplus of information through his photographic practice can be compared with Bronislaw Malinowski's practice nearly twenty years earlier. In Kiriwina in the Trobriands Islands (PNG), Malinowski often used a wider framing of his subjects as a means to visually transcribe the action he was observing *and* the context in which it was taking place.[43] Yet, the result of Bateson's engagement with the camera remained visually different from Malinowski's. Helped by the technological evolution of photographic processes, Bateson provided visual transcriptions of phenomena through series, which Malinowski could not do.[44] In Bateson's series, the spectator follows his eye and movements across space and time along the performance, witnessing the ceremony itself but also the surrounding environment. In his reportage of ceremonies, Bateson literally followed the movement of the performers and the action as well as paid attention to the audience—at times placing himself at the center of the action.[45]

Yet, during Bateson's two trips to the Sepik region, the camera never had a central role in his ethnography; the camera was a tool to capture what was available to him rather than photography being his primary research method. It was only when he returned to Cambridge in 1933 that he started reflecting on what photographs could tell about Iatmul culture.[46] From this perspective, Bateson's use of photography is similar to his approach to ethnographic writing; he used both as attempts to translate the intangible aspects of Iatmul culture into comprehensible data.[47] For example, by comparing portraits of men with portraits of women, he concluded that their differences in posing for the camera visualized the dichotomy of gender ethos. The masculine ethos was supposedly visible through the pride with which men were posing, as opposed to women's shyness, which was reflected by their modesty in front of the camera.[48] It was only later, during his research in Bali (1936–37) and Tambunum (1938), that photography became Bateson's central research method.[49]

Photography had been part and parcel of the Western anthropological project since the turn of the twentieth century, when the camera became one of the tools used to make unseen cultural aspects visible and comprehensible. Bateson's photographic and ethnographic practices were the result of anthropological methods he was taught during his time at Cambridge University. Alfred C. Haddon, Bateson's supervisor, was particularly concerned about the production of visual records through which culture was made visible.[50] Cultural meaning was thought to be located and captured in the appearance of things.[51] The anthropologist was understood as the one digging into local culture and life in order to bring cultural elements to the surface. These observations were to be made following specific methods and processes. From this perspective, photography calibrated the eye—"being taught what to see and how to see it"[52]—and enabled a so-called "objectivity" in the ethnographic enterprise. A trained eye was able to dig into the unseen and excavate the invisible rules and laws that regulate a social group, in this case the Iatmul.[53]

Picturing culture was therefore not simply an act of documenting, but needed to represent the invisible principles structuring the visible cultural phenomena.[54] Anthropologists hoped photography would produce a series of visual facts that would appear in print and be easily transportable and reproducible, thus validating the ethnographic endeavor.[55] As an indexical result of the actual object depicted, photography was evidence and witness of the past, now vanished. The evidential quality of a photograph became paramount in the "salvage ethnographic" project.[56] Particularly important in the Western imagination of Melanesia, the project of salvaging the cultural heritage of newly colonized people became the primary driving force in the ethnographic exploration of the area.[57] At the turn of the twentieth century, the Sepik region was the subject of multiple expeditions with the purpose of collecting objects from and photographing the different cultures established along the river.[58] In this context, Bateson was expected to study the social institutions that were holding this material culture together.[59] Photographing Iatmul culture was essential as a way to preserve and understand a population that was thought to be profoundly disrupted and on the verge of disappearance. Alongside ethnography, photography led to the cutting of objects and knowledge from their original contexts for their collection, classification, study, and publication.

Interlude: Thinking with the Lotus

The sight of a lotus flower and its leaves (*Nelumbo nucifera*) covering most of a lake's surface creates a dazzling image. A photograph taken by Bateson while traveling up the Sepik River in 1933 (Fig. 4) shows the full growth cycle of the lotus: on the right, a flower blooms, other buds appear in the background, and a seed head emerges at the center of the image. This photo offers a fixed moment that shows the different stages of leaves expanding, flowers blooming, and seeds being produced. During one of his visits to Chambri Lake to meet his colleagues Margaret Mead and Reo Fortune,[60] Bateson photographed five views of the lake covered in lotuses with the Chambri and Aibom mountains in the background.

Figure 4. Gregory Bateson, photograph of lotuses on the Chambri Lake, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea, 1933. Black-and-white print mounted, P.16750.BAT, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge. Courtesy of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge

The reader may wonder why I am interrupting my discussion of the visual return of Bateson's photographs to look at this image. Indeed, nothing in this image seems, at first glance, to be associated with specific cultural or historical discourses that would make it a meaningful image of the Sepik in the past. But while this image did not spark many conversations when I showed it to my Iatmul

collaborators, it stuck with me and has come to visualize a paramount discussion I had with men in Kanganamun in June 2024.

