

TRIPOD:  
MEAD, BATESON, BALI

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The pleroma is the world in which events are caused by forces and impacts and in which there are no "distinctions." Or, as I would say, no "differences." In the creatura, effects are brought about precisely by difference.

Gregory Bateson  
Steps to an Ecology of Mind  
(1972: 462)

INT. THEATER - EVENING

The house lights dim. The curtains are closed, but the stage is lit. NORA BATESON, 8, peeks through the curtains and looks at the audience. She ventures to center stage, carrying a magazine, a scrap of paper, a drawing pad, and a pencil case.

NORA

Hi. I'm Nora Bateson. I'm Gregory Bateson's daughter. You might not know much about my dad, especially compared to Margaret Mead. Everybody knows about Margaret. But my dad is as important as she is. Together, they invented this thing called cybernetics, and now, because of them, all the computers in the world are being connected to each other to make one giant thinking machine. It's true.

She holds up the magazine. It's CoEvolution Quarterly.

NORA

It says so in here. My dad and Margaret are in this magazine. With Jacques Cousteau and Joni Mitchell! How cool is that?!

She dreams of the life aquatic and yellow taxis, then remembers she was sent onstage for a purpose. She holds up the scrap of paper in her hand.

NORA

My dad asked me to read this to you.

(reading)

A metalogue is a conversation about a problematic subject in which the structure of the conversation is relevant to the subject. What you are about to see was not originally intended to be a metalogue. It just worked out that way. Thanks!

As she scurries backstage, she drops her pencil case. She picks it up and disappears behind the curtains.

A moment later, the curtains open. There are three empty chairs at center stage with a small table in front of them. On the table are a pitcher of ice water, three glasses, and a tape recorder.

A podium stands stage right. Near the podium (far stage right) Nora sits at an old school desk, preparing to draw. An oversized projection of I MADE KALER, Mead and Bateson's Balinese assistant, looms stage left.

Behind the chairs is a large screen for video projection. Currently it shows a splitscreen with curtains blowing in the wind and fish in a fish tank, but the images will change as the conversation unfolds. They should be mostly abstract images, along with stills from Balinese Character and clips from Trance and Dance in Bali.

STEWART BRAND, 38, emerges from backstage, carrying a notepad and a pencil. He walks to the podium and addresses the audience.

BRAND

Thank you for coming to this special event. My name is Stewart Brand. I am the editor of the Whole Earth Catalogue and founder of CoEvolution Quarterly, among many other things. Tonight, I am honored to serve as moderator for a conversation between two of the most important thinkers of the 20th century.

Margaret Mead is one of the world's most remarkable women. She got a full mixture of praise and notoriety with her first book, Coming of Age in Samoa, published in 1928. Since then, there have been ten other books and numerous honors and positions, including President of the American Anthropological Association and Curator of the American Museum of

Natural History, which continues as her headquarters.

Gregory Bateson is one of the foremost scientists of this century. He was one of the original members of the Macy Conferences, which promoted meaningful communication across scientific disciplines and extended systems theory and cybernetics to the social and behavioral sciences. Just this year, he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and California Governor Jerry Brown appointed him to the Board of Regents of the University of California. His collected papers appear in Steps to an Ecology of Mind, a book that wowed me out of my shoes.

Mead and Bateson were married in 1936. In Bali, they spent two collaborative years in the most intense and productive fieldwork of their lives, developing, among other things, a still unmatched photographic analysis of the culture. They were increasingly separated by World War II and their own diverging interests, but they both were involved in starting the Macy Conferences that invented cybernetics. We will begin our conversation with that critical period.

Please welcome Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson.

MARGARET MEAD, 75, and GREGORY BATESON, 72, emerge from backstage. Mead sits in the middle chair. Bateson sits to her left. Brand leaves the podium, bringing his notepad and pencil with him, and sits to Mead's right. Throughout the conversation, he occasionally jots down notes.

At her desk, Nora begins to draw.

