CYBERNETIC COUNTERCULTURES INTENSIVE

Week 9. Mind and Life at Lindisfarne

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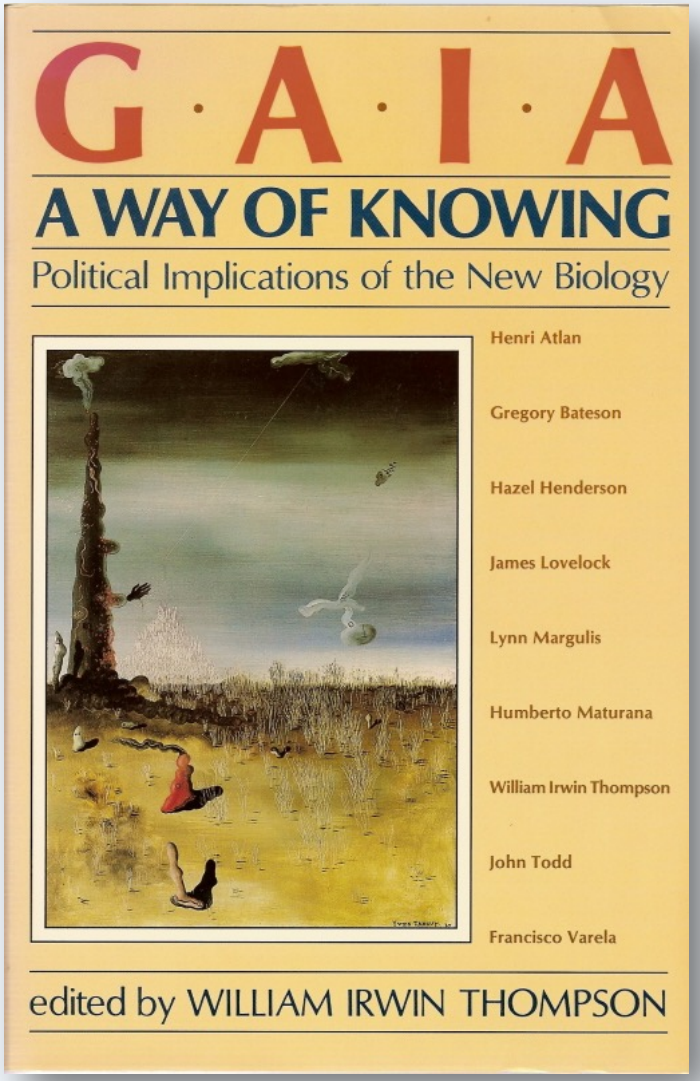
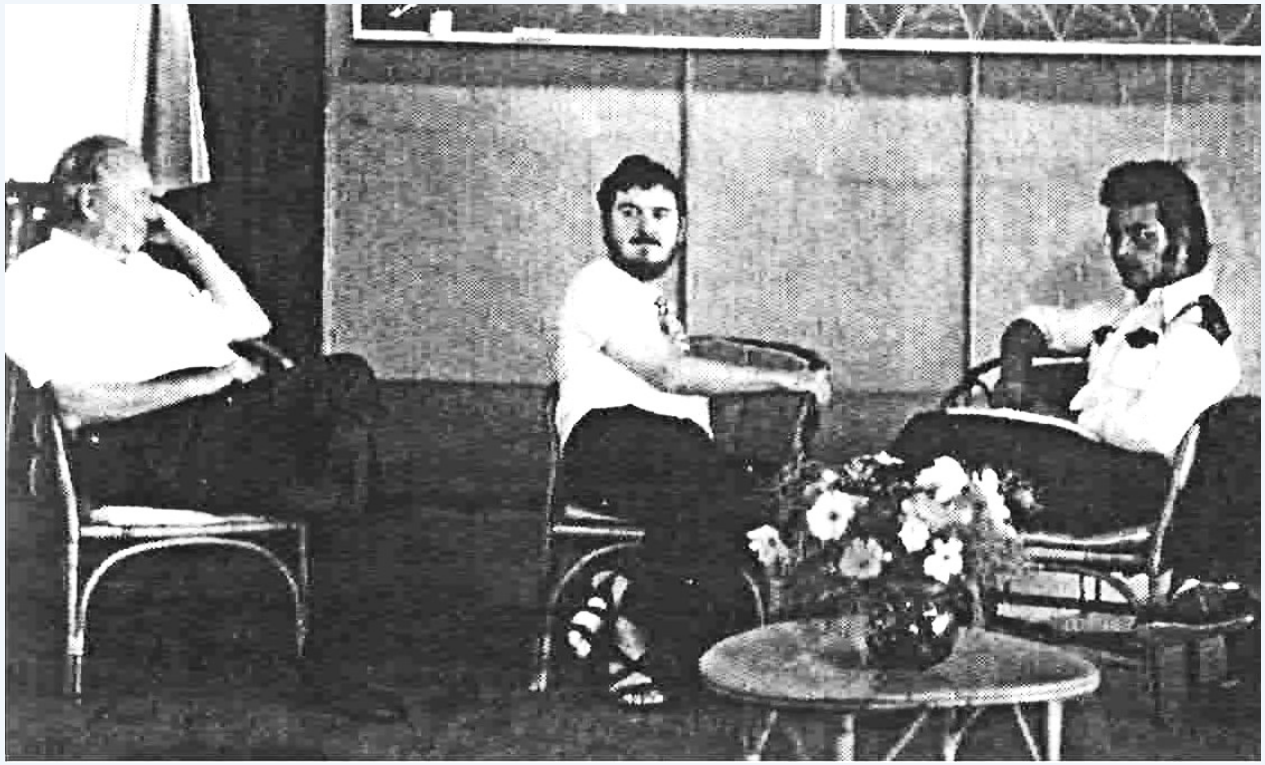
Part Two: Lindisfarne and Living Systems