As mentioned earlier, I shared Bateson's photographs with Iatmul men in the men's houses to see whether the images sparked any comments, discussions, or stories. During my first weeks in Kanganamun, I spent afternoons in two men's houses, Wolimbi and Minjimbit, where I shared and discussed the same photographs. Most men only made a few comments. One exception was Vincent Yarme, a locally renowned sculptor and cultural specialist, who was particularly interested in trying to identify the different masks and objects in the photos and how they were made. The rest of the men did not have much to say. I was puzzled; the visual return that I hoped to be a moment of dialogue and sharing was resulting mostly in silence.

After a few weeks, in the hopes of generating interest and discussions, I read the notes I had taken from Bateson's field notes at the Library of Congress. Upon learning that Bateson wrote more than what was published in his monograph *Naven*, men became eager to know what was recorded in these field notes.[61] What was at first a visual return became a larger project involving my reading of Bateson's field notes to those gathered in the men's house. In the Wolimbi men's house, while discussing Bateson's field notes, I asked the men, "Why are you more interested in the field notes than in these images?" The men replied with a common Iatmul saying, "*Vandingawa Manbangasawa,"* that means "one root and many groups." The use of botanical metaphors to explain cultural phenomena, especially regarding kinship systems, is common in the region.[62] This saying usually refers to how human beings reproduce themselves like lotuses and that one person can have relatives across different villages. In the same way that a lotus on the one end of a lake can be related to another one at the other end by a series of rhizomes extending throughout the entire lake, a man can be related to another man in a different village because they share common ancestors. But during this discussion, in the context of Bateson's photos and his field notes, men used this saying to highlight how visual appearances provided limited access to knowledge. Whether understanding a photograph, a person, or a lotus, in the Iatmul context they followed a similar model: they had to be placed according to the relational networks that were constituting them.[63] This knowledge of the rhizomes—that is to say, the relational network—is what makes someone able to understand where something or someone comes from and how they are related to others in order to act accordingly.

As a Iatmul metaphor and the subject of one of Bateson's photographs, this image of the lotus has shaped my analysis of visual return. For photographs to

become meaningful for my Iatmul collaborators, they had to grow back connections to the local rhizomatic network of interconnections. Conversely, because Bateson's notebooks contained hundreds of Iatmul names and stories, my collaborators did not perceive the content of these notebooks as disconnected from the complex relational networks in which they belong. While photographs alone were not sufficient to sprout connections, connections between persons, places, ancestors, and spirits were made through names and stories. In the horticultural context, it is easier to grow new lotuses from rhizomes than from other parts of the plant because rhizomes as plant stems contain all the necessary nutrients for their vegetative reproduction, a process through which new sprouts grow from the nodes of rhizomes. In this perspective, field notes acted as rhizomes because they contained within themselves the necessary connections for their re-engagement in the dense entanglement of Iatmul relations. Even when the names recorded by Bateson were unfamiliar to my collaborators, they contained semantic sequences enabling Iatmul men to assign them to the right clan and thus connect them to other better-known names and stories.[64]

Sprouting Photographs: Visual Return as a Striking Process

With Bateson's photograph of a lotus and the Iatmul metaphor in mind, I propose that the cutting of scenes, people, and events out of photographs' contexts and fixing them onto negatives, can be seen as analogous to the cutting of a lotus from its rhizomes. When photographing the lotus, Bateson created an image of a lotus removed from the rhizomes from which it sprouted, and which connected it to other lotuses across the lake. This metaphor can be applied to the rest of his photographic collection. By taking photographs, Bateson removed the elements in his photos from their original context and relational network. Following the botanical metaphor, I argue that in the Iatmul context, a visual return can be compared to striking—a horticultural process through which a new plant is grown from a cutting. From this perspective, the researcher, like a gardener, places a "cutting" in the form of a photograph in a fertile environment and hopes it will sprout and grow new "rhizomes" in the form of connections between images and communities. The project of returning photographs to the villages where they were made is undertaken in the hope that these images will sprout new connections and reconnect with the context from which they were once removed.

The parallel between a visual return and a striking process can be demonstrated through the case study of the visual return of a particular photograph taken

by Bateson in January 1933 (Fig. 5). This image was part of a series of images he made during men's initiation ceremonies. It depicts a *wal mbuanggo* (crocodile performance), one of the first stages of the initiation ceremony in which the initiators are dancing in line and come to gather the initiates to bring them to the ritual enclosure. Men, fully ornamented, are walking toward the camera on the *wompunau* (ceremonial ground), bounded by two *tuvui* (mounds). At the back stands a men's house.

