



Week 9. Mind and Life at Lindisfarne

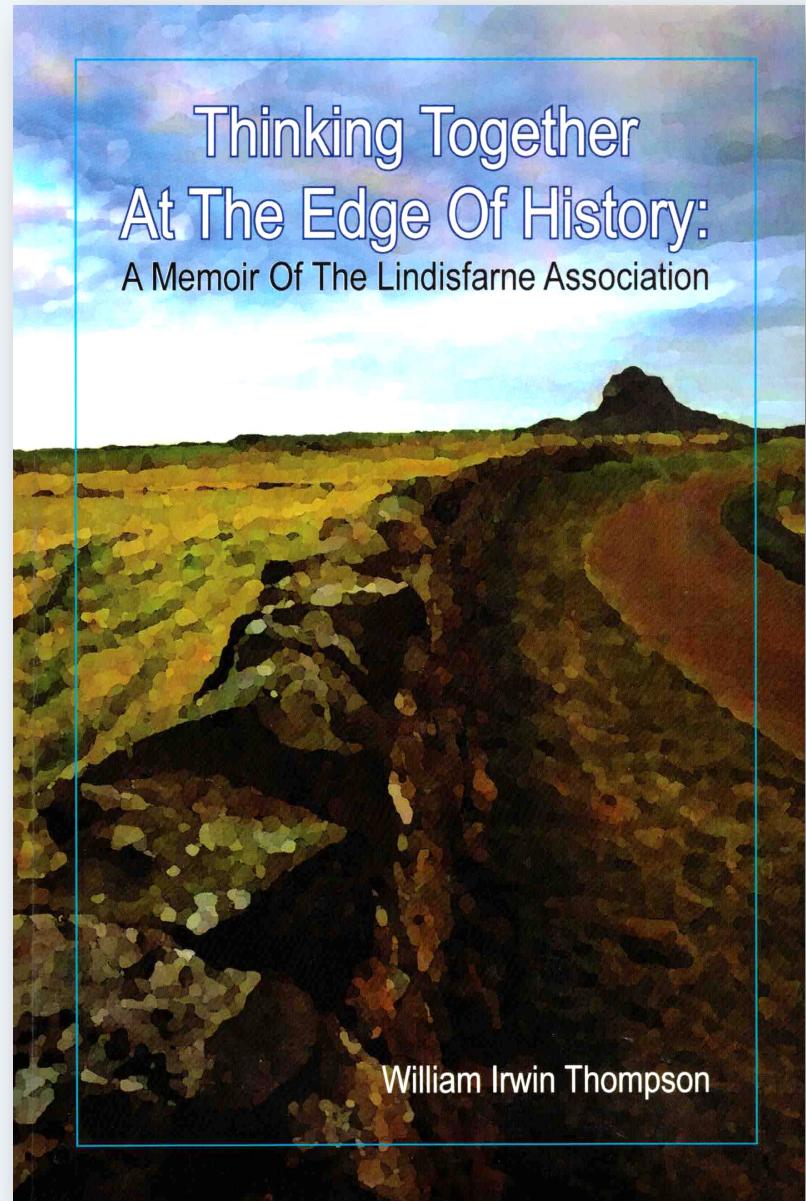


Part One: Lindisfarne and the Whole Earth Network



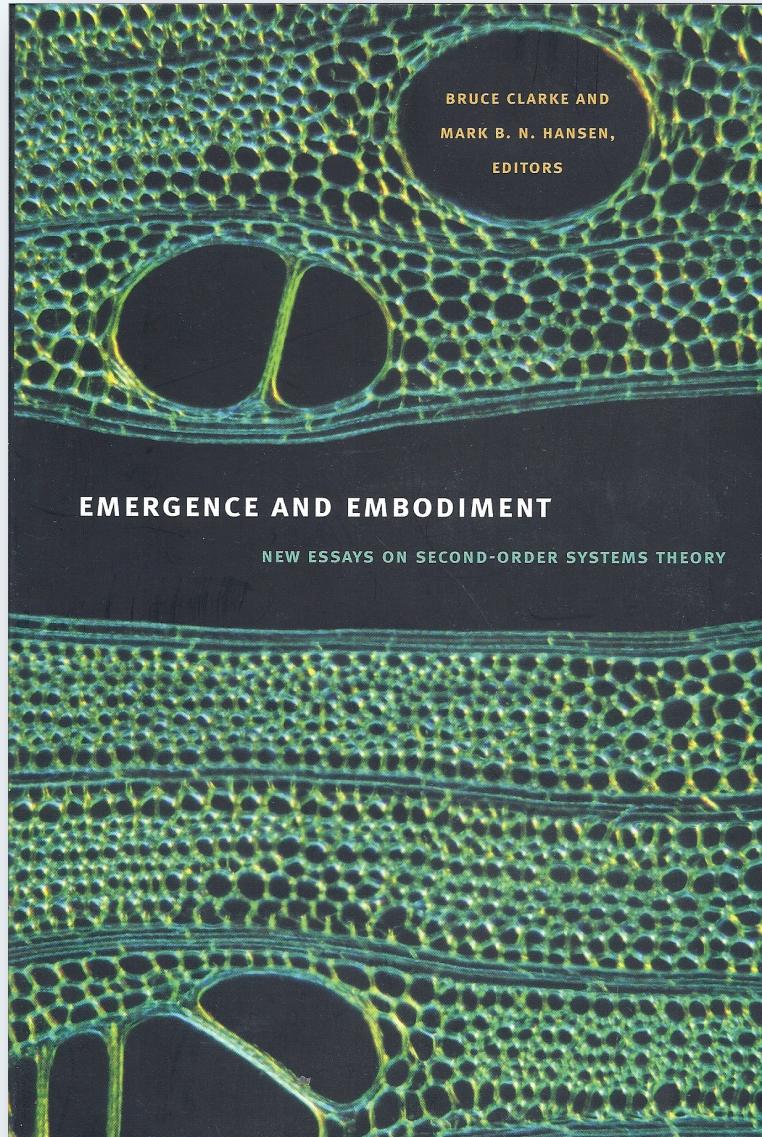
As we begin winding up the Cybernetic Countercultures Intensive, I'll take a moment to explain a bit of how I got here and why I am taking you now, as a last major destination, to Lindisfarne, a relatively esoteric intellectual location, to provide an account of its significant phase as a Cybernetic Counterculture.

How did I get here? I discovered cybernetics in the 1990s as one of the conceptual precursors of chaos theory, aka dynamical systems theory. I already had a shred of familiarity with Stewart Brand and Gregory Bateson from being awake in the 1970s. But only in the nineties could I begin to attach something to the names of von Foerster, Maturana, Varela, Margulis, or Lovelock. By the end of the nineties I was also absorbed in the social systems theory of Niklas Luhmann. Through an explicit extension of von Foerster's second-order cybernetics and Spencer-Brown's *Laws of Form*, the German sociologist Luhmann worked out what I call a *metabiotic* appropriation of the concept of autopoiesis. This was not an "organic cybernetics" as we have examined that line of thought in this Intensive and as carried on in Varela's work. Nor was it any longer "countercultural." But to my mind, it is attached to that larger narrative as an important offshoot, as what I call *second-order systems theory*. However, that is another story. The story at hand hangs instead on the circumstances unfolding from my chance meeting with Lynn Margulis.