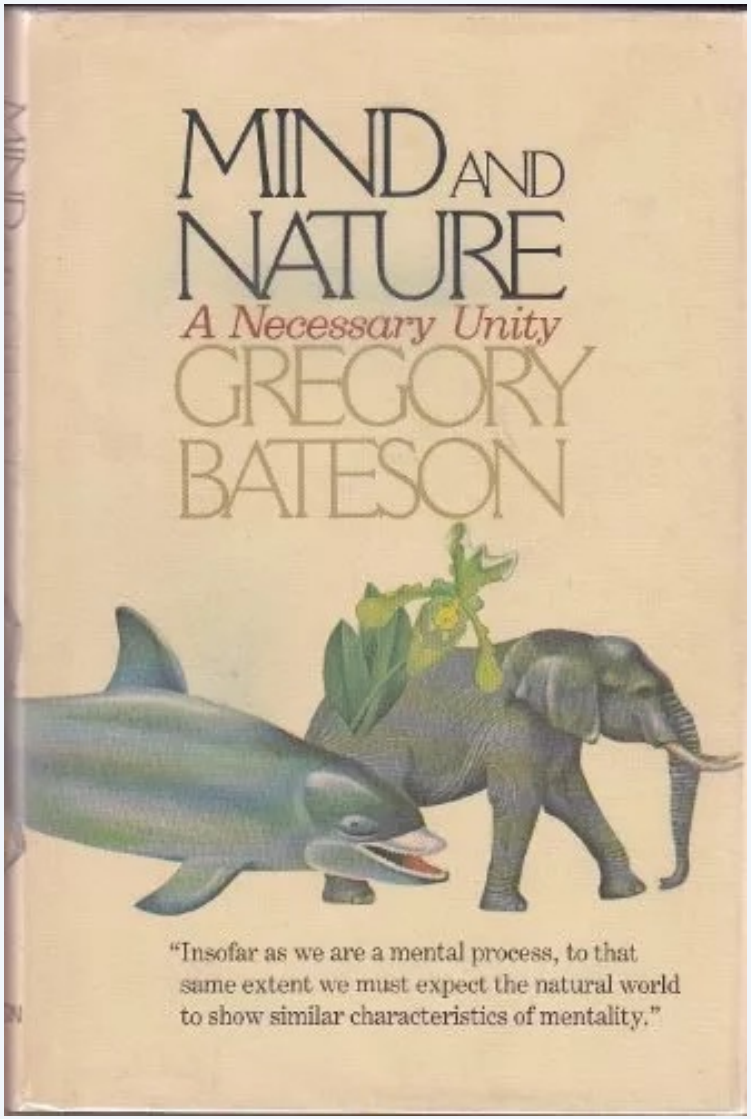
((o)) GAIAN SYSTEMS

—With the success of the inaugural conferences behind *Earth's Answer*, Thompson formalized the Lindisfarne Fellowship: "No longer were teaching fellows simply to be resident faculty or staff, but a special group of those around the world whose works served to help us in articulating and effecting the shift from one world civilization to another" (*Thinking Together* 35). The main problems confronting the Association in its first years were at once material—the financial burdens of the large facilities needed to carry on as a residential program—and psychosocial—the difficulties of sustaining cohesion in a porous intentional community with a "Big Daddy"(Bill's own words) at the head.

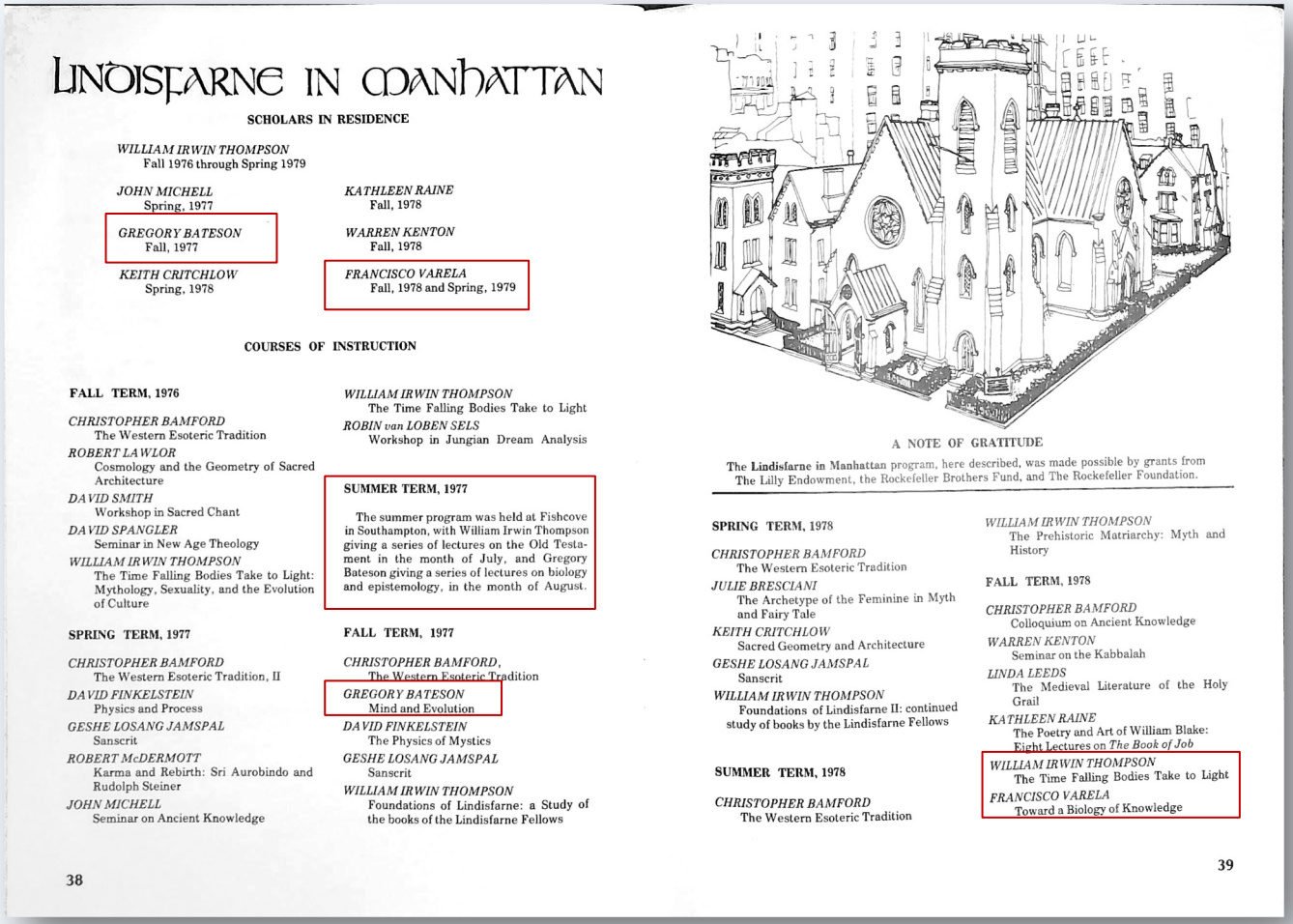


Gregory Bateson, William Irwin Thompson, and Francisco Varela at Fish Cove, 1977

—Bateson's agency in turning Lindisfarne in the direction of a *cybernetic* counterculture that was especially attuned to living systems and the "new biology"—that is, a scene where scientific rigor of observation could be brought to bear on an expanded cognitive milieu—is manifest in Thompson's memoir. He also found that he could leverage Bateson's experience and authority as a former therapist to lift some of the rigors of charismatic leadership off his own shoulders: "When Gregory Bateson came to live with us, this articulator of the double-bind was the perfect anthropologist to begin the process of my shifting Lindisfarne away from the emotional swamp of utopian community to the brighter air of a scientific circle working to articulate a new planetary culture" (*Thinking Together* 106-7). As the first Lindisfarne Scholar-in-Residence, Bateson arrived on the Fish Cove campus in the last year of its operation before the move to Lindisfarne in Manhattan. Francisco Varela made his first visit to Lindisfarne during this period as an invitee to the 1977 Lindisfarne Conference on Mind and Nature, a theme drawn from the book Bateson completed while in residence and published in 1979.