Figure 5. Gregory Bateson, photograph of a *wal mbuanggo* (crocodile performance) during an initiation ceremony in Maliguatgei, January, 1933. Black-and-white print mounted, P.16612.BAT, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge. This photograph is reproduced here with the consent of the Minjimbit men's house community. It shows the first part of initiation ceremonies without revealing sensitive elements. Courtesy of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge

I shared this image and the rest of the collection attributed to Kanganamun with my collaborators on multiple occasions in the men's houses. When I first showed them this image, they had no particular discussion other than short comments about the performance depicted and the ornaments used. As often happened when looking at Bateson's photographs, men began telling me stories that had no clear link with the images. Because in Kanganamun, my collaborators' grandparents were alive when Bateson visited the village, talking about Bateson had them remembering stories from their grandparents' generation. One of these

stories came to me from Jack Kapi, my adoptive father, who asked my *wau* (maternal uncles) Patrick Kamanjane and James Norubange to join us at his place to narrate it. Following the local desire to keep the story and related names hidden, I am providing only a summary of the story:

> During our grandfathers' time, a fight occurred between two men's houses in Kanganamun: Wolimbi and Minjimbit. A man from Wolimbi had learned that one of his wives had gotten pregnant by a man from Minjimbit. In great anger, he tried to kill him, but his spear was stopped by a second man from Minjimbit. Tension escalated and the conflict became generalized to the two men's houses. The community of Minjimbit eventually decided to leave Kanganamun. They created their own village, in one of the bushes of Gaikorobi, called Maliguatgei. Minjimbit stayed in this bush for some years before returning to Kanganamun.[65]

A few days after Jack, Patrick, and James shared their story with me, I was talking with Jack about a different photograph of the Wolimbi men's house in Kanganamun.[66] The structure of the building photographed by Bateson in 1932 was quite different from the one standing today in the village. I asked Jack about his perspective on these changes. This led Jack to start comparing it to Minjimbit, and to go through Bateson's images before stopping on the *wal mbuanggo* image (Fig. 5). He identified the men's house at the back as Minjimbit.

Later that day, I returned to the Minjimbit men's house, showed the same image to James and Patrick, and said, "Jack says it is Minjimbit. What do you think?" They spent some time looking at it and concluded, "Yes, it looks like Minjimbit." They started looking at the other images taken of this *wal mbuanggo* which had been said to be made in Kanganamun. I explained that, according to my understanding of his field notes, Bateson witnessed an initiation in Kanganamun in January 1933 and had written some descriptions of it in his notebook. Intrigued and curious, James and Patrick asked me to read some of these notes. Bateson had listed the names of five initiates, which I read aloud. Patrick stopped me; one of the names was that of his father, Suatkaman. Patrick returned to the picture and looked at it silently for a long moment. He said, "That's the initiation of my father." We marked a pause, moved by this realization.

After a moment, we continued our discussion of Bateson's notes and photographs. With more conviction, the men confirmed that it was Minjimbit. Remembering the story they had told me a few days prior, I asked "Is it the men's house from inland [Maliguatgei] or from here [Kanganamun]?" They went back to the

image, looked carefully at the arrangement of the *tuvui* (mounds), and concluded that this photograph of Minjimbit was not taken in Kanganamun but in Maliguatgei. The story of Maliguatgei was now directly linked to Bateson's ethnography; Bateson had clearly visited Kanganamun when Minjimbit and Wolimbi were in great conflict and Minjimbit had moved inland to Maliguatgei.

Figure. 6. Photograph of where the Minjimbit men's house used to stand, Maliguatgei, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea, September 2024. Photograph courtesy of the author

During my last week in Kanganamun in September 2024, I visited the bush where the village of Maliguatgei used to be. My collaborators from Minjimbit wanted me to visit and re-photograph the place where the men's house once stood, reaffirming and rearticulating the connections between past and present places, humans, non-humans, and ancestors.[67] Because the land does not belong to the men of Minjimbit anymore, our visit had to be organized with its current landowners: people from Gaikorobi. For the last decades, the community of Minjimbit had not visited the place. Arriving at the location, I was puzzled. It was difficult to identify landmarks because trees had grown everywhere (Fig. 6). What once was the *wompunau* (ceremonial ground) was now hard to identify; the *tuvui* that

delineated the *wompunau* had flattened out with time, and the only trace of what used to be the *wak* (ceremonial mound) was a *tepme iaman* (palm tree). Patrick said the "mother"—the original tree planted by their ancestors—must have died and a "child"—a new tree—had sprouted from it further down the *wompunau*. The place kept a visual connection to the past, but as for other connections, they sometimes grow in unexpected places and can be hard to recognize at first glance. It was just a tree hiding in the middle of others. This story was a great example of how this visual return was done *with* my collaborators. This detail in the landscape, which I was unable to see at first, had a powerful and meaningful story that we were able to reconnect with Bateson's ethnography and his archives.

I present this example to show that reconnecting visual archives with contemporary communities is a long process that involves more than just photographs. My work around Bateson's photographs had moved beyond merely identifying the elements his images depicted; through assembling historical photographs, archival written documents, and local knowledge, (re)connections were created. This collaboration became a unique moment—a meeting place for my collaborators and their knowledge of past events, material culture, environment, and social and personal histories, and my knowledge of Bateson's archives and his work in the village—that enabled us to reassess and recover stories from the past.