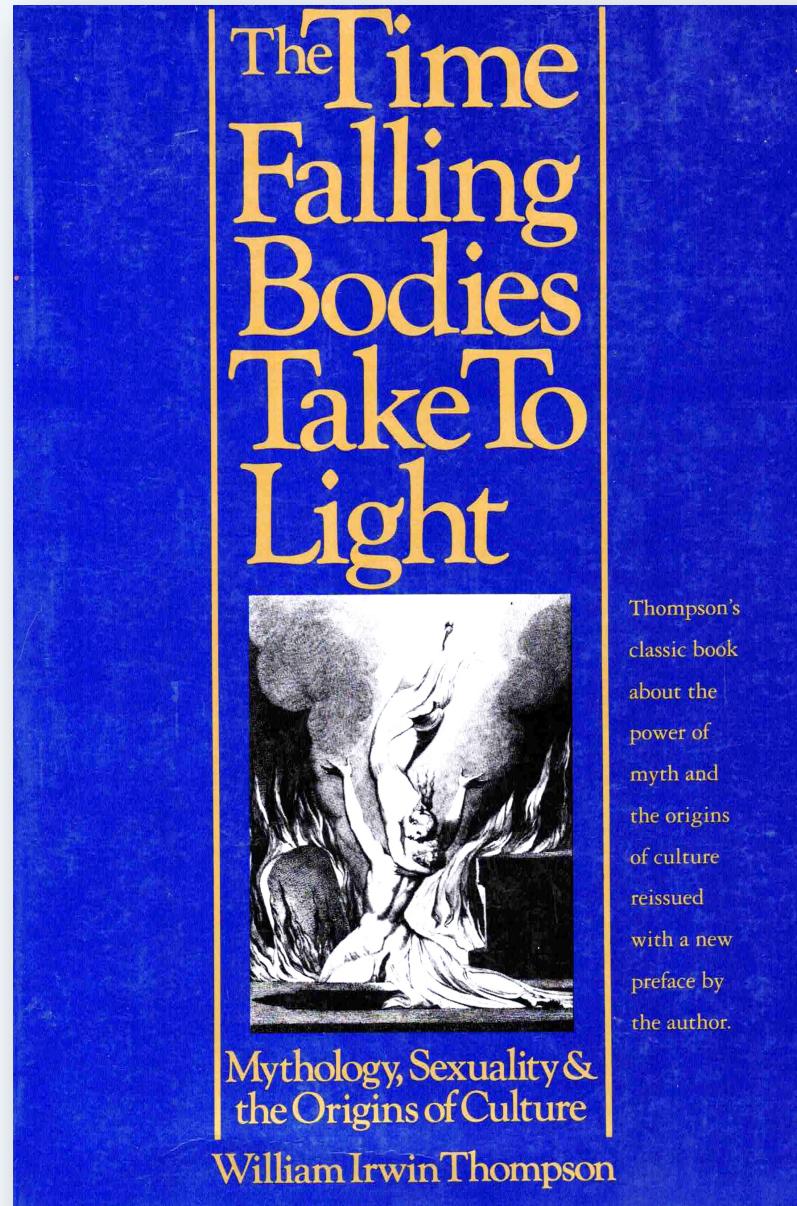
Meanwhile, as I was coming up to speed on the larger history of cybernetics and the specific career of the autopoiesis concept, thanks to my art-historian collaborator Linda Henderson's recollection of some curious correspondence she had received and filed away, I came into possession of contact information for Heinz von Foerster, who was then long retired to the hills above Pescadero, CA, in striking distance of Stanford University. Happily, he granted me the interview I conducted in the summer of 2001, later published in the edited volume *Emergence and Embodiment*. And by then, following the thread of von Foerster's review of *Laws of Form*, I had worked my way back to the *Whole Earth Catalog*. I gave a very early report on what we have formalized here as the Cybernetic Countercultures at a *Whole Earth* conference at UC/Davis in 2006.

Now, regarding Lynn Margulis, although I could dimly remember that Lewis Thomas mentioned her in *The Lives of a Cell*, which I read in the early 1980s, it was 2000 before I discovered her own work in her book *What is Life?* co-authored with her eldest son Dorion Sagan. I began teaching this text avidly and gradually linking its mentions of "autopoietic Gaia" to their cybernetic roots when, by another lucky coincidence, in 2005 she came to give some lectures on my campus. That was when I met Margulis in person. The next fall, I spent two weeks lurking at her Environmental Evolution lab at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. The next spring, she happened to mention that she would be in Santa Fe, New Mexico, that summer for a revival of the Lindisfarne Fellows meetings. And given that Santa Fe is a mere five-hour drive from where I live in West Texas, I asked if guests were welcome. She replied, God bless her, "You can be my guest."



Duke University Press, 2009

So that is how I came to witness firsthand the Lindisfarne way of "thinking together," at three consecutive Fellows meetings held between 2007-09 in Santa Fe at the Upaya Zen Center under the direction of Roshi Joan Halifax. And that is how I got to know Bill and Evan Thompson. Upon first encounter I was more familiar with Evan as a co-author with Varela and Eleanor Rosch of the cognitive science classic *The Embodied Mind*. But also, thanks to a tip I got in the early 1980s from my dear departed mom, a hard-core Jungian and subscriber to the newsletter of *Aquarian Conspiracy* author Marilyn Ferguson, *Brain/Mind Bulletin*, I did have some recollection of checking out Bill Thompson's 1981 tour de force *The Time Falling Bodies Take to Light: Mythology, Sexuality and the Origins of Culture*, twenty-five years prior. When I arrived at Upaya as Lynn's guest in 2007, then, I had at least a few coordinates by which to locate the scene.



Thompson's
classic book
about the
power of
myth and
the origins
of culture
reissued
with a new
preface by
the author.

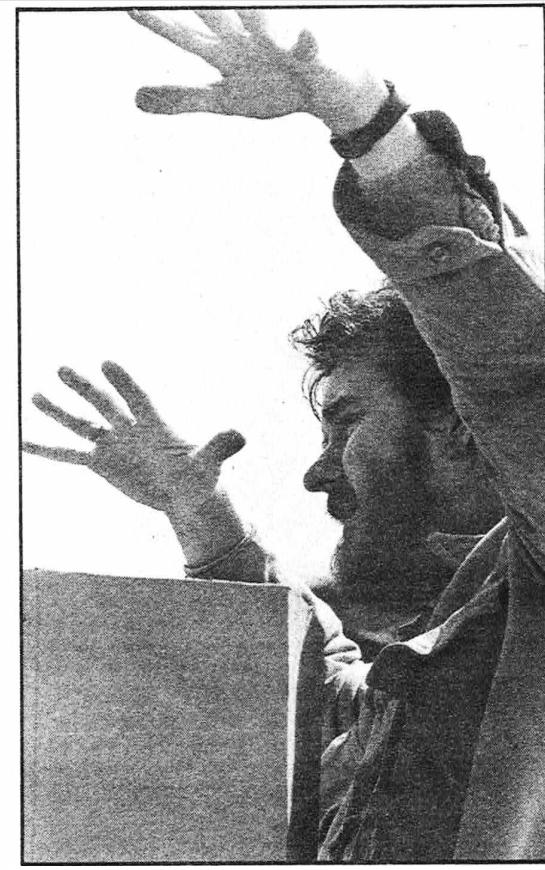
—Now, *CoEvolution Quarterly* for Winter 1978 contains a long account of the tribulations attending the Whole Earth Jamboree, held on August 26-28, 1978, in celebration of the 10th anniversary of the *Whole Earth Catalog*. Included are 40 pages of "Five Minute Speeches" by sundry Whole Earth networkers, including Peter Warshall, Michael McClure, Allen Ginsberg, Dean Fleming, Paolo Soleri, Harold Morowitz, Peter Coyote, Ann Herbert, Rusty Schweickart, Wavy Gravy, Stephanie Mills, and Stewart Brand himself.

And William Irwin Thompson. Whereas the other speakers got at most two sentences of identification, Bill Thompson stands out by getting a full paragraph of context. Thompson's five-minute speech ended with an acerbic critique of the current state of the Brand's operation. That may have hit a nerve.

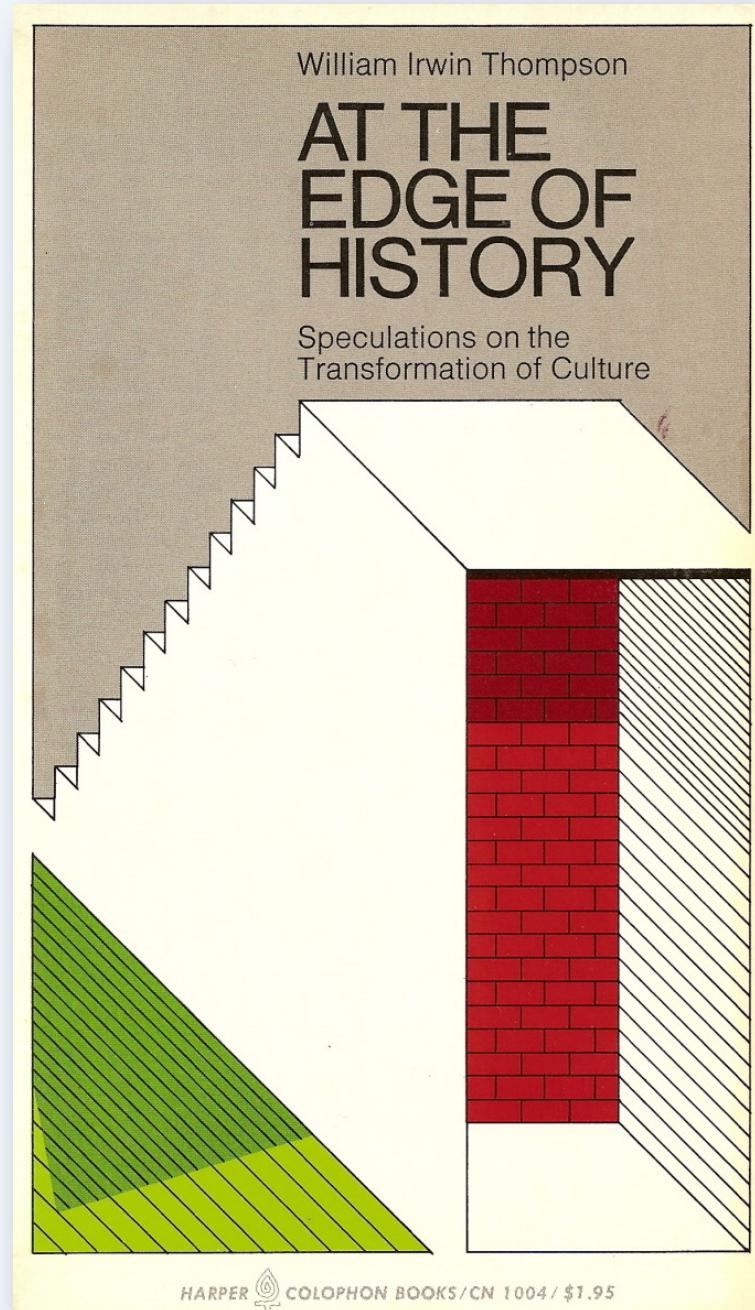
SB: William Irwin Thompson is one of those authors where people grab you by the arm and say, "Have you read . . .?" In my case, it was, "Have you read *The Edge of History*?" By one of the ironies of edges of history, William Irwin Thompson's book and the *Whole Earth Catalog* (I've got to phrase this carefully) were both up for the Contemporary Affairs Category of the National Book Award in 1972. And in the flukey politics of that business, one of the judges, a fellow named Gary Wills, was so outraged that the *Whole Earth Catalog* would be considered for such an award that he quit as a judge, and the other two judges, Harrison Salisbury and Digby Diehl looked at one another and gave the prize to the *Catalog*. So when we first met, I felt that Bill Thompson was a little uncertain toward me. I thought that he should be uncertain toward Gary Wills. Since then Bill has done other good books, but he has been most active as the co-founder and head of Lindisfarne Association, which has put together a remarkable number of people and events somewhat more private but in many ways very similar to this.