—It appears that it was Stewart Brand who first brought Bateson and Varela bodily together for the Mind-Body Dualism conference held outside San Francisco in July 1976. It was then Bill Thompson who, upon absorbing Varela's remarkable appearances in the Summer and Fall 1976 numbers of *CoEvolution Quarterly,* invited him to join up with Bateson again at Lindisfarne for the 1977 Mind and Life conference. Soon after that, Thompson offered Varela a residential appointment at the new Lindisfarne campus, a vacant church in downtown Manhattan: "When I read Varela's paper on non-dualism, "Not One, Not Two,"... I knew that I wanted Varela to succeed Bateson as our second scholar-in-residence for our new facility of Lindisfarne-in-Manhattan.... At the time Varela ... was finishing the work on his book *Principles of Biological Autonomy*, so with his residency at Lindisfarne we were taking a big step forward in the emergence of the new mentality" (*Thinking Together* 107). As these pages of the Lindisfarne in Manhattan brochure make evident, the Lindisfarne mindset was deeply spiritual and esoteric alongside its overtures to new scientific paradigms. Varela's budding Buddhism fit right in, as would the mythological aura that came along with the holistic cybernetics of the Gaia concept.



LINDISFARNE IN MANHATTAN

SCHOLARS IN RESIDENCE

WILLIAM IRWIN THOMPSON
Fall 1976 through Spring 1979

JOHN MICHELL
Spring, 1977

GREGORY BATESON
Fall, 1977

KEITH CRITCHLOW
Spring, 1978

KATHLEEN RAINE
Fall, 1978

WARREN KENTON
Fall, 1978

FRANCISCO VARELA
Fall, 1978 and Spring, 1979

COURSES OF INSTRUCTION

FALL TERM, 1976

CHRISTOPHER BAMFORD
The Western Esoteric Tradition
ROBERT LAWLOR
Cosmology and the Geometry of Sacred Architecture
DAVID SMITH
Workshop in Sacred Chant
DAVID SPANGLER
Seminar in New Age Theology
WILLIAM IRWIN THOMPSON
The Time Falling Bodies Take to Light: Mythology, Sexuality, and the Evolution of Culture

SPRING TERM, 1977

CHRISTOPHER BAMFORD
The Western Esoteric Tradition, II
DAVID FINKELSTEIN
Physics and Process
GESHE LOSANG JAMSPAL
Sanscrit
ROBERT McDERMOTT
Karma and Rebirth: Sri Aurobindo and Rudolph Steiner
JOHN MICHELL
Seminar on Ancient Knowledge
WILLIAM IRWIN THOMPSON
The Time Falling Bodies Take to Light
ROBIN van LOBEN SELS
Workshop in Jungian Dream Analysis

SUMMER TERM, 1977

The summer program was held at Fishcove in Southampton, with William Irwin Thompson giving a series of lectures on the Old Testament in the month of July, and Gregory Bateson giving a series of lectures on biology and epistemology, in the month of August.

FALL TERM, 1977

CHRISTOPHER BAMFORD,
The Western Esoteric Tradition
GREGORY BATESON
Mind and Evolution
DAVID FINKELSTEIN
The Physics of Mystics
GESHE LOSANG JAMSPAL
Sanscrit
WILLIAM IRWIN THOMPSON
Foundations of Lindisfarne: a Study of the books of the Lindisfarne Fellows

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A NOTE OF GRATITUDE

The **Lindisfarne in Manhattan** program, here described, was made possible by grants from The Lilly Endowment, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and The Rockefeller Foundation.

SPRING TERM, 1978

CHRISTOPHER BAMFORD
The Western Esoteric Tradition
JULIE BRESCIANI
The Archetype of the Feminine in Myth and Fairy Tale
KEITH CRITCHLOW
Sacred Geometry and Architecture
GESHE LOSANG JAMSPAL
Sanscrit
WILLIAM IRWIN THOMPSON
Foundations of Lindisfarne II: continued study of books by the Lindisfarne Fellows

SUMMER TERM, 1978

CHRISTOPHER BAMFORD
The Western Esoteric Tradition
WILLIAM IRWIN THOMPSON
The Prehistoric Matriarchy: Myth and History

FALL TERM, 1978

CHRISTOPHER BAMFORD
Colloquium on Ancient Knowledge
WARREN KENTON
Seminar on the Kabbalah
LINDA LEEDS
The Medieval Literature of the Holy Grail
KATHLEEN RAINE
The Poetry and Art of William Blake: Eight Lectures on *The Book of Job*
WILLIAM IRWIN THOMPSON
The Time Falling Bodies Take to Light
FRANCISCO VARELA
Toward a Biology of Knowledge