BRAND

(to Mead and Bateson)

Can you start by giving us a little background on how the whole Macy thing got rolling, why, and when, what got you excited about cybernetics?

BATESON

It was a solution to the problem of purpose. From Aristotle on, the final cause has always been the mystery. This came out then. We didn't realize that the whole of logic would have to be reconstructed for recursiveness. When I came in from overseas in '45, I went within the first two or three days to Frank Fremont-Smith and said, "Let's have a Macy Conference on that stuff."

MEAD

There wasn't even any usable terminology. At first we called the thing "feedback," and the models that we were presented with at that point were the guided missile, target seeking. Kurt Lewin went away with the idea of feedback as something that when you did anything with a group, you went back and told them later what had happened. And he died before anything much else happened. So the word "feedback" got introduced incorrectly.

BATESON

Yes, feedback now means either telling people what they did, or answering.

MEAD

"I don't get any feedback from you," or "I can't go on with this

without some feedback." It wouldn't have survived if Kurt had lived. He would undoubtedly have got it right.

BRAND

I would like a little more detail back at the initial time when you knew you had hit something.

BATESON

We knew we had - well, for me, I had analysed the Iatmul of Sepik River in Naven, and I had analysed out the fact that there were interactions which must stockpile.

BRAND

This was your schismogenesis?

BATESON

This was schismogenesis, yes. We named it in '36.

MEAD

It hadn't been named yet. You're starting back before you named it schismogenesis.

BATESON

Well, Naven was published. I'm talking about the state I was in when this stuff appeared.

MEAD

In '43. Now, there were some other things like this that were being talked about, and one was what was called a vicious circle. Milton Erickson had written a paper on a girl who quarreled and had headaches and got alienated from people, which led to further quarrels, and so on.

BATESON

Yes, all the positive feedback stuff was ready. And that

presented the problem: why don't these systems blow their tops? And the moment they came out with negative feedback, then one was able to say why they don't blow their tops.

BRAND

This was a word and an idea you heard about in '43?

BATESON

That's when negative feedback came in.

MEAD

We had things about reversals of sign -

BATESON

That was another story, that's before Richardson, even, and way before feedback. Already in Naven there is a statement that complementary schismogenesis neutralises symmetrical schismogenesis, and vice-versa. If you get into too-long a conflict between the bosses and the workers - which is complementary schismogenesis - you put them all out on the cricket field and make them play cricket, which puts them in a symmetrical situation. And it doesn't matter who wins the game of cricket, you know.

BRAND

As long as they're in that mode -

BATESON

Or if they're too far in symmetrical rivalry, such as a quarrelling husband and wife, when one of them sprains his ankle, in comes the complementary with dependency. They suddenly feel much better.

BRAND

It doesn't matter who sprains?

BATESON

It doesn't matter who sprains his ankle, of course not.

BRAND

So you had some notion that all of these various pathologies were structurally the same?

BATESON

No, structurally related, that there was a subject matter of inquiry defined by all these. You see, the fantastic thing is that in 1856, before the publication of the Origin of Species, Wallace in Ternate, Indonesia, had a psychedelic spell following his malaria in which he invented the principle of natural selection. He wrote to Darwin and he said, "Look, natural selection is just like a steam engine with a governor." The first cybernetic model. But then he only thought he had an illustration. He didn't think he'd really said probably the most powerful thing that'd been said in the 19th Century.

MEAD

Only nobody knew it.

BATESON

Nobody knew it. And there it is, still in the text. Nobody picked it up. There was the machinery, the governor itself. There was the mathematics of the machine with the governor, the internal matrix of the body, control of temperature, control of sugar, and all that.

BRAND

Which later became homeostasis?

BATESON

Which later became homeostasis in Cannon. But nobody put the stuff together to say these are the formal relations which go for natural selection, which go for internal physiology, which go for purpose, which go for a cat trying to catch a mouse, which go for me picking up the salt shaker. This was really done by Wiener, and Rosenblueth and McCulloch and Bigelow.

BRAND

How many of you were thinking you had some kind of a general solution?