WILLIAM IRWIN THOMPSON

It is absurd to give a lecture in five minutes, so I'm going to be even more absurd to try to give a mini-lecture on one end of history to the other in 4-1/2 minutes. The geologists who spoke before me have tried to give us a sense of where we are as a way of gaining a sense of where we are going, so I want to talk about history by talking about cultural change, about six great cultural transformations: the Hominization of the primates, Symbolization and the origins of notation and art in the Upper Paleolithic, Agriculturalization in 9000 B.C., Civilization in 3500 B.C., Industrialization in the eighteenth century A.D., and the cultural transformation we are in now, Planetization.



—Brand's introduction to Thompson in the Winter 1978 *CQ* relates that in 1972, the *Last Whole Earth Catalog* beat out Thompson's *At the Edge of History: Speculations on the Transformation of Culture* (1971) for a National Book Award: "So when we first met, I felt that Bill Thompson was a little uncertain toward me.... Since then Bill has done other good books, but he has been most active as the co-founder and head of the Lindisfarne Association, which has put together a remarkable number of people and events somewhat more private but in many ways very similar to this." What one would not find out from reading *CQ* is that Brand himself was one of the first cadre of Lindisfarne Fellows and in attendance at a number of their meetings in that organization's first decade. What one does find in *CQ* are numerous articles sourced from Lindisfarne events.

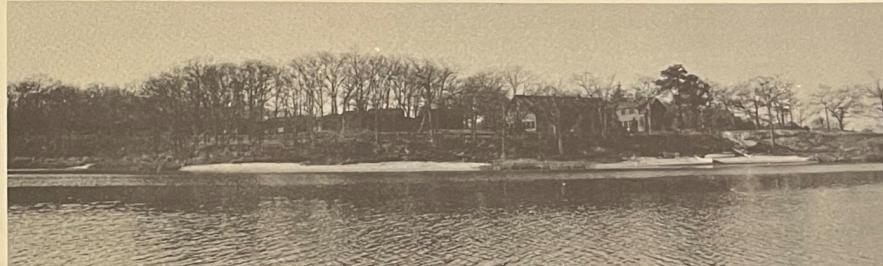


—published
in 1971

—The first page of the Lindisfarne brochure Thompson included in his letter of February 25, 1975, inviting Gregory Bateson to speak at the second Lindisfarne Conference. This and the letters from Thompson are in the Bateson papers at the University of California at Santa Cruz.

Here we will trace
the mutual
imprints of
Thompson and
Lindisfarne upon
and within the
Whole Earth
network at large.

Thompson
founded
Lindisfarne in the
early 1970s not as
a commune
precisely but as an
intentional
intellectual and
spiritual
community along
the lines that the
*Whole Earth
Catalog* and *CQ*
aimed to
encourage and
support.



The Lindisfarne Association in Southampton, Long Island, which became a physical reality in 1973, is an educational and spiritual community in which people of all ages can work and study together to achieve individual growth and societal transformation. The core of the program is instruction in the transformational disciplines of Yoga, Buddhism, and Sufism as well as in the esoteric aspects of the Judaic and Christian traditions. In accordance with the ancient Pythagorean ideal of a way of life integrating religion, science, and art, seminars are given relating the exoteric to the esoteric in art, humanities, and sciences. Although the contemplative techniques of the great universal religions are affirmed at Lindisfarne, no attempt is made to synthesize these techniques. Each day begins with group meditation followed by communal work, lectures, seminars, and workshops throughout the afternoon and evening. Each person works out his or her own combination of activities and balance between self and community. Lindisfarne grants neither degrees nor credits though other institutions have been willing to award credit for work at Lindisfarne. Fall, spring, and summer sessions are given each year; people of all ages and backgrounds are welcome. Classes may also be taken individually on a non-resident basis and visitors are welcomed if they give advance notice. Lindisfarne, a non-profit educational corporation, has neither formal application procedure nor fixed entrance requirements. Each person is considered individually and carefully, so a visit, telephone call or detailed letter is important. For further information about courses, activities, and costs please call (516) 283-8210 or write: The Lindisfarne Association, 50 Fishcove Road, Southampton, New York 11968.

Among many other activities pursuing Thompson's vision of fostering a *planetary culture*, as we noted in our first session, Lindisfarne also played a kind of shadow role in the wider cultivation of neocybernetics and Gaian discourse. Through a series of connections with Brand, Bateson, and the Whole Earth network of the 1970s, for a while in the 1970s and 1980s Lindisfarne cultivated its own Cybernetic Counterculture, one that deeply embraced and fostered Bateson's late work, the biological cybernetics of Maturana and Varela, and the planetary cybernetics of Margulis and Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis.

This notice for the Lindisfarne Association appears in the second number of *CQ* (Summer 1974: 130) in the section on Learning. For much of its first decade, Lindisfarne ran a residential operation with a dedicated campus, first in Fish Cove, then in downtown Manhattan, and finally in Crestone, Colorado.

Lindisfarne

Lindisfarne seeks to help the individual achieve a transformation of consciousness through the esoteric teachings and practices of the great universal religious including Buddhism, contemplative Christianity, mystical Judaism, Sufi and Yoga.

For the mind there will be seminars, workshops and lectures in philosophy, the physical sciences, Jungian psychology and world order models.

The body disciplines of Hatha Yoga and Tai Chi complete the balance of the program.

To bring the centralizing spiritual and planetary vision of Lindisfarne into sharp focus, William Irwin Thompson, Lindisfarne director, will offer a course on the Transformations of Human Culture.

Lindisfarne is located on the Peconic Bay near the eastern tip of Long Island about 4 miles north of Southampton, N.Y. The 11-acre Lindisfarne property is surrounded by water and woods and has its own beach which is about 1/5 of a mile long. There are 29 log cabins facing the water and a large main building overlooking a cove. This building houses dining facilities, seminar space, meditation room, library and additional bedrooms.

The community's summer session, May 25 through August 20, will be in 2 self-contained parts: May 25 - July 5 and July 8 - August 20. If space is available a limited number of residents may be accepted for only one part rather than the full session.

A ten day conference August 24 to September 2. PLANETARY CULTURE AND THE NEW IMAGE OF MAN. Participants from the arts, sciences, and religion will be announced later in the spring. The cost for the summer program is \$1,600, if you stay on for the 10 day conference the cost is \$1,850. If you can only come for one of the self-contained parts of the session the cost is \$900 for the six weeks. The ten day conference will cost \$400. For a limited number of residents Lindisfarne will offer a self-contained weekend program. The cost is \$900 for the full weekend summer session. Costs include an individual study-bedroom, all meals and tuition.

If you are interested in becoming a resident please tell us something about yourself - where you are now and where you feel you want to go is the only basis for qualifying. A deposit of \$100 will secure your place. If it turns out we cannot accept you or that you do not wish to become a resident, the deposit will be refunded.

Lindisfarne operates communally. There is structure in terms of the fixed program but within this structure each person is free to pursue his own path using the teaching fellows and the community as a whole to help in his development. We live as a community each seeking to help the other and with all of us helping the community by contributing two hours of work daily to the community.

For more information write to: The Lindisfarne Association, P.O. Box 1395, Southampton, N.Y. 11968. Phone: 516-283-8210.



We learn in
Thinking
Together at the
Edge of History
that participants
in this first
Lindisfarne
Conference
included
Stewart Brand,
Carl Sagan,
and John Todd.

This notice of Thompson's *Passages About Earth: An Exploration of the New Planetary Culture*, with Brand's terse description, appears in the *Whole Earth Epilog* (October 1974): 458.

WHOLE SYSTEMS



Passages About Earth

Emerging planetary mythology explored by an escaped historian consulting other explorers and their ideas—NASA, Illich, Peccei, Gopi Krishna, Soleri, magical Findhorn, etc. (See also Thompson's preceding At the Edge of History.)