Here, I argue that the collaborative work done around the photograph of a *wal mbuanggo* can be compared to a striking process. Like a gardener, I (re)planted the photograph (the lotus) in its original context (the lake) from which it was once removed, hoping people would (re)connect with it. For a lotus cutting to sprout, it must grow new rhizomes that will provide water and nutrients to the plant. The lotus reconnects with other lotuses by spreading and growing rhizomes. The Iatmul saying about lotuses ("*Vandingawa Manbangasawa*," "one root and many groups") highlights a specific understanding of visuality and knowledge. For the photograph of the *wal mbuanggo* to become meaningful, it had to be (re)placed and understood together with the relational network from which it had been removed. In this case study, the image could be reconnected to the large and complex network of rhizomes because the image was re-entangled to both local history (the fight between Minjimbit and Wolimbi and the move of Minjimbit from Kanganamun to Maliguatgei) and personal stories (the initiation of Patrick's father).

The example of Bateson's *wal mbuanggo* photograph highlights the multiplicity of connections that can sprout from a single image when paying close attention to photographic details and letting discussions flow freely. Moreover, it shows how emotional, personal, collective, and sociopolitical connections are porous and entangled. Because of this porous and partible ontology of humans and non-

humans, the photograph of the *wal mbuanggo* in Minjimbit became the starting point from which multiple connections could be made. In thinking about connections as rhizomes, I emphasize the necessity of following discussions even when they seem to go in opposite directions or when they contradict earlier statements. Both connections and rhizomes can be described as uncontrollable. Rethinking connections as rhizomes implies imagining these connections beyond a specific order or process. Indeed, the rhizome has "no beginning nor end, but always a middle . . . from which it grows and overspills."[68] This botanical metaphor reflects the ways in which Iatmul men discussed Bateson's photographs—their discussions were never structured or stable but rather followed chains of thoughts which seemed conflicting or unrelated at times.

Additionally, this lotus metaphor offers an image of connections outside of the frame of truth-value and the objectivity of visual identification, emphasizing the fluidity and multiplicity of these identifications. The focus of my research was not necessarily on whether the identification proposed by my collaborators at one point was true or not. It was about letting men discuss the photographs and incorporate them within the local knowledge system. By bringing back images to the Iatmul villages, they were taken out of Western regimes of knowledge and visuality often centered around fixed discourses of photographs as documents or evidence. Indeed, in the Iatmul region, photographs were integrated into local knowledge systems in which there is no fixed or objective meaning. Knowledge is positioned and linked to different versions, public and secret ones, and can be regularly reassessed and debated.[69]

The successful "sprouting" of Bateson's photograph of a *wal mbuanggo* was possible because my collaborators and I were able to weave together information from Bateson's archives, his photographs, and local narratives. In doing so, photographs were reintegrated within a knowledge system based on debates and disputes over names, lands, and properties.[70] Ownership over the elements depicted in the photographs can only be secured when the story to which it refers is clear and well-formulated. Details are important because they are what confirm or disprove the veracity and mastery of the related knowledge. The identification of the men's house as Minjimbit took part in a bigger dispute between Minjimbit and Wolimbi. The men from Minjimbit perceived Bateson's ethnography as distorted. He was not aware of these conflicts, and he overlooked Minjimbit's role and position within Kanganamun because he was relying mainly on informants from Wolimbi, who had their own interests in promoting Wolimbi over the other two men's houses of Kanganamun. This centrality of Wolimbi was further reinforced in later ethnographies, especially when Wolimbi was included in Papua New Guinea's

national cultural heritage in 1967 and listed as part of PNG's National Art Gallery and Museum. By claiming that this men's house was Minjimbit, Jack, Patrick, and James were uncovering previously overlooked stories that had the potential to redress historical biases in the understanding of the village and redistribute power and agency to Minjimbit.

Finally, thinking about visual returns as the striking of a lotus brings new attention to the fact that connections are not given but produced. Merely returning photographs to the Iatmul villages would not have created meaningful connections. As I explored earlier, creating meaning is like growing rhizomes—it takes time, attention, and care. Growth, from a Sepik perspective, is not easy or simple work, but rather mobilizes multiple human and non-human agencies, embodied techniques, savoir-faire, and (secret and public) knowledge.[71] Growing a plant, gardeners are involved in a complex process engaging and reassessing multiple ties to places, people, past, present, and future, entangled within local discourses of aesthetic, efficacy, and ownership. Thus, both the growth of plants and the return of the image are entangled in different registers of knowledge. This is why, when talking about the *wal mbuanggo*, I was confronted with histories that had to remain secret. As I have shown earlier, the photograph was tied to the story of Maliguatgei. Nowadays, the story still holds great implications for several personal and collective lives. The descendants of the men involved in the fights between Wolimbi and Minjimbit are still living in the village. The reconnection between the photograph and this broader story had new ethical implications. I was specifically told to keep some elements of the story secret because they could be harmful to the descendants. If the story was known by most of the men, the details and ability to connect different elements of this event to the photograph and their contemporary utterances should not therefore be publicly known.