MEAD

Gregory thought so, and Larry Frank thought so, Evelyn Hutchinson, we had Ross Ashby over, how about Savage?

BATESON

I don't think so, no. You see, one of the essentials, Stewart, for understanding it, was to have been brought up in the age when it wasn't there, when purpose was a total mystery. Naven is a disciplined book, written without teleology. The rule was that you must not invoke teleology. Now, people like Savage, who was a mathematician, for one thing, he never faced biological data, you see. He didn't know what a mystery it is that you have a nose between two eyes, and you don't have noses on the outside here, you know. All that sort of mystery wasn't a question for him. Now, if you say to somebody like that, "Why is the trunk of an elephant a nose?" they

can't tell you without getting into an awful sweat that it's because it's between two eyes. The formal-puzzle has never been presented to them.

MEAD

I remember Robert Merton saying once that there wasn't a person in the country who was thinking hard about problems who didn't have a folder somewhere marked something like "circular systems." Horney's book, The Neurotic Personality of Our Times discusses the vicious circle, and interventions in the circle, and the effect of intervention. Milton's paper on that girl with migraine headaches and quarrelling with her friends, there was lots of stuff around -

BATESON

On positive feedback.

MEAD

But also about possible intervention.

BATESON

But the essence of the other thing is that it's not an intervention.

MEAD

Yes, but an intervention is a precursor of thinking of -

BATESON

Yes, yes. All cybernetic entities are displaced small boys.

MEAD

Displaced small what?

BATESON

Boys. They're jacks. You know what a jack is? A jack is an instrument

to displace a small boy. A boot jack is a thing for pulling off boots 'cause you haven't a small boy to pull it off for you.

MEAD

I'll remember that next time. This is an English joke that no one will understand.

BATESON

I can't help it.

(beat)

On the first steam engines, you've got a pair of cylinders and you've got valves, and you pull this valve to run the steam into this one, close it, let it drive the piston, pull it - this is done by hand. Then they invented the idea of having the flywheel control the valves. This displaced a small boy.

BRAND

The governor displaced another one?

BATESON

And the governor displaced another small boy who was to keep the engine going at a constant rate, that's right. Now then, the John Stroud stuff is the study of the psychology of the human being between two machines. In any device, such as an ack-ack gun, you've got a whole series of small boys in the situation of being between a machine and another machine. What John Stroud worked on was the psychology of that situation. Where is he now, do you ever see him?

MEAD

He is retired, teaching at Simon Fraser somewhat, and he's been

brought back by Gerry O'Neill into discussions of space colonies.

BRAND

Good lord! Space colonies?

The lights on Mead, Bateson, and Brand go out. The lights on Norah remain on. She is drawing. Her pencils are scattered on the desk. She looks for one in particular, but cannot find it.

Bateson steps into Nora's world.

NORA

Daddy, why do things get in a muddle?

BATESON

What do you mean?

NORA

Well, people spend a lot of time tidying things, but they never seem to spend time muddling them. Things just seem to get muddled all by themselves. And then people have to tidy them up again.

BATESON

But do your things get in a muddle if you don't touch them?

NORA

No, not if nobody touches them. But if you touch them - or if anybody touches them - they get in a muddle, and it's a worse muddle if it isn't me.

BATESON

Yes, that's why I try to keep you and your mother from touching things on my desk.

Bateson straightens the pencils on the desk.

BATESON

Would you say that your desk is tidy now?

NORA

No. That's not how I like my pencils.

Bateson moves the pencils a little.

BATESON

How about now?

NORA

No.

Nora moves the pencils so that they are just right.

NORA

They have to be like that.

BATESON

So there's only one way your pencils can be for them to be tidy?

NORA

Yes.

BATESON

And there are many ways your pencils can be for them to be untidy?

NORA

I guess so.

BATESON

Then that is why things always get in a muddle. Because there are so many more ways for things to be untidy than tidy.

NORA

Hmm.