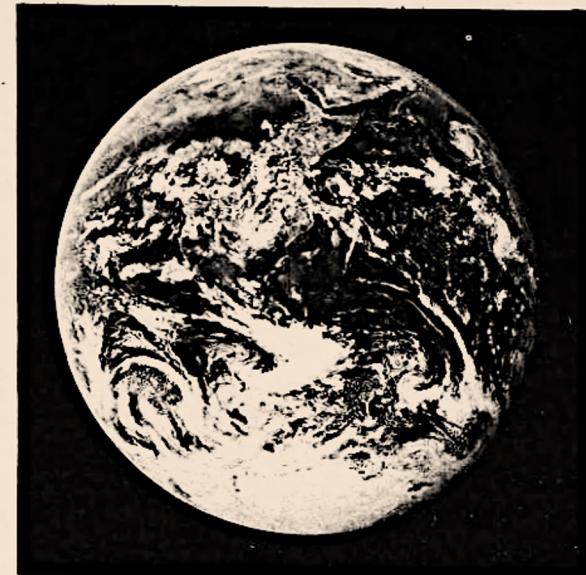
—SB

Passages About Earth
(An Exploration of the
New Planetary Culture)
William Irvin Thompson
1973; 206pp.
\$6.95 postpaid
from:
Harper & Row Genl. Books
Keystone Industrial Park
Scranton, PA 18512
or Whole Earth

Nothing except a religious experience could surpass the elevation of that host. We had all been prepared for spectacle; but when the engines ignited, the night went away, and the force of the rocket entered my body. There was no heavy blast that hurt my ears; instead, the engines beat in a subtler rhythm that went directly and physically into the chambers of the heart and made all the valves stammer in astonishment. If it weren't for the joy and exhilaration of the crowd, I would have wondered if my heart would stop. But as I felt my heart continue with the progress of the rocket in the sky, I threw away anxiety and leaped up with the others in the sheer joy of knowing that men were turning tables on the heavens and riding that comet out of earth.

In a world in which men write thousands of books and one million scientific papers a year, the mythic *bricoleur* is the man who plays with all that information and hears a music inside the noise.

At the end of the line for industrial society, we discover that it's a spiral and that we have turned and are now



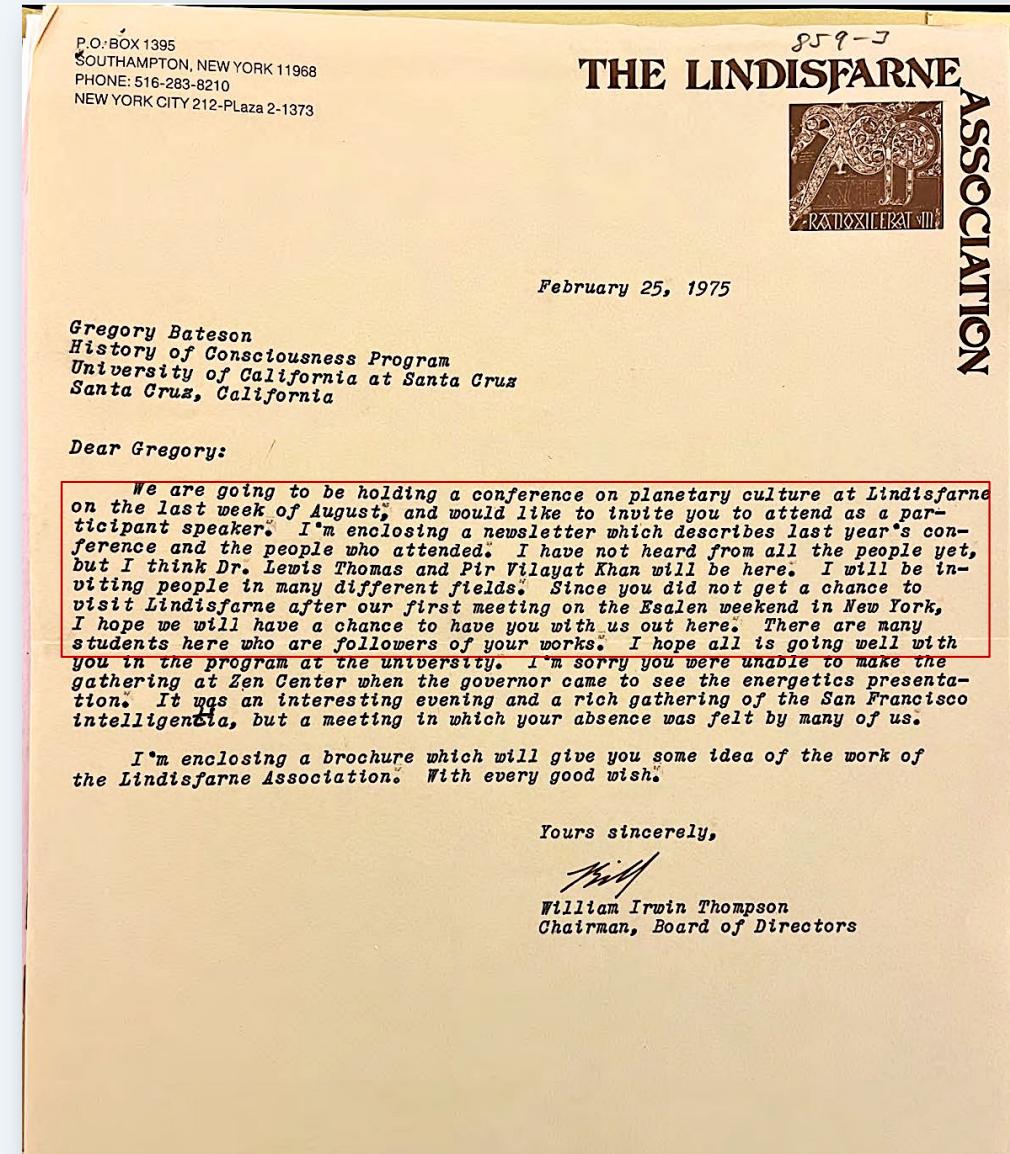
facing back in the direction of cosmic mythology. Now all the old maps take on a new meaning as they warn us, "Here be dragons." Ecstasy or economics, madness or sanity, mysticism or science: where ancient dragons live modern categories die.

When you know what you are looking for, it is certainly not hard to find it. Von Daniken wants to find holes blasted out by rockets, so he takes the round wells of the Maya, the *cenote* at Chichén Itzá, and says that the limestone well is the result of a rocket blast. Curiously enough, he is willing to take the huge monolithic platform of the temple of Baalbek in Lebanon, which has no holes scoured out by rockets, and say that this, too, was a launching pad for rockets. Next he goes to the plain at Nazca in Peru to say that the long lines that can be seen only from the air are landing strips for the ships from space. The image of a World War II prop job chug-chugging in from Andromeda and needing a landing strip a few miles long is hilarious, but von Daniken is not sensitive to the perils of what Whitehead called "misplaced concreteness."

—Lindisfarne's proper description as a *cybernetic* counterculture rests first of all on the participation of Gregory Bateson. Thompson and Bateson met in 1974 at an event in New York to fundraise for the Esalen Institute (*Thinking Together* 29). By then Bateson was a regular guest at Esalen's Big Sur campus, site of the notorious AUM conference on *Laws of Form* in 1973. In *At the Edge of History*, Thompson memorably portrayed the Esalen scene as he encountered it in 1967. In this correspondence he invites Bateson to have a leading role in the second Lindisfarne conference, to be held in August 1975 at their Fish Cove campus. Another Esalen veteran, Stewart Brand, had attended and spoken at the first, 1974 gathering. Both Bateson and Brand were soon inducted as Lindisfarne Fellows ▪

February 25, 1975

"We are going to be holding a conference on planetary culture at Lindisfarne on the last week of August, and would like to invite you to attend as a participant speaker. I'm enclosing a newsletter which describes last year's conference and the people who attended.... I will be inviting people from many different fields. Since you did not get a chance to visit Lindisfarne after our first meeting on the Esalen weekend in New York, I hope we will have a chance to have you with us out here. There are many students here who are followers of your works...."



—Thompson follows up that spring to emphasize Bateson's centrality to the proposed theme for the upcoming meeting, citing inspiration from precisely the same article Stewart Brand had specified five years earlier: "... 'The Effect of Conscious Purpose Upon Human Adaptation' practically defines my underlying program since I left the Stanford biology dept in 1960." ▀

May 15, 1975

"I think what I would like to do is to focus on your essay "The Effects of Conscious Purpose on Human Adaptation" and Jonas Salk's book, Survival of the Wisest to explore conscious evolution, and the evolution of consciousness.... Frankly, I can't imagine doing the conference without you, since your ideas are so integral to the entire scene.... I really do hope you can come and would like to say that I feel it is really important for us if you can be with us. Your ideas are basic to what we have been doing here, so it'd be good to have you with us to explore the full range of the implications of all of them."