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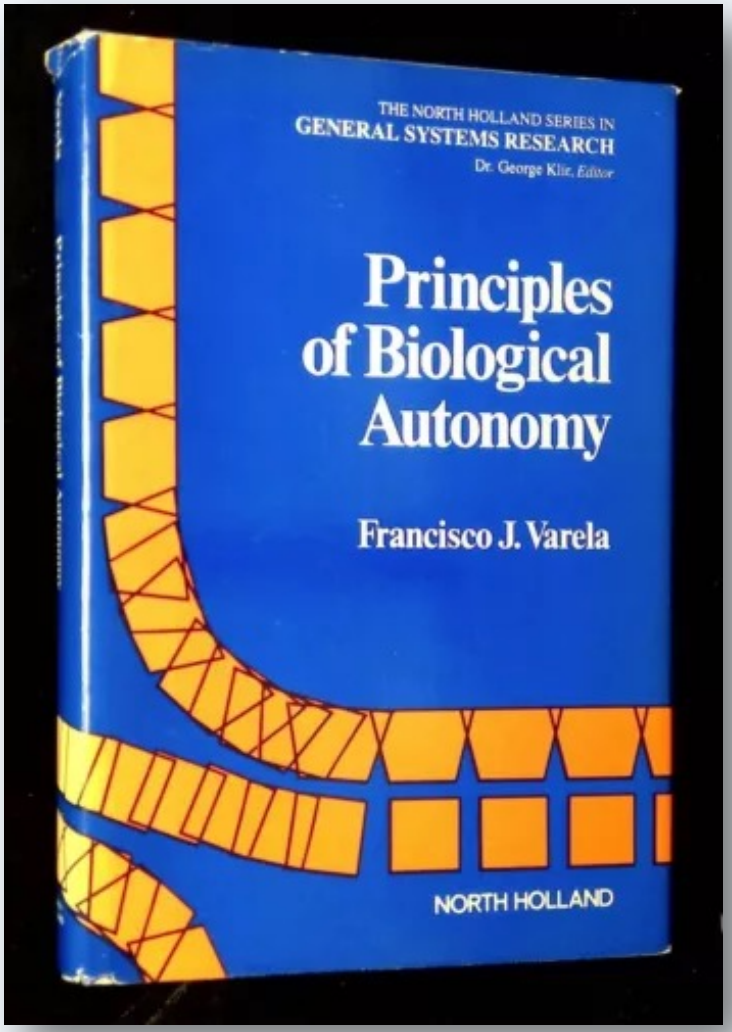
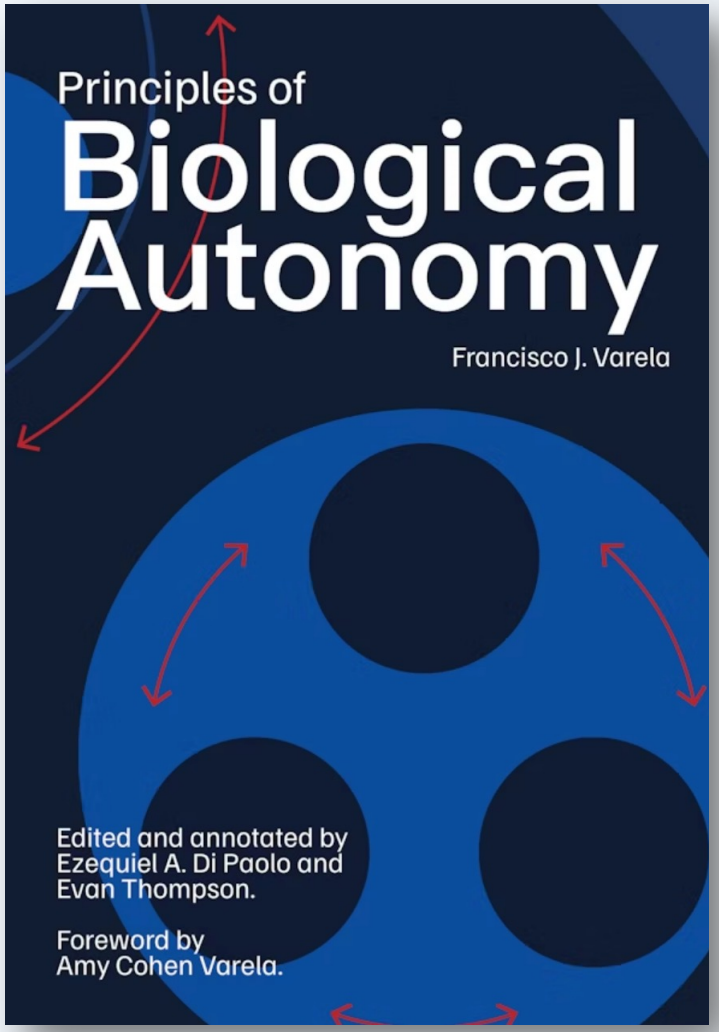


November 2024: $470 or best offer on eBay

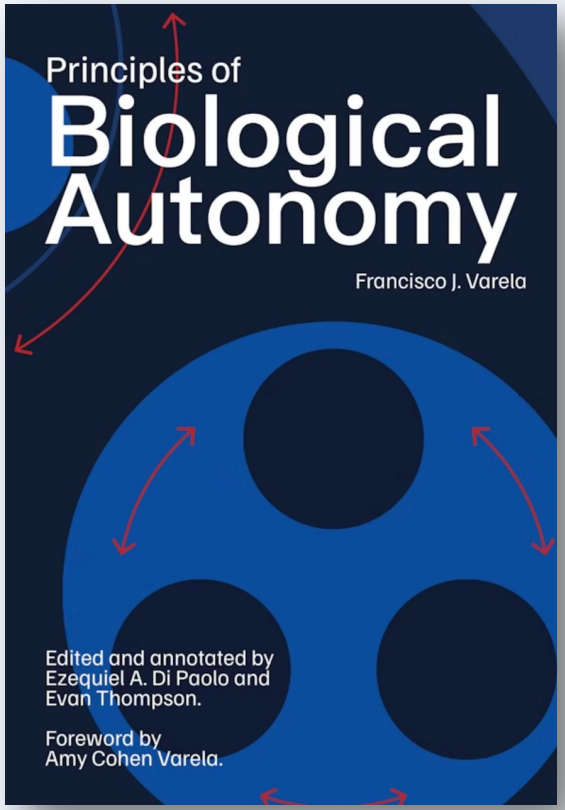


May 13, 2025: $70 at MIT Press

—Thanks to the generosity of Amy Varela and Evan Thompson, we have a sneak preview of the forthcoming, superbly annotated new edition of *Principles of Biological Autonomy*. Here are some passages from the editors' "Introduction to the New Edition. A Message from the Margins":

Francisco Varela wrote *Principles of Biological Autonomy* in his early thirties through the nomadic years that followed the coup d'état in his native Chile on 11 September 1973. He put the finishing touches on the manuscript in 1978 during his time as scholar in residence at the Lindisfarne Association in New York City by invitation of William Irwin Thompson. He also gave a course at Lindisfarne based on the ideas of the book as well as his research on the neurophysiology of visual perception and his growing interest in Buddhist philosophy. Lindisfarne proved to be a suitable atmosphere for nurturing his daring new ideas. The book brings together the deep contributions of a young scholar to a variety of fields, yet all in the service of shaping a new framework for understanding life and mind that would continue to occupy Varela for the rest of his career.

New printings and new translations deservedly brought *Autopoiesis and Cognition* out of obscurity in later years, if not quite into the mainstream, and today this work is appreciated across a variety of disciplines. This has not been the fate of *Principles of Biological Autonomy*, which showcased Varela's further thinking after *Autopoiesis and Cognition*. *Principles of Biological Autonomy* soon went out of print, information about it became scarce, and copies became expensive and hard to find.



BC] We can now decode the historical anachronism that although *Principles of Biological Autonomy* (1979) was published a year *before Autopoiesis and Cognition* (1980), the content of Varela's *Principles* represents the serious development of his own thinking well *beyond* his collaboration with Maturana on the autopoiesis concept at the beginning of the 1970s.