BATESON

Let's think about a real concrete out-and-out muddle and see if that helps. Do you remember the game of croquet in Alice in Wonderland?

NORA

Yes, with flamingos?

BATESON

That's right.

NORA

And porcupines for balls?

BATESON

No, hedgehogs. They were hedgehogs. They don't have porcupines in England.

NORA

Oh. Was Wonderland England, Daddy? I didn't know.

BATESON

Of course it was England. You don't have duchesses in America.

(beat)

The point is that the man who wrote Alice was thinking about the same things that we are. And he amused himself with little Alice by imagining a game of croquet that would be all muddle, just absolute muddle. So he said they should use flamingos as mallets because the flamingos would bend their necks so the player wouldn't know even whether his mallet would hit the ball or how it would hit the ball.

NORA

And the ball might walk away of its own accord because it was a hedgehog.

BATESON

That's right. Everything could move, and nobody could tell how it would move.

NORA

Did everything have to be alive so as to make a complete muddle?

BATESON

No, he could have made it a muddle by... no, I suppose you're right. That's interesting. Yes, it had to be that way. Wait a minute. It's curious, but you're right. Because if he'd muddled things any other way, the players could have learned how to deal with the muddling details. I mean, suppose the croquet lawn was bumpy, or the balls were a funny shape, or the heads of the mallets just wobbly instead of being alive, then the people could still learn and the game would only be more difficult. It wouldn't be impossible. I wouldn't have expected that.

NORA

Why not? That's what I would have expected.

BATESON

Yes. But this is the thing that I would not have expected. That animals, which are themselves able to see things ahead and act on what they think is going to happen - a cat can catch a mouse by jumping to land where the mouse will probably be when she has completed her jump - but it's just the fact that animals are capable of seeing ahead and learning that makes them unpredictable. To think that we try to make laws as though people were quite regular and predictable.

NORA

Or do they make the laws just because people are not predictable, and the people who make the laws wish the other people were predictable?

BATESON

Yes, I suppose so.... There is something about living things and the difference between them and the things that are not alive - machines, stone, so on. Horses don't fit in a world of automobiles. And that's part of the same point. They're unpredictable, like flamingos in a game of croquet.

NORA

What about people, Daddy?

BATESON

What about them?

NORA

Well, they're alive. Do they fit? I mean on the streets?

BATESON

No, I suppose they don't really fit - or only by working pretty hard to protect themselves and make themselves fit. Yes, they have had to make themselves predictable, because otherwise the machines get angry and kill them.

NORA

Don't be silly. If the machines can get angry, they would not be predictable. They'd be like you, Daddy. You can't predict when you're angry, can you?

BATESON

No, I suppose not.

NORA

But, Daddy, I'd rather have you  
unpredictable - sometimes.

Bateson smiles. Nora returns to drawing. Bateson steps out  
of her world, and the lights go out.

The lights on Mead, Bateson, and Brand come up. Bateson is  
lost in thought.

BRAND

Margaret, what was your perception  
at the time of the early Macy  
meetings as to what was going on?

MEAD

The thing that cybernetics made  
the most difference to me, aside  
from all the things that you know,  
in the social organisation field,  
was the interaction between the  
mother and child. There had been  
too much emphasis that there were  
temperamental differences among  
children, so that you responded  
differently to a hyperactive baby  
than you did to a quiet baby. But  
the extent to which there was a  
system in which the mother was  
dependent on what the child had  
learned as the stimulus for the  
next position wasn't well  
articulated until we got the  
cybernetics conferences going.

Bateson rejoins the conversation.

BATESON

The link-up between the behavioral  
sciences spread very slowly and  
hasn't really spread yet. The  
cyberneticians in the narrow sense  
of the word went off into input-  
output.