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THE LINDISFARNE

859-6



May 15, 1975

Gregory Bateson
History of Consciousness Program
University of California
Santa Cruz, California

Dear Gregory:

The conference for the summer, from August 22nd to August 29th is really beginning to shape up. I think what I would like to do is to focus on your essay "The Effects of Conscious Purpose on Human Adaptation" and Jonas Salk's book, Survival of the Wisest to explore conscious evolution, and the evolution of consciousness. I think it would be useful to explore the societal and institutional and in the largest sense of the word, political means by which we can deal with the next thirty years or so. Pir Vilayat Kahn has agreed to come and Sean Wellsley Miller, an architect from MIT involved with solar and wind alternate technology for human habitation is also coming. Philip Slater says he thinks he will be able to drop in, and there is a chance that we may be able to have Stockhausen with us. So I do hope you will be able to be with us. Frankly, I can't imagine doing the conference without you, since your ideas are so integral to the entire scene. Gerry Brown has indicated that it's too early to commit himself for his summer schedule, but there is a chance. I advised the governor that I thought it would be best not to make a commitment, but just to show up unannounced more or less, so that we could keep his presence as unspectacular and decorous as possible.

I'm going to be lecturing at Naropa on June 15th; if you're there at that time I'd love to see you.

I really do hope you can come and would like to say that I feel that it is really important for us if you can be with us. Your ideas are basic to what we have been doing here, so it would be good to have you with us to explore the full range of the implications of all of them.

ASSOCIATION

—Bateson accepted the role Thompson envisioned for him, initiating several years of close involvement with Lindisfarne's programs. ■

June 4, 1975

"I am going to invite as many people as I can in key places around here in New York so that we can begin to break up the rigidity of institutions and make a case for flexibility and cultural innovation. As it seems to be shaping up rather nicely, I'm quite hopeful that this conference will be significant. At all events, it's being set up to be a really serious discussion conducted at a very high level. It will not be the sort of entertainment they asked of us when we were together last for Esalen."

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THE LINDISFARNE



ASSOCIATION

Folder 859-7

June 4, 1975

Professor Gregory Bateson
History of Consciousness Program
University of California
Santa Cruz, California 95064

Dear Gregory:

It was good to talk to you on the phone the other day. Everything seems shaping up quite nicely for the Conference. I think we'll begin with Jonas on Friday night, then if you like to give a response you could initiate the conversation after Jonas on Friday night, and then begin with you the next morning. I think it best since we have so many speakers, if we slot everyone for being responsible for speaking or instigating the discussion on a particular day. John Todd has indicated that he would very much like to follow your talk, for he is a student of your work and wants to talk about the implication of your ideas in his own work at The New Alchemy Institute. I am purposely keeping the afternoons open so that there can be occasions for informal discussions and walks through the woods and on the beach.

Do let us know when you are arriving and how many you are bringing, so we know what size cabin to give you.

Let me take this opportunity to thank you very much for your generosity in attending this conference. I am going to invite as many people as I can in key places around here in New York so that we can begin to break up the rigidity of institutions and make a case for flexibility and cultural innovation. As it seems to be shaping up rather nicely, I am quite hopeful that this conference will be significant. At all events, it's being set up to be a really serious discussion conducted at a very high level. It will not be the sort of entertainment they asked of us when we were together last for Esalen.

Have a good time at Naropa. I am looking forward to meeting Trungpa for the first time. With every good wish.

CONSCIOUS EVOLUTION AND THE EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The writings of contemporary thinkers like Gregory Bateson and Jonas Salk have indicated that our contemporary industrial civilization has reached an evolutionary crisis and that new forms of conscious cultural evolution are necessary if humanity is to survive. This year the Lindisfarne Conference will focus on Jonas Salk's *The Survival of the Wisest* and Gregory Bateson's "The Effect of Conscious Purpose on Human Adaptation" and "Form, Substance, and Difference" to explore what new forms of civilizational societal and political transformations will be needed if we are to grow beyond the over-specialized adaptation of industrial culture. The questions, among many, that the conference will take up will be: Is Conscious Evolution a possibility? If evolution becomes self-conscious does that mean that humanity will be divided between an advanced evolutionary elite and a regressive sloughed-off majority? Is evolution a cultural reality, or simply a cultural ideology, a neo-Darwinian apology for a new globalist elite? How does the spiritual evolution of consciousness talked about by the young in the counterculture compare with the idea of conscious evolution discussed by our intellectual elite?

SECOND ANNUAL LINDISFARNE CONFERENCE, AUGUST 22 to 29

859-8

CONSCIOUS EVOLUTION AND THE EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

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By bringing together the major proponents of cultural evolutionary thought, Lindisfarne hopes to join intellectual and spiritual energies to revision our contemporary predicament and to envision a new future adaptation that need not be the mixture of chaos and tyranny predicted by Arnold Toynbee and Robert Heilbroner. To this end, we are inviting individuals from universities, churches, foundations, industry, and government to participate with the community in this conference. This year, however, we are asking a bit of homework from our participants by suggesting that they read before arrival the following works:

Gregory Bateson, "The Effects of Conscious Purpose on Human Adaptation"
"Form Substance, and Difference" in Steps Toward an Ecology of Mind.

Jonas Salk, The Survival of the Wisest

Lewis Thomas, "On Societies as Organisms" and "On Probability and Possibility" in Lives of a Cell.

Speakers attending the Conference

José Argüelles, author of Mandala and The Transformative Vision

Gregory Bateson, author of Steps Toward an Ecology of Mind

Richard Falk, author of This Endangered Planet

Joel Elkes, Professor of Psychiatry, Johns Hopkins

Pir Vilayat Inayat Kahn, leader of the Sufi Chisti Order, author of Towards the One.

Lewis Thomas, author of Lives of a Cell

William Irwin Thompson, author of At the Edge of History and Passages about Earth

John Todd, Director, New Alchemy Institute

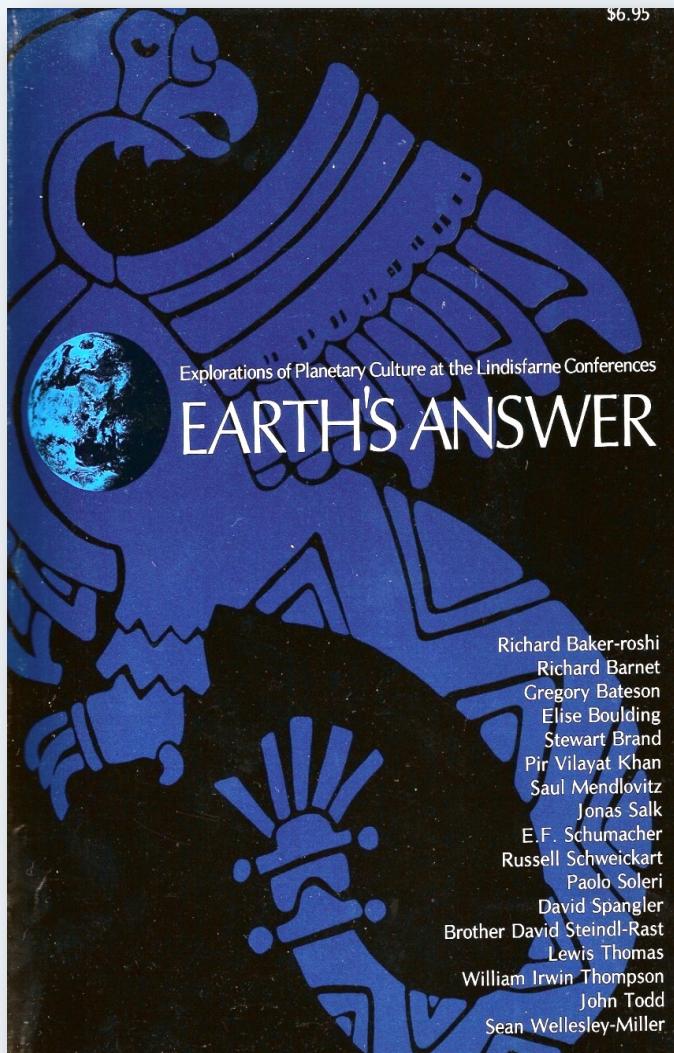
Jonas Salk, author of Man Unfolding and Survival of the Wisest

Sean Wellesley-Miller, architect, M.I.T., inventor of "BioShelter"

Schedule and Costs

The conference will run from 6:00 PM on Friday, August 22, to Saturday morning, August 30. The costs will be \$350 for room and board and conference fee. During the week the afternoons will be kept open for informal talks and recreation on the adjoining beaches.

—Two years later, a selection of talks from the inaugural 1974 and 1975 meetings is published as *Earth's Answer: Explorations of Planetary Culture at the Lindisfarne Conferences*.



—Blake's sublime poem "Earth's Answer" replies to the "Introduction" to *Songs of Experience*. Here the "Bard" has a vision of the "Holy Word ... / Calling the lapsed Soul," that is, the Logos imploring the fallen Earth to "return! / Arise...." Earth answers that her "free Love" has been "with bondage bound," that some force must come to "Break this heavy chain / That does freeze my bones around."

I take it that Thompson reads "Earth's Answer" as an allegory of the response to the desire for the *planetary* cultural transformation to which the Lindisfarne Association is dedicated. It may also be that the figure of Earth here beckons toward the ecological iconography of the Whole Earth network.