Conclusion

In this article, I used the botanical metaphors of photography as a cutting and of visual return as a striking process to call attention to several important specificities of a visual return project in the Iatmul context. While I discussed the successful experience of the striking of an image of a *wal mbuanggo*, many images made by Bateson were never deeply engaged with nor connected to entangled stories and contexts. In that sense, the striking metaphor acknowledges failure as part of visual return processes. Indeed, visual returns sometimes do not achieve their hope of generating (re)connections and photographs, like some cuttings, will remain

unsprouted. It does not mean that these photographs will never grow connections, but just that the conditions, at that time of the project, were not right to make them germinate.

When photographs do sprout, the growth of connections does not follow a specific order or process, but rather flow, with discussions going in unexpected or conflicting directions, much like the meandering of a growing rhizome. These botanical metaphors make apparent that integrating photographs into local systems of knowledge—in which the past is necessarily positioned, partial, and linked to public and private knowledge—moves the connection process beyond the Western framework of truth and veracity around photography.

The purpose of the lotus-growing metaphor was also to help frame visual returns as collaborative projects that take time, attention, and care. The return of photographs to the Iatmul villages, in itself, did not awaken connections between communities and collections; connections were the result of a long process involving the collaborative discussion of several sources of knowledge from both the past and the present.

Understanding historical photographs in the Iatmul region requires knowing how to navigate between the lotus (the photograph) at the surface and the rhizomatic network (stories, narratives, relationships) that connects them underneath. This distinction between lotuses at the surface and their rhizomes underneath illustrates the distinction between public appearances and hidden/secret knowledge. As such, growing new rhizomes (connections) from a lotus cutting (photograph) resurfaces hidden connections and meanings. In this process, researchers must ethically follow their collaborators' guidance and refrain from bringing up to the surface rhizomes that should remain hidden or buried.

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Notes

[1] Bateson's photographic archives are held at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA), Cambridge, UK, and his field notes are held at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

[2] Jocelyn Dudding, "Visual Repatriation and Photo-Elicitation: Recommendations on Principles and Practices for the Museum Worker," *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 17 (2005), http://www.jstor.org/stable/40793782. Photo-elicitation as a research method has developed since the 1950s; see John Collier Jr. and Malcolm Collier, *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method* (University of New Mexico Press, 1967).

[3] Joshua Bell, "Losing the Forest but not the Stories in the Trees: Contemporary Understandings of F. E. Williams's 1922 Photographs of the Purari Delta," *Journal of Pacific History* 41, no. 2 (2006): 192, https://doi.org/10.1080/00223340600826094.

[4] Joshua Bell, "Out of the Mouths of Crocodiles: Eliciting Histories in Photographs and String-Figures," *History and Anthropology* 21 (2010): 366, https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2010.521156.

[5] Bell, "Out of the Mouths," 359. For examples of visual returns, see Joshua A. Bell, "Looking to See: Reflections on Visual Repatriation in the Purari Delta, Gulf Province, Papua New Guinea," in *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader*, ed. L. Peers and A. Brown (Routledge, 2003), 111–22; Bell, "Out of the Mouths"; Anita Herle and Haidy Geismar, *Moving Images: John Layard, Fieldwork and Photography on Malakula since 1914* (University of Hawaii Press, 2010).

[6] Bell, "Looking to See"; Joshua Bell and Haidy Geismar, "Materialising Oceania: New Ethnographies of Things in Melanesia and Polynesia," *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 20, no. 1 (2009), https://doi.org/10.1111/j.17576547.2009.00001.x; Herle and Geismar, *Moving Images*.

[7] During his ethnographic research (1972–1988) conducted in Palimbei, Christian Coiffier showed villagers Bateson's photographs that were published in *Naven* (Cambridge University Press, 1936). Eric Silverman similarly visually returned photographs taken by Bateson in Tambunum in 1938 during his ongoing research in the village.

[8] See Marilyn Strathern, "Kinship as a Relation," *L'Homme* 210 (2014): 43–61, https://doi.org/10.4000/lhomme.23542; and Marilyn Strathern, *Relations: An Anthropological Account* (Duke University Press, 2020).

[9] This ties back to current discussions about the redefinition of "source communities," highlighting the complexities of notions of identity and community in cross-cultural contexts. See Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown, eds., *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader* (Routledge, 2003); and Laura Brown, "Museums and Source Communities: Reflections and Implications," in *Matters of Belonging: Ethnographic Museums in a Changing Europe*, ed. Wayne Modest et al. (Sidestone, 2019), 31–35.