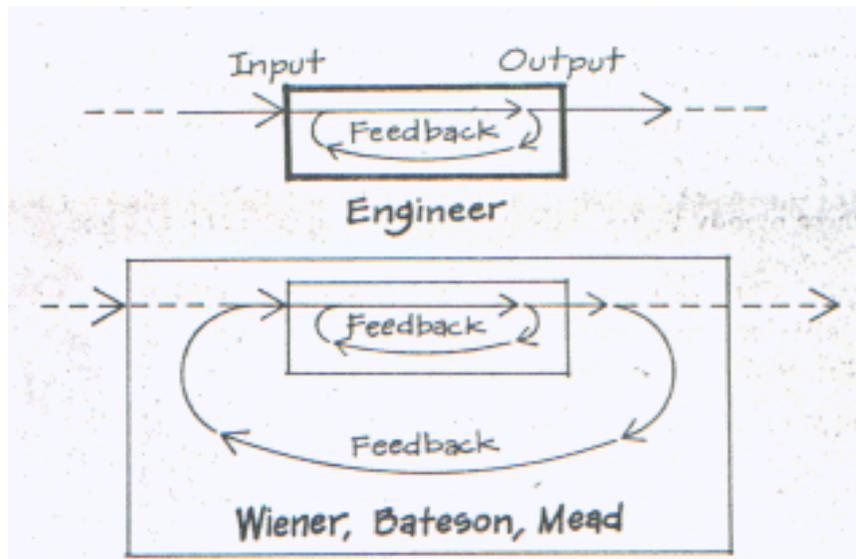
BRAND

They went off into computer science.

BATESON

Computer science is input-output.  
May I borrow your notepad,  
Stewart?

Brand hands his notepad and pencil to Bateson. Bateson quickly sketches a diagram. He shows it to Brand as he speaks.



BATESON

All right, you've got a box, and you've got this line enclosing the box, and the science is the science of these boxes. Now, the essence of Wiener's cybernetics was that the science is the science of the whole circuit. You see, in the diagram here -

Mead points at the tape recorder.

MEAD

You'd better verbalize this diagram if it's going to be on the tape.

BATESON

Well, you can carry this piece of paper all the way home with you.

(to Brand)

The electric boys have a circuit like that, and an event here is reported by a sense organ of some kind, and affects something that puts in here. Then you now cut off there and there, then you say there's an input and an output. Then you work on the box. What Wiener says is that you work on the whole picture and its properties. Now, there may be boxes inside here, like this of all sorts, but essentially your ecosystem, your organism plus-environment, is to be considered as a single circuit.

BRAND

The bigger circle there -

BATESON

And you're not really concerned with input-output, but with the events within the bigger circuit, and you are part of the bigger circuit. It's these lines around the box, which are just conceptual lines after all, which mark the difference between the engineers and -

MEAD

And between the systems people and general systems theory, too.

BATESON

Yes.

BRAND

A kind of a Martin Buber-ish breakdown, "I-it," where they are trying to keep themselves out of that which they're studying. The

engineer is outside the box, and Wiener is inside the box.

BATESON

Wiener is inside the box. And I'm inside the box.

MEAD

I'm inside the box.

(beat)

You see, Wiener named the thing, and of course the word "cybernetics" comes from the Greek word for helmsman.

BATESON

It actually existed as a word before Wiener - it's a nineteenth century word.

MEAD

Yes, but he wrote the book Cybernetics and sort of patented the idea to that extent. Now, Stewart, what we had said we were going to talk about was the need of having "some data flowing through the system."

BRAND

Some data flowing through the system?

BATESON

Yes. All right, I set my classes an assignment. If they can, they will handle it purely abstractly. And they then get off into an awful mess of ill-drawn abstractions which act upon other ill-drawn abstractions. But if you can make them fool around with data of any sort while they're playing with the abstractions, then you get something. I keep a fish tank going there, because a fish tank is a nice thing, really, to have in the back of your mind

while you're thinking about whatever it might be. Norbert Wiener, when he had a problem, used to sit with the wind blowing on a curtain.

MEAD

I thought that was von Neumann.

BATESON

It could have been von Neumann. Now, this goes along with: "always the multiple approach." Any Hebrew poetry is like this. "The candles are white as translucent fishes," you know. "Lilies for joy, and lilies for funerals." "How are the mighty fallen and the weapons of war perished." You get away from the pure verbalism by double-phrasing. You make two statements, and what is true of both of them is the formal truth. This is what is called explanation.