—With the convergence of both Brand and Bateson in its ranks, by 1975 Lindisfarne is on the verge becoming a *cybernetic* counterculture. *CoEvolution Quarterly's* moments of overlap with Lindisfarne are further confirmed by the amiable spacewalker Rusty Schweickart's original memoir of planetary consciousness. John Todd's sober assessments on the space colony issue as well as his long article on "The New Alchemists" will appear in *CQ* the next year, while his work in ecosystem ecology with the New Alchemy Institute will be an abiding source for organic cybernetics in the Lindisfarne milieu. Lewis Thomas, a medical researcher and "biology watcher" with a Batesonian penchant for seeing mind in nature and information in ecological circuit, was also an early advocate for the symbiotic theories of Lynn Margulis and her teamwork with James Lovelock on the Gaia hypothesis. Bill Thompson's formal training was in the literature and history around William Butler Yeats's poetic vision, as informed by the metaphysics of Whitehead, by which preparation he emerged as a consummate intellectual observer and cross-disciplinary translator seeking to ignite conscious evolution through a "meta-industrial" and "supra-mental" Imagination.

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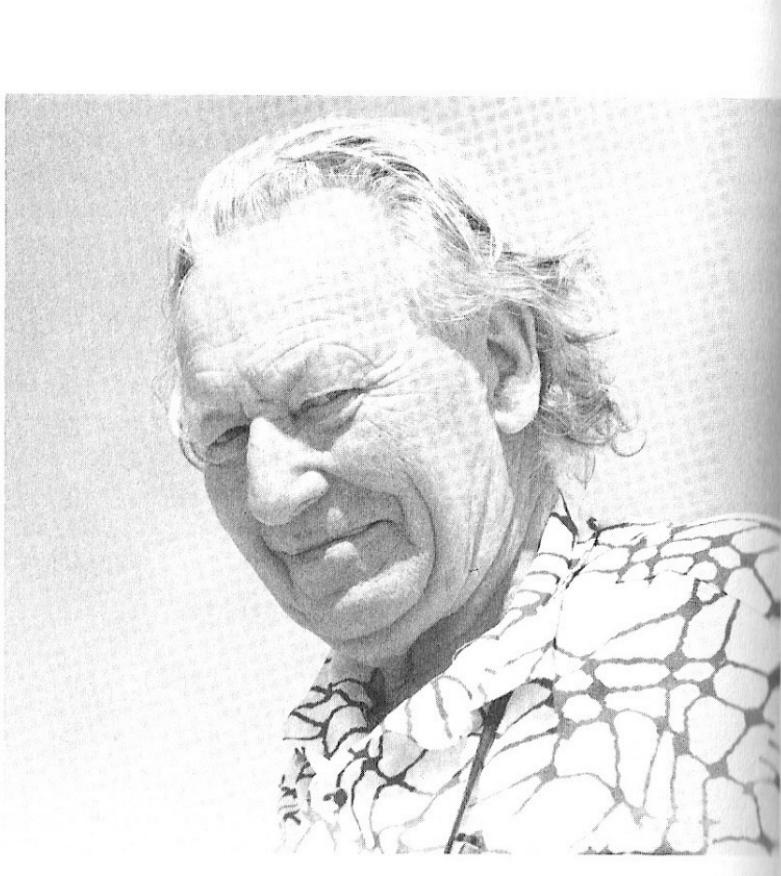
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—The opening of Gregory Bateson's chapter in *Earth's Answer*.



Gregory Bateson has been a seminal influence in many fields—biology, ethnology, linguistics, psychotherapy, epistemology. He developed the "Double Bind" theory of schizophrenia and participated in the Macy Foundation conferences that founded the science of cybernetics. His book

Steps to an Ecology of Mind is a collection of his essays written over a period of forty years. Most of all, Gregory is a teacher. Currently he is on the Board of Regents of the University of California and teaches at UC Santa Cruz.

12 The Thing of It Is

Gregory Bateson

The thing of it is that these are very difficult things to talk about because there are three aspects of the matter which people think are different problems, different concerns, which in fact boil down to being all one matter. I put these three up on the board. One of them is **evolutionary theory**, and that is a matter, you know, which is dealt with in one sort of book. Another is **mind-body problems**, and that is dealt with in another sort of book, and the third is **epistemology**, and that is dealt with again in another sort of book.

I want to get across to you that these three apparently different matters are in fact all one subject of discourse and that you cannot handle one without simultaneously handling the others. If

—Bateson's and Todd's chapters and Thompson's appreciative critiques in his summation "Notes on an Emerging Planet" are well worth checking out. But we will set *Earth's Answer* aside for now and move on. Meanwhile, here is Bill Thompson's contribution to the Space Colony debates, published in *CoEvolution Quarterly* 9 (Spring 1976): 16. Interestingly, there is no published statement on this matter one way or another from Gregory Bateson.

WILLIAM IRWIN THOMPSON

*Author of At the Edge of History; Passages About Earth;
co-founder of Lindisfarne*

We need to transform our civilization, not simply extend it. If we extend ourselves as we are now, we will simply be setting up metastases of the carcinoma of industrial civilization. If we are going to move out into space, we will have to learn how to be inhabitants of the universe, and that will require a transformation of consciousness. Such a transformation of consciousness was beautifully expressed by Rusty Schweickart in the piece you published last summer. What I am asking for is an exercise of imagination more profound than the science-fiction fantasies of the comic books of a generation ago. It is not an exercise of imagination to envision solar energy as the means of beaming down intense concentrations of power to drive capital intensive economies of scale. There is abundant solar energy on the earth for a good life. It may not provide enough energy to fly Ritz Crackers in jumbo jets to Venezuela, and if it doesn't we need to rethink the whole kind of crazy economy we have created. If that economy is now running out of energy, perhaps there is good reason for it to do so.

I don't see anything wrong with setting up a colony in space but I do see something wrong in thinking that one can create wildness by placing it into a container. At the present time, there is a battle going on in American culture between those who are trying to surround management with Culture, and those who are trying to surround and contain culture with Management. If the space colonies are sold to the American public as a way of escaping the juggernaut of apocalypse, of escaping the internal contradictions of our industrial civilization, and of not having to face those contradictions but simply to extend, extend, extend always to a new American frontier, then I think we will overextend ourselves to a point of a deserved collapse. I think the space colonies excite the Faustian imagination of the managers and the technocrats for it offers them a way of continuing their existence without going through the pain of a transformation of consciousness. Though I see nothing wrong, in and of itself, with the idea of an experimental small colony in L5, I do see a lot of things wrong with the hype that is being generated in order to sell the American public on colonies, so that they will encourage congress to pass the appropriations. You, yourself, are guilty of encouraging some of this hype by captioning an article on the colonies as apocalyptic goodbye to the juggernaut of apocalypse. The apocalypse, in the fashion of the Tibetan book of the dead, is but the malevolent aspect of beneficent deities. If we can in the face of famine, pollution, and war, remember our Buddha-nature, then we can go through the terrifying initiation of the race to discover that the apocalypse that we seek to escape is inside us, and until we come to terms with it, it will follow us wherever we go — to L5, to the moon, or to Mars. Since all of us have to make some kind of choice as to what work will receive our limited energies, I prefer to work to create a planetary, decentralized, meta-industrial village on the surface of the face of the earth. Earth may not be the best place for a highly technological civilization, but it is, as Robert Frost said, "The best place for love. I don't know where it's likely to go better."

—Later that same bicentennial year, Bateson and Brand organize a conference on a theme going to the heart of Bateson's diagnosis of the "pathologies of epistemology" inherited from the Cartesian separation of the mechanical body from the spiritual mind. Here is gathered a core sample of the West Coast cybernetic counterculture already with substantial Lindisfarne overlap: joining Bateson and Brand's event are Heinz von Foerster, his long-time colleague British cyberneticist Gordon Pask, and his BCL protégé Francisco Varela, whose interview "On Observing Natural Systems" had appeared in the immediately previous number of *CQ*. The venue, the Wheelwright Center, was part of the Green Gulch Zen Center presided over at that time by Richard Baker-roshi, another early Lindisfarne Fellow and beneficiary (to Bill Thompson's later chagrin: see *CQ* 40 [Winter 1983]: 112-23).

CoEvolution Quarterly 11 (Fall 1976)

MIND/BODY DUALISM CONFERENCE

POSITION PAPERS

Organized by Gregory Bateson and myself, a conference addressing the pathology of Cartesian mind/body dualism was held at the Wheelwright Center in Marin County, California, July 27th to 30th, 1976. Participants were Gregory Bateson, Francisco Varela, Heinz Von Foerster, Richard Baker-roshi, Ramon Margalef, Gordon Pask, Alan Kay, Terry Winograd, Mary Catherine Bateson, Steve Baer, Stewart Brand, Robert Edgar, and Carol Proudfoot. Below is Gregory's invitational paper, followed by three of the position papers. Portions of the proceedings and some more of the position papers will appear in later CQs.

—SB

Invitational Paper by Gregory Bateson

1. The human species, perhaps since the evolution of language, has attached strange importance to "spiritual," "mental," "moral," and even "supernatural" aspects or components of life and death.

proposes the same dualism, and I hope that the conference members will be able to agree at the start that the old compromises between "supernatural" religion and "materialist" science are artifacts of a false division and by-products of the meeting between unsophisticated theology and equally unsophisticated science.