[10] See, for example, Liam Buckley, "Photography and Photo-Elicitation after Colonialism," *Cultural Anthropology* 29, no. 4 (2014): 720–743, https://doi.org/10.14506/ca29.4.07.
[11] Marilyn Strathern, "Cutting the Network," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2, no. 3 (1996): 523, https://doi.org/10.2307/3034901. See also Joshua Bell, "A Bundle of Relations: Collections, Collecting, and Communities," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 46 (2017): 241–259, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-102313-030259.
[12] Bell, "Bundle of Relations," 252.
[13] See Geismar, *Moving Images*, 259; Roland Barthes, *La Chambre Claire: Note Sur la Photographie* (Gallimard, 1980); Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (Routledge, 2001).
[14] Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 5.
[15] In his presentation of the advantages of photo-elicitation methods, John Collier Jr. argued that photographs were a great medium to develop interviews in cross-cultural contexts because they could overcome linguistic barriers. See Collier and Collier, *Visual Anthropology*, 58. However, this ability to "read" photographs is culturally constructed and dependent on specific ways of thinking about images and representation.
[16] *Wagan* ceremonies are performed at important moments of village life, such as the inauguration of a new men's house. Historically, they were directly linked to the performance and presence of *wagan* spirits, a highly powerful and important category of spirits in Iatmul cosmologies. See Gregory Bateson, *Naven: A Survey of the Problems Suggested by a Composite Picture of the Culture of a New Guinea Tribe Drawn from Three Points of View* (Cambridge University Press, 1936), 136–7.
[17] Bateson, *Naven*, 168, Plate XVIII A and B, and Plate XXVIII A.
[18] The hook mentioned is part of Bateson's collection at the MAA (accession number 1935.62).
[19] Additionally, the photographic prints held in the MMPSPEA also contain sets of images related to different publications by Bateson, especially *Naven*.
[20] Letters between different employees at the American Museum of Natural History and Margaret Mead, folder 8, Box P 89, MMPSPEA, Library of Congress.
[21] Notebook G II, Folder 7, Box N107, MMPSPEA, Library of Congress.
[22] The offering of *buai* is necessary before engaging in any form of work with the community. It is a way to acknowledge the place and its people in the research (both humans and non-humans). *Buai* includes not only betelnut, but also Western goods such as cigarettes, salt, coffee, sugar, and newspapers.
[23] Discussions with my collaborators were done in Tok Pisin, the lingua franca of Papua New Guinea, with some English and Iatmul.
[24] This closer engagement with Minjimbit was justified locally by the involvement of previous researchers, especially Andrew Moutu, with the community of the

Wolimbi men's house. I was explicitly told by men from Minjimbit that it was their turn to have an anthropologist working with them.

[25] See Moutu's comment made in November 2003 on the database of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology for the photographs depicting initiation ceremonies, https://collections.maa.cam.ac.uk/photographs/434162/.

[26] Every spirit is known by a series of names. Some are publicly known while others remain secret. Knowledge of the relevant and correct names is necessary to ensure a good communication with the spirits and the efficacy of ceremonies. On the importance of names, see Bateson, *Naven*; Andrew Moutu, *Names are Thicker than Blood: Kinship and Ownership amongst the Iatmul* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Jürg Wassmann, *The Song to the Flying Fox: The Public and Esoteric Knowledge of the Important Men of Kandingei About Totemic Songs, Names and Knotted Cords (Middle Sepik, Papua New Guinea)* (The National Research Institute, 1991); Christiane Falck, "'You Have to Call the Right Name'—Operation Joshua meets Cosmology and Catholicism at Lake Chambri in Papua New Guinea," *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 31, no. 2 (2020): 170–186, https://doi.org/10.1111/taja.12358.

[27] One afternoon in Kanganamun, we were discussing and debating stories linked to a specific *wagan* (a powerful type of spirit in the region). The interest for these stories led the conversation to carry on despite the sun going down. Suddenly, a mask suspended in the Wolimbi men's house dropped, signaling that the discussion needed to stop.

[28] In Mindimbit and Kaminimbit, men's initiations are not practiced anymore. Nevertheless, in both villages I was told by elder men that they had to be the first ones to see Bateson's photographs, and they provided advice on how to proceed with women and children.

[29] The flutes are kept hidden from women and played in pairs at different ceremonies, including men's initiations. See Raymond Ammann, "Middle Sepik Music and Musical Instruments in the Context of Melanesia," *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 146 (2018): 179–188, https://doi.org/10.4000/jso.8411; Mervyn McLean, *Diffusion of Musical Instruments and Their Relations to Language Migrations in New Guinea* (Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, 1994); Philippe Peltier, Markus Schindlbeck, and Christian Kaufmann, *Sepik, Arts de Papouasie Nouvelle-Guinée* (Skira 2015); and Gordon Spearritt, "The Pairing of Musicians and Instruments in Iatmul Society," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 14 (1982): 106–125, https://doi.org/10.2307/768073.

[30] Tourism in the region first emerged along the Sepik River in the 1970s and has grown exponentially since the 1990s. Although tourism represents an important source of income, it brings new challenges, forcing villagers to reassess—and at times adapt—their customary practices, and to forge new sociopolitical stages for the promotion of new identities. For local perspectives on tourism, see Eric Silverman, "From Cannibal Tours to Cargo Cult: On the Aftermath of Tourism in the

Sepik River, Papua New Guinea," *Tourist Studies* 12, no. 2 (2012): 109–130, https://doi-org.uea.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/1468797612454511. For a focus on photography in the context of tourism, see Christian Coiffier, "Safari photo et chasse aux têtes en Nouvelle-Guinée," *Journal des Anthropologues* 80–81 (2000): 259–281, https://doi.org/10.4000/jda.3235.