BRAND

It's not that it's a repetition of the message, it's different derivations of the same message from different sources.

BATESON

Yes, in psychoanalysis if you can recognize the same formal pattern in a dream and in a childhood memory and in how you're treating your analyst, you will say, "Aha, it's true." You've got it.

MEAD

And when you're studying a culture.

BRAND

What would be an example there?

## MEAD

Well, you find the same pattern recurring in different aspects of the culture. You find, for instance, a house in which there's no ornamentation inside, all the ornamentation's on the gate. You find a people who are preoccupied with the external aspects of their skin and believe that any breakage will impair them so that they're imperfect for something else, and so forth. With that kind of understanding, if you're told something, you can tell whether it fits or not. For instance, the Balinese told us that they had marriage by capture, which didn't suit anything we'd understood about their culture. Our cook was going to carry off a girl by capture, so Gregory went outside the gate with him early in the morning, and the girl was there waiting. They looked around and there was nobody else there, so she trotted off with him. If there had been another group there, she would have pretended, she would have screamed and been carried off, because that was correct etiquette. Then we had the case of a very stupid boy who thought it was true. He carried off a girl who had already planned to elope with somebody else. It took the society months to sort that out. From a complex culture like Bali you take a lot of chunks - birthday ceremonies and funeral ceremonies, children's games, and a whole series of things, and then you analyze them for the patterns that are there.

## BATESON

In Iatmul they have flutes. The flutes are long hollow bamboo, an

inch and a half thick, five feet long, and one hole here, which you blow across. And from that you can get about five notes by overblowing, by harmonics. All right. You have a flute, you're blowing with me, and yours is tuned one tone higher than mine. So your harmonics fit between mine, right? Between us we've got quite a bit of scale. If we blow alternatively we can make a tune. Well, now this is how the generations are arranged. The grandparents go with the grandchildren, and the initiation grades are like seniors - juniors - sophomores - freshmen, and when you get a fight over initiation, the seniors and the sophomores go together, and the juniors and the freshmen go together. And so on.

BRAND

So what is the truth?

BATESON

The truth is that Iatmul like to make this pattern. This is a pattern of organization that they think is nice.

BRAND

Margaret, an old student of yours told me you have a list of reliable sources of insight. What's the list?

MEAD

I used to say to my classes that the ways to get insight are: to study infants; to study animals; to study primitive people; to be psychoanalyzed; to have a religious conversion and get over it; to have a psychotic episode and get over it; or to have a love affair with an Old Russian. And I

stopped saying that when a little dancer in the front row put up her hand and said, "Does he have to be old?"

BRAND

How many of those have you done?

The lights and video go out. GAMELAN MUSIC begins. In the darkness, the chairs, podium, and desk are moved offstage, and the screen behind them goes up.

The lights come up to reveal a gamelan orchestra and Balinese dancers. They perform for 30 minutes.

The lights go out. GAMELAN MUSIC continues in the darkness as the screen comes down and the chairs, podium, and desk are returned to the stage.

The video flickers back on. The lights come up. Mead and Bateson sit in their chairs. Nora sits at her desk, which is now lit again.

MEAD

Watching Konrad Lorenz be simultaneously a bird and a worm, is one of the really magnificent things in the world. You've seen that, haven't you, when he's describing a bird catching a worm, and he's both? Talk about the whole system, there it is.

BATESON

One of the things I've always regretted is that I didn't film him lecturing in Hawaii.

Mead glances at Brand's empty chair.