—The conceptual dialect of Bateson's mission statement is acutely neocybernetic, calling out the centrality of "recursive systems" as well as the observational recursions that bind the describer to the thing described.

Bateson, "Invitational Paper" to the Mind/Body Dualism Conference, *CoEvolution Quarterly* 11 (Fall 1976): 56-57.

56] 3. . . I have given the name "Mind-Body" to the aggregate of matters which I hope we shall discuss. But I hope that our deliberations will be shaped by an agreement at the start that at least the following list of topics is only a listing of synonyms—names of other ways of approaching the same central concern. "Evolutionary Theory" and "epistemology," "Mind-Body," "cybernetics," "ecology"; and, indeed, "theology" and "ethics" are labels for different paths which all lead to the same problematic mountain.

4. I hope also that we may agree at the start that the problematic nature of what we are to discuss has been grossly increased by those philosophies and religions which divide the mind from the body. . . .

Invitational Paper by Gregory Bateson

1. The human species, perhaps since the evolution of language, has attached strange importance to "spiritual," "mental," "moral," and even "supernatural" aspects or components of life and death.

2. It seems today, from the growth of scientific knowledge, that special concern with these matters is justified. Man's very nature, his relations with other men, and his "adaptation" to the biosphere of which he is a part are all affected and even determined by his deeply-held opinions regarding these matters. Even the most materialistic persons are influenced, by their very materialism, to treat others and the natural environment and themselves in special and peculiar ways.

3. Many branches of human knowledge and speculation combine to build up different facets of this problem. I have given the name "Mind-Body" to the aggregate of matters which I hope we shall discuss. But I hope that our deliberations will be shaped by an agreement at the start that at least the following list of topics is only a listing of synonyms — names of other ways of approaching the same central concern. "Evolutionary Theory" and "epistemology," "Mind-Body," "cybernetics," "ecology"; and, indeed, "theology" and "ethics" are labels for different paths which all lead to the same problematic mountain.

4. I hope also that we may agree at the start that the problematic nature of what we are to discuss has been grossly increased by those philosophies and religions which divide the mind from the body.

Equally to blame in this respect are those who would separate the Creator from the products of creation and those who would deny mental and spiritual characteristics to components of the biosphere other than man. Each of these positions

Presently a teacher at the University of California, Santa Cruz, Gregory Bateson is author of Steps to an Ecology of Mind (EPILOG, p. 453) and other turns in the path.

—SB

proposes the same dualism, and I hope that the conference members will be able to agree at the start that the old compromises between "supernatural" religion and "materialist" science are artifacts of a false division and by-products of the meeting between unsophisticated theology and equally unsophisticated science.

5. I further hope that we may be agreed at the start upon certain characteristics of our subject of discourse:

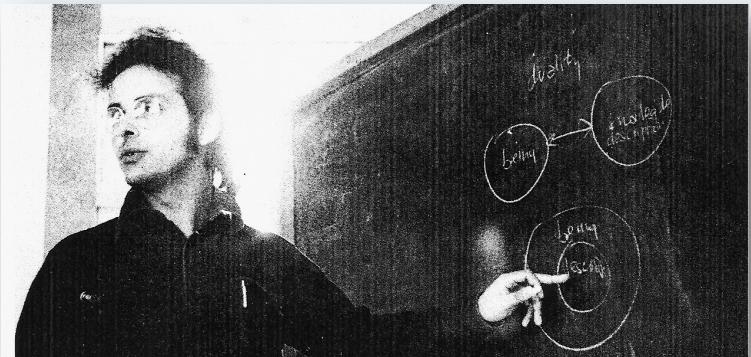
a. That phenomena (percepts, events, data, injunctions, descriptions, etc.) are commonly linked together in recursive systems and/or subsystems.

b. That "energy" (a quantity, having dimensions MV^2 , not itself patterned or differentiated) is commonly available in such systems to be "triggered" by events ("stimuli," "information," "causes," etc.) whose energetic content may be large or small, zero or negative.

c. That it is characteristic of the biosphere that the triggering events or variables are commonly differences. "Zero" differs from "positive" and therefore may trigger the freeing of stored energy. The epistemology — the way of knowing — which is characteristic of the sense organs of organisms is the way of sensing differences. By scanning (i.e., by moving the sense organ), comparisons are achieved, to create within the organism events in time, to stand for static differences existing outside it.

d. That "differences" of whatever sort (ratios, contrasts of shape, subtractive or additive differences, differences between external phenomena, differences between self and the outside, etc.) are always "at one remove" from the paired or multiple events in which they are immanent (but not localized). Differences thus precipitate "news of difference" and this "news" or information may be of various "levels" or "logical types." The map is not the territory and the rules of coding by which the map is made and by which it is "read" are not the map, etc.

e. Finally, the above four characteristics of our subject and sub-subjects of discourse apply both to that which we would investigate and to ourselves as investigators. A description of the behavior or anatomy of a living thing (say a starfish) should relate — be a bridge between —



CoEvolution Quarterly 11 (Fall 1976): 62-67.

—On this occasion Varela brings a complex philosophical statement that deconstructs the oppositional dualism of dialectical thinking through a method he calls “Star cybernetics.” (Note. Thompson will call it a theory of “non-dualism,” but since there is no collapsing of observed distinctions, I think that “meta-dualism” might be a preferable label.) In his introductory note, Brand strikingly observes, “Of all the mind/body position papers I think his has the most remarkable content.” Here we will just examine the top layer of Varela’s discourse. He promptly places his approach in alignment with Bateson’s “series of convergences”:

“Star is (can be taken to be) a compact expression to signify a broad paradigm encompassing that series of convergences rightly demanded by Bateson:

cybernetics ↔ epistemology ↔
evolution ↔ ethics ↔ cognition ↔
ecology”

NOT ONE, NOT TWO

Position Paper for the Mind-Body Conference

BY FRANCISCO J. VARELA

This paper has two parts. In the “Notes on Dialectics” I develop some ideas that apply to dualities quite generally. In the “Epilog,” I have stated my ideas on the Mind-Body Problem from the perspective taken in the notes.

Briefly stated, my feeling is that if there is going to be a change in our perception of the Mind-Body relation, there has to be a change in the context in which the problem is seen to arise. This implies, at least, a change

(i) in the logic used to understand that dialectics and wholes are;

(ii) in the scientific ideas about what mind is, (moving away from the brain-secretion image, towards an understanding of mind as conversational domain); and

(iii) in the cultural conceptions about mind, (which restrict the kind of experience that are socially and individually accessible).

Points (i) and (ii) are treated in the following Notes. In the Epilog, (iii) is considered separately.

I. NOTES ON DIALECTICS

0. The Star

0.1 One possible way of access to the central concern of our gathering is to consider duality and dialectics as a broad philosophical idea. Accordingly I would like to see us discussing trinities.

By trinity I mean the contemplation of the ways in which pairs (poles, extremes, modes, sides) are related and yet remain distinct.

0.2 The metaphorical “trinity” can then be replaced with some statement which contains a built-in injunction (heuristic, recipe, guidance) that can tell us how to go from duality to trinity.

“trinity” = “the it/the process leading to it” (the Star * statement).

0.2.1 The slash ‘/’ in Star *, and hereinafter, is to be read as: “consider both sides of /”, i.e.:

“consider both the it and the process leading to it.”

An active supporter of Allende in Chile, cybernetician Francisco Varela now works out of the Medical Center of the University of Colorado in Denver. Of all the mind/body position papers I think his has the most remarkable content. He appeared last issue in *The CQ*, with an interview called “Observing Natural Systems.”

—SB

Thus the slash is to be taken as a compact indication of a way of transiting to and fro both sides of it.

0.3 In the sections that follow I would like to show

(i) that the Star * is effective, i.e. it is a way to proceed from disjoint pairs to their unity in a metalevel, and;

(ii) that one can map (project, reformulate) in Star a number of dualities, the Mind-Body included, and;

(iii) that Star is (can be taken to be) a compact expression to signify a broad paradigm encompassing that series of convergencies rightly demanded by Bateson

cybernetics ↔ epistemology ↔ evolution ↔ ethics ↔ cognition ↔ ecology

1. Star Cybernetics

1.1 The first aspect (i) of Star that I want to consider is the cybernetics contained in it. Let us transcribe Star into the more convenient form of

* = “network/trees constituting the network.”

1.2 This is pictured in Fig. 1. On one side (by convention the left) we see a network or mesh of interactions. These are left unspecified: the nodes could be anything at all (molecules, species, concepts, . . .), and their interconnecting arrows could be any processes whatsoever (computations, rearrangements, transformations, . . .).

1.2.1 It is assumed that any node could be seen (at another time, by somebody else) as another network, or that the initial net could be seen as a node in a larger net. That is: there are no initial or final “elements”; everywhere we look, everything has the same messy appearance.

1.3 On the right side of Fig. 1 there is a tree of root *a* in which I have, step by step, drawn the nodes to which *a* connects, the nodes to which those nodes connect in turn, and so on. Had I continued to do this, I would have come back, after a while, to write *a* again. Thus the process could go on forever (whence the “. . .”).