[31] For example, during my first visit to Kanganamun in 2023, men were upset because a tourist who had visited the region had uploaded a photograph to Facebook showing the contemporary scarification process. My Iatmul collaborators perceived the Internet as an out-of-control space where they had no means to restrict the sharing of images.

[32] The Melanesian notion of *kastom* refers to ancestral and customary practices, rights, and knowledge systems. See, for example, David Akin, "Ancestral Vigilance and the Corrective Conscience: Custom as Culture in a Melanesian Society," *Anthropological Theory* 4, no. 3 (2004): 299–324, https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499604045566; Roger M. Keesing, "Creating the Past: Custom and Identity in the Contemporary Pacific," *The Contemporary Pacific: Journal of Islands Affairs* 1, nos. 1–2 (1989): 19–42, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23701891; Lamont Lindstrom and Geoffrey M. White, *Culture, Kastom, Tradition: Developing Cultural Policy in Melanesia* (Institute of Pacific Studies, The University of the South Pacific, 1994).

[33] For example, initiated men decided to charge visitors a fee in exchange for the permission to access and take photographs in the men's houses. Additional fees were charged for specific images, like photographs of the back of a scarified man. Similarly, tourists were required to pay to witness and photograph ceremonial performances. At initiation ceremonies, tourists could watch the scarification process but were only allowed to take pictures once it was finished.

[34] See, for example, Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Penguin Books, 1977); Jean Baudrillard, *Le Crime parfait* (Galilée, 1995); Elizabeth Edwards, "Exchanging Photographs: Preliminary Thoughts on the Currency of Photography in Collecting Anthropology," *Journal des Anthropologues* 80–81 (2000): 23, https://doi.org/10.4000/jda.3138; Bruno Latour, "Visualisation and Cognition: Drawing Things Together," in *Knowledge and Society Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present*, vol. 6, ed. Elizabeth Long and Henrika Kuklick (JAI Press, 1986), 7–13.

[35] Ariella A. Azoulay, *Potential Histories: Unlearning Imperialism* (Verso Books, 2019), 1–3.

[36] Sontag, *On Photography*, 22–23 and 156.

[37] David Lipset, *Gregory Bateson: the Legacy of a Scientist* (Prentice-Hall, 1980), 127–28; Andrew Lattas, "Re-analysing the Baining: The Mytho-Poetics of Race, Gender and Art," *Oceania* 90, no. 2 (2020): 98–150, https://doi.org/10.1002/ocea.5248.

[38] Draft letter from Gregory Bateson to James Mann Wordie in notebook Sepik III, Folder 3, Box N 105, MMPSPEA, Library of Congress.
[39] Lipset, *Gregory Bateson*, 132.
[40] Bateson, "Social Structures."
[41] Bateson, "Social Structures," 450. Locally, people recognize three different cultural groups linked to different histories of migrations and settlements. The eastern part of the region was studied by Bateson, Margaret Mead, Rhoda Métraux, Brigitta Hauser-Schaüblin, and Eric Silverman. The Central Iatmul group was the focus of much research undertaken since Bateson by Milan Stanek, Florence Weiss, Jürg Schmid, Christian Coiffier, and Andrew Moutu. The Western Iatmul group has been studied by Jürg Wassmann and more recently by Christiane Falck.
[42] This identification is possible through the comparison of this photograph with a group photograph of men in front of a building. In his field notes, Bateson mentioned ceremonies and performances linked to the opening of this new *tegal*, junior men's house.
[43] See Michael W. Young, *Malinowski's Kiriwina: Fieldwork Photography 1915–1918* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 18–19.
[44] Malinowski mainly used a quarter-plate Model II Klimax camera with a Beck Mutar lens. For details, see Young, *Malinowski's Kiriwina*, 275–276. The camera model used by Bateson between 1929 and 1933 remains unknown, but the original negatives are 35mm films. In 1938, Bateson used a 35mm Leica camera. The technological improvement of photographic processes meant that the camera was more compact, portable, and could capture more images and faster. While the Klimax camera could only hold a maximum of ten dry plates, the 35mm film could record at least twenty shots. Dry plates were also more fragile than films.
[45] Following this description, Bateson's photographic practice appears similar to Layard's, as described in Herle and Geismar, *Moving Images*, 109.
[46] Bateson, *Naven*, 260.
[47] On the use of captions for the photographs published in *Naven*, see George E. Marcus, "A Timely Rereading of Naven: Gregory Bateson as Oracular Essayist," *Representations* 12 (1985): 66–82, https://doi.org/10.2307/3043778.
[48] Bateson, *Naven*, 151. Bateson's description of Iatmul womanhood was later challenged by Florence Weiss and Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin. See Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin, *Women in Kararau: Gendered Lives, Works, and Knowledge in a Middle Sepik Village, Papua New Guinea* (Göttingen University Press, 2019); Milan Stanek and Florence Weiss, "Aspects of the Naven Ritual: Conversations with an Iatmul Woman of Papua New Guinea," *Social Analysis* 50, no. 2 (2006): 45–76, https://doi.org/10.3167/015597706780810916.
[49] See Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, *Balinese Character: A Photographic Study* (American Museum of Natural History, 1942).