Varela's central message is summarized in his Closure Thesis: *Every autonomous system is organizationally closed.* This thesis is meant as a bid for thinking of examples that fit or may potentially not fit this definition. It is a *scientific* thesis and a mind teaser at the same time from which different thinking habits can form. Organizational or operational closure is a key concept not only in this book but also in Varela's later work and enactive research. It describes a system that is organized as a network of processes that, through their ongoing operation, realize the enabling relations between themselves so that their network organization is sustained and distinguished as a unity in some domain. For the domain of biomolecular interactions, autonomy coincides with autopoiesis, the self-individuation of the unicellular organism. For other domains, such as the activity of immune networks or neurodynamic processes, autonomy is different from autopoiesis in the strict biomolecular sense. There is no restriction, in principle, to domains in which autonomous organization may be manifested. In each case, the closure thesis furnishes us with a test to settle the question of whether a system is autonomous or not.

Autonomy, to repeat, is a central and distinctive concept in the enactive approach, one that differentiates it from other contemporary perspectives on embodied cognition. In fact, the closure thesis is the ultimate anti-reductionist conceptual tool. It gives us a way of telling at what point we may say that a system and its domain of interaction have co-emerged operationally at different scales and spheres, though not necessarily as neat hierarchical levels, with their corresponding phenomenology and regularities pertaining to that particular domain.

BC] The ground of autonomy is not physical but biological: the living organization.

"There is no restriction, in principle, to domains in which autonomous organization may be manifested. In each case, the closure thesis furnishes us with a test to settle the question of whether a system is autonomous or not."

"The closure thesis is the ultimate anti-reductionist conceptual tool."

BC] And while "there is no restriction, in principle, to domains in which autonomous organization may be manifested," one would generally expect to find (or observe) them only among the "natural systems" Varela delineates in his *CQ* interview, rather than among designed systems or computational models.

BC] Since *The Embodied Mind* (1991) co-authored with Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch, the ongoing development of Varela's radical amalgam of cognitive biology and neurophenomenology has proceeded under the designations of *enaction* and *enactivism*. Di Paolo and Thompson's expert witness to the freshness and contemporary relevance of Varela's original discourse—composed throughout the 1970s and incubated in the Cybernetic Countercultures of the Biological Computer Lab, the Whole Earth network, and the Lindisfarne Association—should encourage us to consider the wider realms of organic cybernetics gestated there during this same period, from Bateson's ecologies of mind to Gaia theory, as primed for renewed appreciation and ready for the continuous work of cultural renovation.

In many cases the term "enactive" is seen as a combination of embodied, situated, active, and participatory. The key message of this approach is that meaning is not something we extract out of a pregiven world and process in our brains, but something we are constantly engaged in creating together with the world and with others. What may not be immediately apparent is that in all of these applications the enactive ideas at play are framed and articulated by the concept of autonomy proposed in *Principles of Biological Autonomy*.

We hope to redress years of underserved inaccessibility. But even more, we hope to underscore the theoretical lineage of ideas that are very much alive and needed today. The autonomous perspective can provide tools for better framing our relations to technology. It can help us formulate simultaneously more powerful and caring outlooks on artificial intelligence, human communication, education, and healthcare. In contrast to the mindset of control, the epistemology of participation that emerges from the autonomy viewpoint is badly needed for re-enacting our design strategies, our economic relations, our politics, and our participation in the rest of the natural world.

"The autonomous perspective can provide tools for better framing our relations to technology. . . . In contrast to the mindset of control, the epistemology of participation that emerges from the autonomy viewpoint is badly needed for re-enacting our design strategies, our economic relations, our politics, and our participation in the rest of the natural world."

Amen.

Preface.
Information and Control Revisited

Two themes, in counterpoint, are the motif of this book. The first one is the autonomy exhibited by systems in nature. The second one is their cognitive, informational abilities.

These two themes stand in relation to one another as the inside and the outside of a circle drawn in a plane, inseparably distinct, yet bridged by the hand that draws them.

Autonomy means, literally, self-law. To see what this entails, it is easier to contrast it with its mirror image, allonomy or external law. This is, of course, what we call *control*. These two images, autonomy and control, do a continuous dance. One represents generation, internal regulation, assertion of one's own identity: definition from the inside. The other one represents consumption, input and output, assertion of the identity of the other: definition from outside. Their interplay spans a broad range, from genetics to psychotherapy.

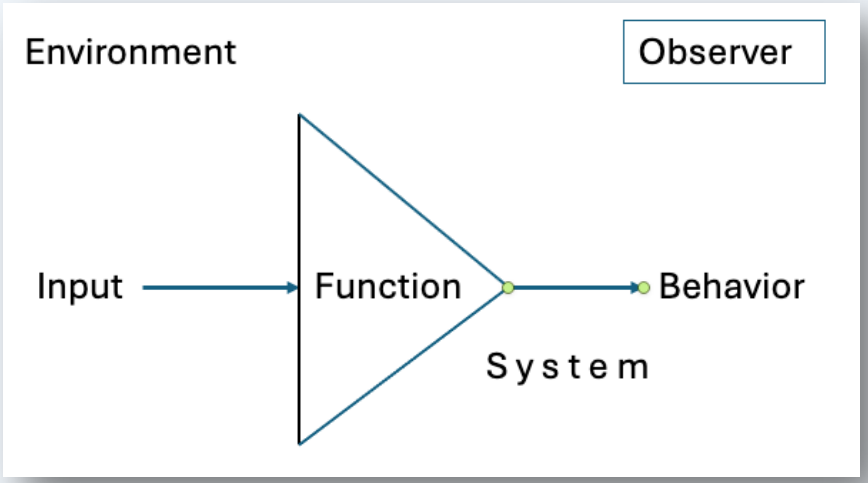
We all know control well; it has been charted out and formalized. Hence the power of the computer and of consumer-oriented services. Its popular model is: something in/process/something out. We stand on both sides of in and out, whether an economic system, a compiler, or a person's mind. The fundamental paradigm of our interaction with a control system is instruction, and the unsatisfactory results are errors.

Autonomy has been less fashionable. It is usually taken as a more vague and somewhat moralistic term, and waved off as a question of indeterminacy. There is little understanding of its generic import, let alone its representation in formal terms. The fundamental paradigm of our interaction with an autonomous system is a conversation, and its unsatisfactory results breaches of understanding.

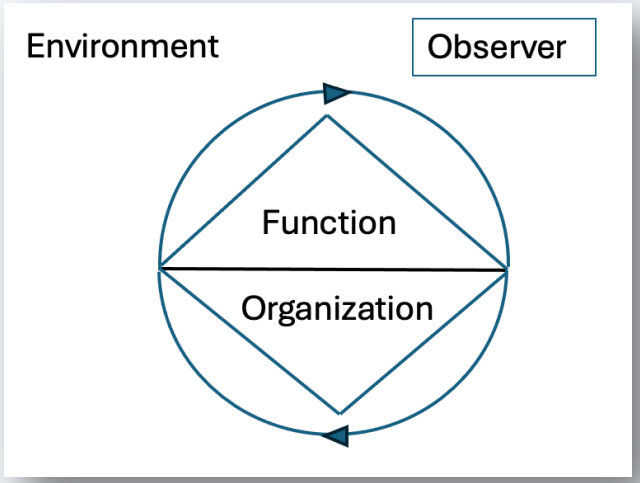
BC] So now, if we take just a quick glance at the opening Varela's preface to *Principles of Biological Autonomy*, it should come as no surprise that we are already quite familiar with the idiom and the intent of his discussion.