1.3.1 The stages of this procedure are conveniently tracked by 1,2,3, . . . , to indicate the successive depth of the tree.

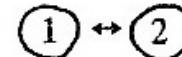
1.4 The way to go from left to right in Fig. 1 is: chop (prune, truncate) at *a*. That is: take *a* as if it were an initial element, and proceed as if the time at which this is done is zero time. Please note that the act of chopping demands somebody who does it, and sometime to do it.

1.5 The way to go from right to left is more tricky, hence usually disregarded. If we go down the tree we would

—Star cybernetics is devoted to resolving rather than fortifying logical oppositions and binary thinking. If your view of a solution is blocked at one level, try adding another dimension to your description of the situation. The shift to a metalevel bids to create the conceptual space needed to overcome that obstruction. Placing affairs in a Star statement adds a second but *imbricated* (co-determined) level to an observation. By contrast, Varela goes on, traditional (Hegelian) idealism tends to fixate on one level. By fixing negative relations between polar opposites, classical dialectics tends to block a view beyond the opposition proper. Impasse is built into this style of observation, and in any real-world situation, solution by the synthesis of antithetical entities is difficult if not impossible. However:

"In our (shall we say) cybernetic or post-hegelian paradigm, dualities are adequately represented by imbrication of levels, where one term of the pair emerges from the other. . . . The basic form of these dualities is asymmetry: both terms extend across levels. The nerve of the logic behind this dialectics is self-reference: pairs of the form: *it/processes leading to it*" (64)."

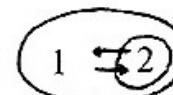
3.1.1 In what I call the classic or hegelian paradigm, the notion of dualities is tied to the idea of polarity, a clash of opposites. Graphically:



3.1.1.1 The basic form of these kind of dualities is symmetry: both poles belong to the same level.

The nerve of the logic behind this dialectics is negation: all pairs are of the form *A/not-A* (e.g., *+/-, oppressor/oppressed*).

3.1.2 In our (shall we say) cybernetic or post-hegelian paradigm, dualities are adequately represented by imbrication of levels, where one term of the pair emerges from the other. Graphically:



3.1.2.1 Several paraphrases for what I want to say are the following:

Mythology: female gives birth to male which fertilizes female.

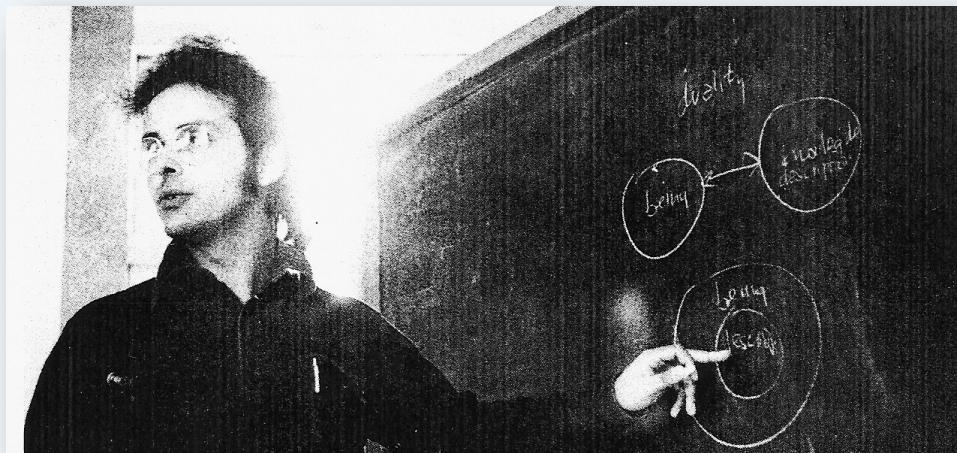
Cognition: intuitive understanding gives a ground for logical thinking which leads to intuitive understanding.

Cybernetics: a whole decomposes in parts which generate processes integrating the whole.

Formalism: a net chopped into trees that generate the net by infinite branching.

3.1.2.2 The basic form of these dualities is asymmetry: both terms extend across levels.

The nerve of the logic behind this dialectics is self-reference: pairs of the form: *it/processes leading to it*.



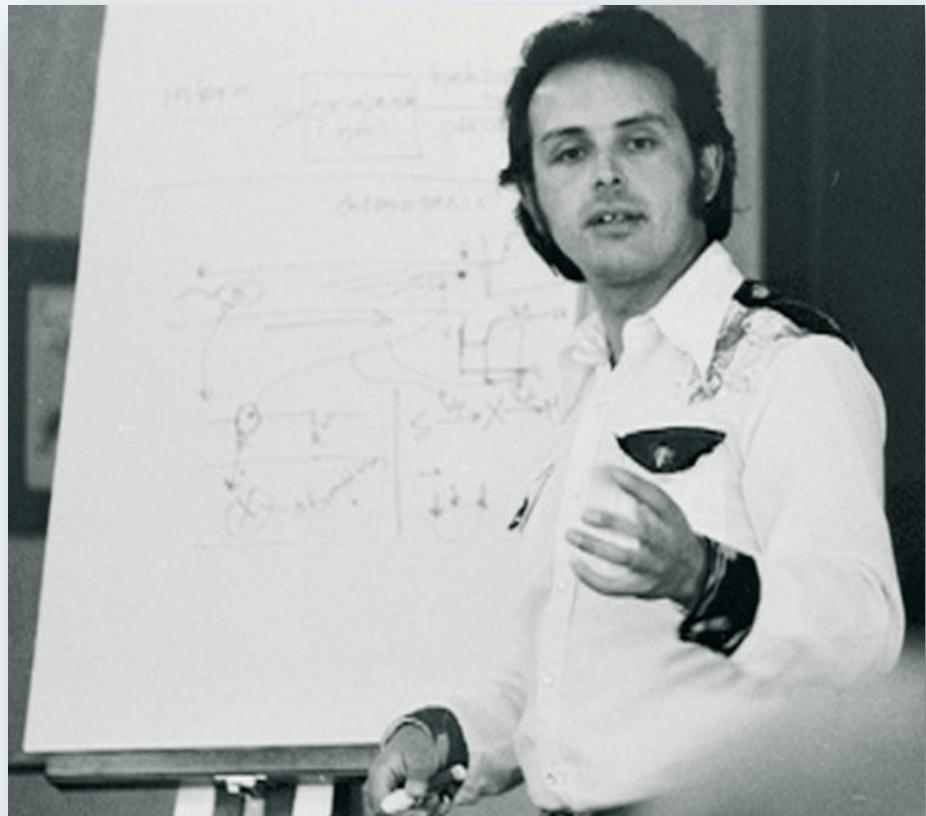
—Let us formulate an instance corresponding to the theme of the meeting at which Varela was delivering this talk. If we map *the mind-body dualism* onto what Varela calls the classic or Hegelian paradigm, we get the Cartesian split. Negation and polarity rule, and self-division holds the field. However, mapping the mind-body dualism as a Star statement allows supplementarity to absorb negation and self-reference to heal self-division. In this form, both mind and body refer to the same self. The unity of their distinction emerges on the metalevel already implicit in the differentiation of levels constellated by the Star formation. Varela comments: “Pairs of the form Star bridge across one level, and this crossing is operational. They mutually specify each other” (64). Here is the strong neocybernetic note: “this crossing is operational” because both terms are now seized not as entrenched opposites but in their operational co-dependence.

In the fullness of “Not One, Not Two,” Varela works the Star paradigm through numerous examples. Here is one that brings us back to natural systems and the cognitive contingencies of organic cybernetics:

It is, of course, the case that when we look to natural systems, nowhere do we find opposition apart from our own projections of values. The pair predator/prey, say, does not operate as excluding opposites. Both generate a whole unity, their ecosystemic domain, where there is complementarity, mutual stabilization, and benefits in survival for both. So, although we can project values to the opposites predator/prey, the effective duality is a larger one, of Star form: *ecosystem/species interaction.* (64)

This discussion of *projection* also provides a fine application of constructivist epistemology’s axiom that the description also describes the describer. If your only paradigm of species interaction is “eat or be eaten, kill or be killed,” you will see your brutal ideology reflected wherever you look. Varela’s Star cybernetics underscores Bateson’s guiding affirmation of the deeper communion of *epistemology, ecology, and ethics.*

Finally, for now, we can look at the way Varela constructs a Star statement that addresses the fundamental distinction of systems theory. He writes it as “environment/system,” and not the other way around. Here the *environment* is the “it” that emerges from the cognitive processes of *systems* that constitute their milieu in the process of distinguishing their own alterity. In this framing, in good constructivist fashion, epistemology precedes ontology: *knowing* produces the attribution of *being* to the thing known, a formulation that underscores how self-reference lays down the bridge between the imbricated levels implicated here. Moreover, seen in a biotic autopoietic view in which any living organization knows its world in the form of its own elements, Varela’s Star statement “environment/system” encapsulates the core proposition by which the Gaia hypothesis reverses the terms of traditional geology: *living systems produce their environments.*



Varela at the Mind and Nature conference at Fish Cove, 1977