[50] Gregory Delaplace, "More than Corpses, Less than Ghosts: A Visual Theory of Culture in Early Ethnographic Photography," *Visual Anthropology Review* 35, no. 1 (2019): 38–9, https://doi.org/10.1111/var.12177.
[51] Anna Grimshaw, The *Ethnographer's Eye: Ways of Seeing in Anthropology* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 24.
[52] Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (Zone Books, 2008), 44.
[53] See Maurice Bloch "Truth and Sight: Generalizing without Universalizing," in *The Objects of Evidence: Anthropological Approaches to the Production of Knowledge*, ed. M. Engelke (Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 21–30; and Grimshaw, *Ethnographer's Eye*.
[54] Delaplace, "More than Corpses."
[55] See Edwards, "Exchanging Photographs;" Latour, "Visualisation and Cognition;" Allan Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs," *Art Journal* 41, No. 1 (1981): 15, https://doi.org/10.2307/776511.
[56] See Elizabeth Edwards and Christopher Morton, *Photography, Anthropology and History: Expanding the Frame* (Routledge, 2010).
[57] See Douglas Dalton, "Melanesian Can(n)ons: Paradoxes and Prospects in Melanesian Ethnography," in *Excluded Ancestors, Inventible Traditions: Essays Toward a More Inclusive History of Anthropology*, ed. R. Handler (University of Wisconsin Press, 2000).
[58] See, for example, the A. B. Lewis and the Joseph N. Field South Pacific Expedition between 1909 and 1913, and the Kaiserin Augusta River Expedition between 1912 and 1913.
[59] Alfred C. Haddon in Lipset, *Gregory Bateson*, 125.
[60] Bateson met Margaret Mead and Reo Fortune during his research in the Sepik Region in December 1932 at Ambunti. He helped the couple find a place to develop their third ethnographic research project after living with the Arapesh and the Mundugumor (Biwat). Together, they visited Kwoma villages before they decided to settle in Chambri villages in January 1933. During the last months of his research, Bateson often traveled to Chambri to visit them. On their relationships, see Margaret Mead, *Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years* (Morrow, 1972) and Lise Dobrin and Ira Bashkow, "'The Truth in Anthropology Does Not Travel First Class': Reo Fortune's Fateful Encounter with Margaret Mead," *Histories of Anthropology Annual* 6, no. 1 (2010): 66–128, https://doi.org/10.1353/haa.2010.0009.
[61] A detailed discussion of the return of Bateson's field notes will not be included here. I discuss the return of these written archives in Enzo Hamel, "Listening to Archives: Iatmul voices and silences in Gregory Bateson's ethnographic archives," *Etnofoor* 37, no. 2 (2025), forthcoming.
[62] See Moutu, *Names are Thicker*, 140; Christian Coiffier, "'L'écorce et la moelle du rotin' Tshimbe Kuvu, Kwiya Kuvu: Conception iatmul de l'univers" (PhD diss., École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1994), 201,

https://theses.hal.science/tel-02146242v1; Eric K. Silverman, *Masculinity, Motherhood and Mockery: Psychoanalyzing Culture and the Iatmul Naven Rite in New Guinea* (University of Michigan Press, 2001).

[63] On Melanesian personhood, see Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (University of California Press, 1988).

[64] See Wassmann, *Song to the Flying Fox*, 228.

[65] Summary of a story told on June 6, 2024 at Kanganamun.

[66] I will not discuss here the details of the history of the Wolimbi men's house. Wolimbi, as photographed by Bateson, was rebuilt from the 1940s. A detailed discussion of the men's houses in Kanganamun will be part of my PhD thesis.

[67] See Geismar, *Moving Images*, 266.

[68] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 21.

[69] On the secret and situated nature of knowledge in the Iatmul region, see Moutu, *Names are Thicker*.

[70] See, for example, Bateson, *Naven*; Deborah Gewertz, "'On Whom Depends the Action of the Elements': Debating Among the Chambri People of Papua New Guinea," *Journal of Polynesian Society* 86, no. 3 (1977): 339–353, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20705271; Simon Harrison, *Stealing People's Names: History and Politics in a Sepik River Cosmology* (Cambridge University Press, 1990); Moutu, *Names are Thicker*.

[71] Ludovic Coupaye, *Growing Artefacts, Displaying Relationships: Yams, Art and Technology Amongst the Nyamikum Abelam of Papua New Guinea* (Berghahn, 2013). See also Tuomas Tammisto, *Hard Work: Producing Places, Relations and Value on a Papua New Guinea Resource Frontier* (Helsinki University Press, 2024) and Olivia Barnett-Naghshineh, *Economies of Care: Market Women in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea* (Bloomsbury Press, 2025).