"The fundamental paradigm of our interaction with a control system is instruction, and the unsatisfactory results are errors. . . .

"The fundamental paradigm of our interaction with an autonomous system is a conversation, and its unsatisfactory results breaches of understanding."



A control system



An autonomous system

Since most of our lives is concerned with how we see other entities and how we comprehend what transpires between us, it is no wonder that the information sciences, understood in this broad sense, are loaded with philosophical and ethico-political connotations. It is my view that this area of science has been substantially modeled in the image of physics and its technological pathos. One essential difference here however is that *we* and the world that support us belong to the categories of sentient being and not of atoms and quasars. Consequently, the Promethean approach inherited from physics bounces back at us in a fast and dramatic way.

"... this area of science has been substantially modeled in the image of physics and its technological pathos."

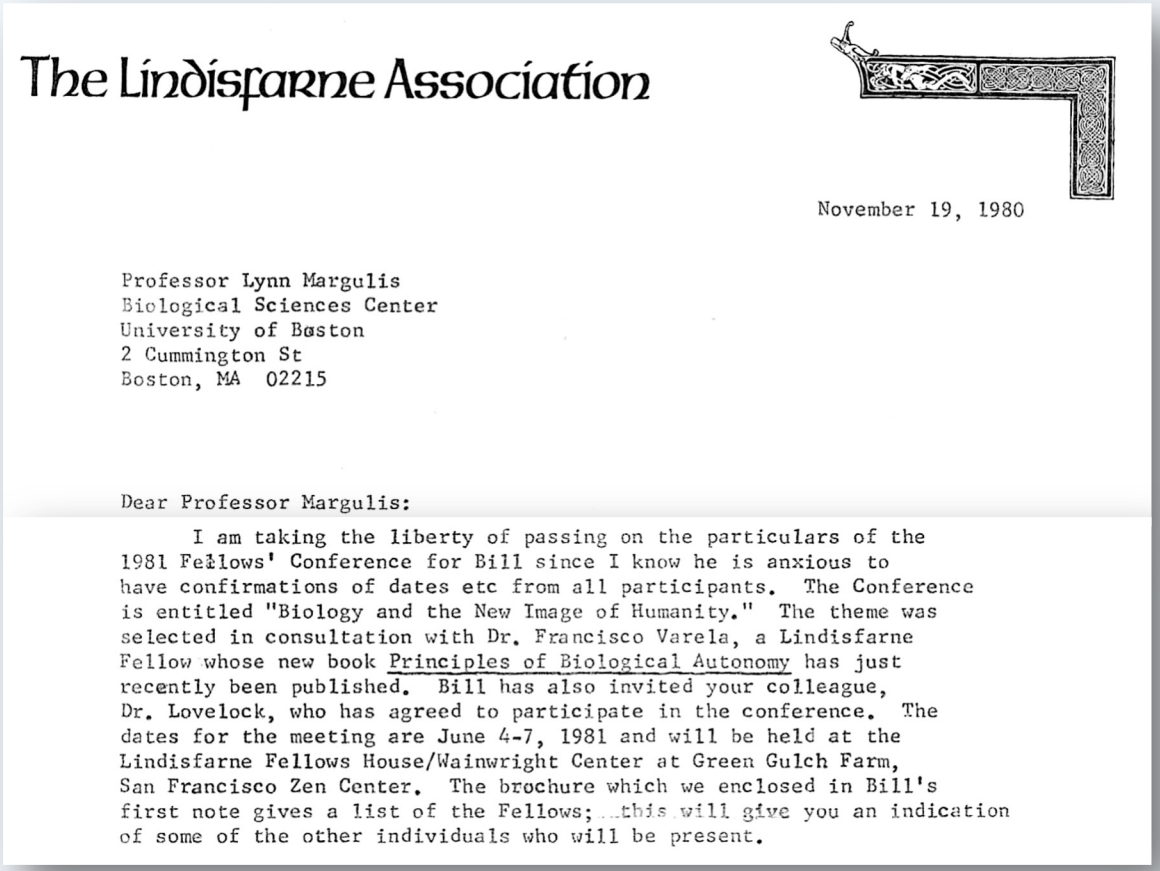
Useful as it may be in the fields of design, the paradigm of cognitive processes as representations has been given a privileged status in our current thinking about cognition. It is well and good that we can sidestep these distinctions in the domain of design, or in some of our dealings with natural systems where they may be treated analogously. To take this approach as a *general* and universal strategy for all aspects of natural systems, including human transactions, seems incredibly limiting. In fact, it is not workable at all, as I shall argue in detail for the two richest cognitive systems in living beings: the immune and the nervous networks.

"To take this approach as a general and universal strategy for all aspects of natural systems, including human transactions, seems incredibly limiting."

It is one of those interesting *corsi e ricorsi* of the history of ideas that the source of the computer gestalt was an understanding of living systems. From this initial inspiration, however, most of the emphasis seems to have shifted towards engineering and design, far more than into other areas. I am arguing, *again on the basis of biological systems*, that this predominant understanding is one-sided and incomplete.

"I am arguing, *again on the basis of biological systems*, that this predominant understanding is one-sided and incomplete."

"I am taking the liberty of passing on the particulars of the 1981 Fellows' Conference for Bill since I know he is anxious to have confirmations of dates etc from all participants. The Conference is entitled "Biology and the New Image of Humanity." The theme was selected in consultation with Dr. Francisco Varela, a Lindisfarne Fellow whose new book Principles of Biological Autonomy has just recently been published. Bill has also invited your colleague, Dr. Lovelock, who has agreed to participate in the conference. . . ."



The Lindisfarne Association

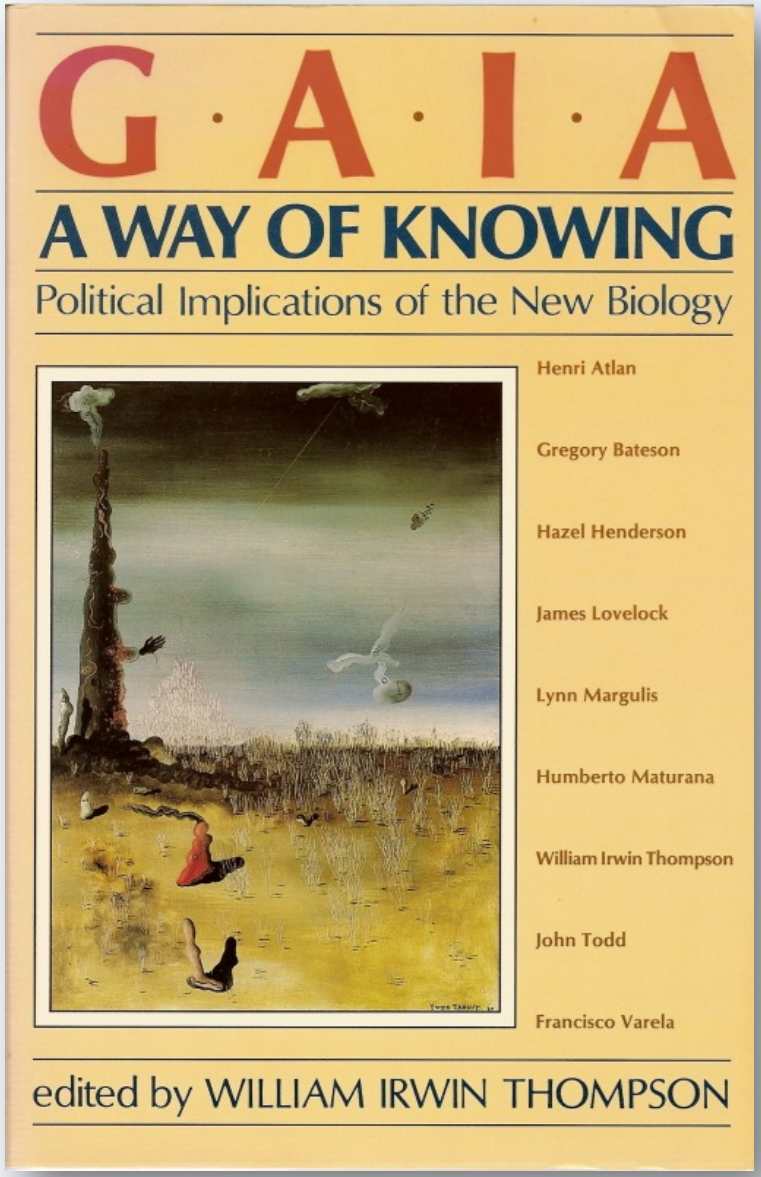
November 19, 1980

Professor Lynn Margulis
Biological Sciences Center
University of Boston
2 Cummington St
Boston, MA 02215

Dear Professor Margulis:

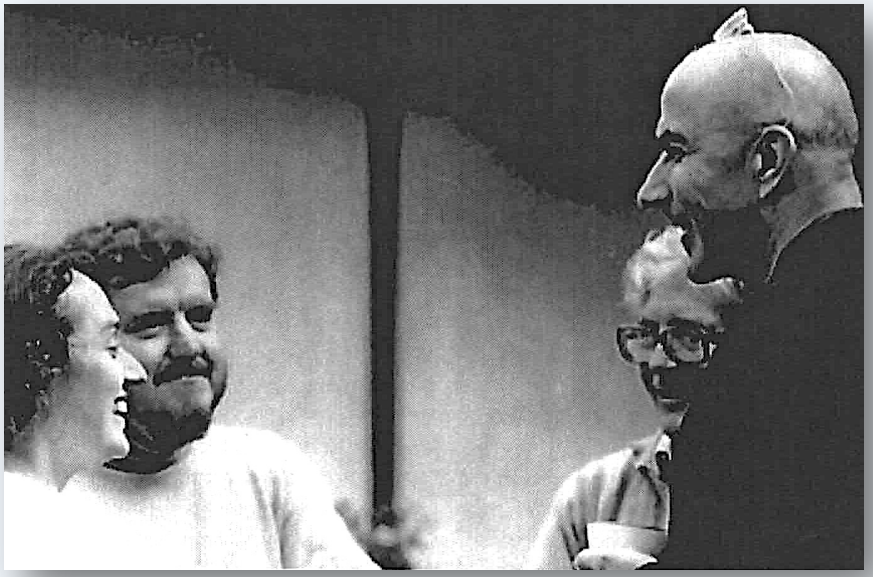
I am taking the liberty of passing on the particulars of the 1981 Fellows' Conference for Bill since I know he is anxious to have confirmations of dates etc from all participants. The Conference is entitled "Biology and the New Image of Humanity." The theme was selected in consultation with Dr. Francisco Varela, a Lindisfarne Fellow whose new book Principles of Biological Autonomy has just recently been published. Bill has also invited your colleague, Dr. Lovelock, who has agreed to participate in the conference. The dates for the meeting are June 4-7, 1981 and will be held at the Lindisfarne Fellows House/Wainwright Center at Green Gulch Farm, San Francisco Zen Center. The brochure which we enclosed in Bill's first note gives a list of the Fellows; this will give you an indication of some of the other individuals who will be present.

—On the evidence of this post-invitation follow-up letter sent to Lynn Margulis by Bill Thompson's assistant Maribeth Bunn, Francisco Varela had a substantial hand in the decision to include Gaia's inventors in a Lindisfarne conference that would break new thematic ground, directly centering that year's topic not just on a scientific issue but precisely on the relation of the biological organism to the *planetary* remit of Lindisfarne's cultural aspirations. As one may suspect, both Varela and Thompson, veteran Whole Earth networkers that they were, would have recognized how perfectly the Gaia concept dovetailed with their emerging Batesonian constitution as a cybernetic counterculture.



"When Lindisfarne's ecological worldview was enhanced by the critique of computationalism in the embodied cognitive science of Francisco Varela in 1977, and then by the Gaia evolutionary theory of James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis in 1981, it began to be obvious to all of us that a new science was showing its face at Lindisfarne and that just such as science was as critical to the process of planetization as any esoteric philosophy of the past" (Thompson, *Thinking Together* 34)

At the Lindisfarne Fellows Conference on "Biology and the New Image of Humanity."



Left to right:
Lynn Margulis,
Bill Thompson,
Jim Lovelock,
Richard Baker-roshi

Left to right:
Francisco Varela,
Heinz Pagels,
Heinz von Foerster

—Notwithstanding Bateson's ecological contributions in the later 1970s, the 1981 Fellows meeting on "Biology and the New Image of Humanity" was a break from the predominance of esoteric content and concerns at large in the Lindisfarne Association of that period. Thompson's admission in the passage cited above marks a further movement into, as previously noted, "the brighter air of a *scientific* circle working to articulate a new planetary culture" (*my italics*). And looking back now, it is notable that, setting the shelf of Bill Thompson's own books to one side, after *Earth's Answer*, the only further volumes Thompson prepared from the programs of Lindisfarne Fellows meetings were the two that brought "applied cyberneticians" Varela, Margulis, and Lovelock together while featuring Gaia as their central theme: *Gaia: A Way of Knowing—Political Implications of the New Biology*, published in 1987, and *Gaia 2: Emergence—The New Science of Becoming*, published in 1991.

GAIA
A Way of Knowing

INTRODUCTION

WILLIAM IRWIN THOMPSON

The Cultural Implications of the New Biology

THE PURPOSE OF the Lindisfarne Conferences, from my perspective as host and organizer, is to render explicit an implicit harmony that exists in the works of those who take part in these gatherings. Some of you are meeting one another for the first time, and this kind of meeting is, I feel, a very important aspect of the work of Lindisfarne. In my travels I meet people whom I recognize as fellow-workers in the emergence of a new culture, and I sense a need that they should meet someone who may be unknown to them personally, but is, nevertheless, a colleague of theirs in the common work. This pattern of association has grown over the years to become the very non-institutional group known as the Lindisfarne Fellows.

This gathering is very much a continuation of that spirit of intellectual and spiritual fellowship. We meet in the room here where last year we heard the tape of what was to be Gregory Bateson's farewell address to the Fellows. Certainly this is a gathering that Gregory would have deeply enjoyed, for present here tonight are some of the individuals, going all the way back to the original Macy Conferences, who have been responsible for opening up new paths in cybernetics, epistemology, and self-organizing systems biology.

Thompson is acknowledging Heinz von Foerster in particular, who spoke at this same meeting (presumably on Varela's invitation as well), but who did not subsequently prepare his remarks for publication.

—The concluding paragraph of Thompson's introduction:

A long time ago, in the shift from the medieval to the modern world system, the small school of Ficino's Academy in Renaissance Florence served to gather poets and philosophers to envision a new culture. A few centuries later, a group of thinkers with Franklin and Jefferson came together in the American Philosophical Society to envision a new democratic society. Now as we move into the period of crisis for the modern world system of industrial nation-states, a period not simply of wars of resources, but also of ecological planetary damage from unbalanced industrialization, we will need to come together to envision a new world. What physics was to engineering in industrial society, biology has become to ecology in our new society. As we move from economics to ecology as the governing science of our era of stewardship, our politics will have to help us realize, beyond all budgets and bottom lines, that what truly counts can't be counted.

"What physics was to engineering in industrial society, biology has become to ecology in our new society."

9

WILLIAM IRWIN THOMPSON

Gaia and the Politics of Life

A Program for the Nineties?

I. Of Conscious Purpose and Unconscious Polities

In his essay, "The Effects of Conscious Purpose on Human Adaptation," Gregory Bateson showed how the conscious purpose of a society, expressed in its economic policies, had very little knowledge of its biological life within an environment.[1] A society did not *know* what it was *doing*, or, in another way of saying it, its political interpretation of life was less than its full existence in an ecology. All that was left over when the conscious interpretation of activity was subtracted, constituted the virtual existence of the organism embedded in the environment. This unconscious transformational activity at the membrane between the organism and the environment was, for Bateson, still the expression of a kind of Mind, and Bateson's last work in his life was to try to explore just this relationship between Mind and Nature.

Thompson sharpens the point of Bateson's celebrated polemic by reading the *conscious purpose* of modern society as a whole as "expressed in its economic policies," over the manifest mediations of which its political system then deliberates and legislates, all the while with "very little knowledge of its biological life within an environment." Over the last half a century we've seen how very hard it still is to make the ecological Unconscious sufficiently manifest to bring sanity to the human environment.

III. Eight Theses for a Gaia Politique

. . .

3. A World is not an ideology nor a scientific institution, nor is it even a system of ideologies; rather, it is a structure of unconscious relations and symbiotic processes. In these living modes of communication in an ecology, even such irrational aspects as noise, pollution, crime, warfare and evil can serve as constituent elements of integration in which negation is a form of emphasis and hatred is a form of attraction through which we become what we hate. The Second World War in Europe and the Pacific expressed chaos and destruction *through* maximum social organization; indeed, this extraordinary transnational organization expressed the cultural transition from a civilization organized around literate rationality to a planetary noetic ecosystem in which stress, terrorism, and catastrophes were unconsciously sustained to maintain the historically novel levels of world integration. Through national, thermonuclear terrorism, and, as well, through subnational expressions of terrorism electronically amplified, these levels of stress and catastrophic integration are still at work today. A World should not be seen, therefore, as an organization structured through communicative rationality,[11] but as the cohabitation of incompatible systems by which and through which the forces of mutual rejection serve to integrate the apparently autonomous unities in a meta-domain that is invisible to them but still constituted by their reactive energies. Therefore, ideologies do not map the complete living processes of a World, and unconscious polities emerge independent of "conscious purpose." Shadow economies (such as the drug traffic between Latin America and the United States), and shadow exports (such as the acid rain from the United States to Canada), and shadow integrations (such as the war between the United States and Japan in the forties) all serve to energize the emergence of a biome that is not governed by conscious purpose.[12]

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—In conclusion, speaking of "the cohabitation of incompatible systems by which and through which the forces of mutual rejection serve to integrate the apparently autonomous unities in a meta-domain that is invisible to them but still constituted by their reactive energies," here are the concluding remarks of Bill's Thompson's "five-minute speech" at the Whole Earth Jamboree in 1978.

What was true of Industrialization is true of Planetization. A nostalgic and false consciousness tried to camouflage the structure with a romantic content. All the artifacts and cultures of the world were miniaturized in Stewart Brand's *Whole Earth Catalog*, and although people grooved on wood stoves and fantasies of self-sufficiency, the catalog itself was absorbing everything into its giant collage. All culture was now being absorbed and miniaturized as the preparation for stuffing it into one of Stewart's beloved space colonies.

Just as the Victorians had once grooved on rose-decorated sewing machines, so people now grooved on wood stoves, windmills, and solar collectors, but the folksy nostalgia merely camouflaged the technological collectivization. When the *CoEvolution Quarterly* later openly came out in favor of Herman Kahn and O'Neill's space colonies, it showed the true skull and bones under the costume: all nature was to be turned into a potted plant in a tin can, and all culture was to be trashed into a television-sensibility collage.

But the *Whole Earth Catalog* and the *CoEvolution Quarterly* do not express the full dimensions of Planetization. In what Sri Aurobindo would call "the descent of the supra-mental," there is a new level of human consciousness which is now surrounding, absorbing, and miniaturizing the old civilized and technological consciousness. As the Supramental surrounds the old mental level, the mind becomes an artifact, and intellection becomes a mind-dance. *Ratio* becomes *logos* once again and the central icon of the econometric state, the dollar sign $ falls on its side and the bars that cross it melt and turn it into a sign for infinity.