MEAD

Gregory, have you any ideas on the subject of the harm that is done by television because of the rigidity of the body of people watching TV? Sartre discussed at one point what happens when you peek into a keyhole. When you look

through a keyhole, the whole body is focused to try to use this very small aperture, and he described what happens if you touch somebody who is looking through a keyhole. They jump. I have a big set, now, of comparative pictures of family groups reading and looking at TV. When the family is reading, they're a thousand years away from each other, their eyes are all down, but you get a sense of community and relaxation. Their bodies are very loose, and undoubtedly there's movement going on as they read. But when they're watching television, the same people sit like this, they don't touch each other, and they're very rigid. We have lots of material that if you move in your mind, your muscles don't get stiff. For years we had this very funny problem with catatonics, such as a man who would stand all day long in a ward with his eyes up and his hands together in prayer, never moving. They'd pick him up at night, tip him into a bed, feed him artificially, and then after five years or something, there'd be a fire. He'd walk across the ward, pick up a telephone, report, "Fire in ward five," help get all patients out, and then when the fire was out, back he went to his position. But he was not stiff. Whereas if you take the ordinary person and put them in bed for three months, they have to relearn how to walk. All the data we now have on monitoring muscles with tiny transistor monitors shows, if you think about skiing or exercising, the muscles that you use to ski will respond. If you inhibit movement, as one does watching TV, with no empathy, no

muscular involvement at all, I think this is the thing that's doing harm.

BATESON

I was wondering about looking through, for example, a camera.

MEAD

Remember Clara Lambert and when you were trying to teach her? That woman who was making photographic studies of play schools, but she was using the camera as a telescope instead of as a camera. You said, "She'll never be a photographer. She keeps using the camera to look at things." But you didn't. You always used a camera to take a picture, which is a different activity.

Brand returns and sits in his chair.

BATESON

Yes. By the way, I don't like cameras on tripods, just grinding. In the latter part of the schizophrenic project, we had cameras on tripods just grinding.

MEAD

And you don't like that?

BATESON

Disastrous.

MEAD

Why?

BATESON

Because I think the photographic record should be an art form.

MEAD

Oh why? Why shouldn't you have some records that aren't art

forms? Because if it's an art form, it has been altered.

BATESON

It's undoubtedly been altered. I don't think it exists unaltered.

MEAD

I think it's very important, if you're going to be scientific about behavior, to give other people access to the material, as comparable as possible to the access you had. You don't, then, alter the material. There's a bunch of film makers now that are saying, "It should be art," and wrecking everything that we're trying to do. Why the hell should it be art?

BATESON

Well, it should be off the tripod.

MEAD

So you run around.

BATESON

Yes.

MEAD

And therefore you've introduced a variation into it that is unnecessary.

BATESON

I therefore got the information out that I thought was relevant at the time.

MEAD

That's right. And therefore what do you see later?

BATESON

If you put the damn thing on a tripod, you don't get any relevance.

MEAD

No, you get what happened.

BATESON

It isn't what happened.

MEAD

I don't want people leaping around thinking that a profile at this moment would be beautiful.

BATESON

I wouldn't want beautiful.

MEAD

Well, what's the leaping around for.

BATESON

To get what's happening.

MEAD

What you think is happening.

BATESON

If Stewart reached behind his back to scratch himself, I would like to be over there at that moment.

MEAD

If you were over there at that moment you wouldn't see him kicking the cat under the table. So that just doesn't hold as an argument.

BATESON

Of the things that happen, the camera is only going to record one percent anyway.

MEAD

That's right.

BATESON

I want that one percent on the whole to tell.

MEAD

Look, I've worked with these things that were done by artistic film makers, and the result is you can't do anything with them.

BATESON

They're bad artists, then.

MEAD

No, they're not. I mean, an artistic film maker can make a beautiful notion of what he thinks is there, and you can't do any subsequent analysis with it of any kind. That's been the trouble with anthropology, because they had to trust us. If we were good enough instruments, and we said the people in this culture did something more than the ones in that, if they trusted us, they used it. But there was no way of probing further into the material. So we gradually developed the idea of film and tapes.

BATESON

There's never going to be any way of probing further into the material.

MEAD

What are you talking about, Gregory? I don't know what you're talking about. Certainly, when we showed that Balinese stuff that first summer, there were different things that people identified - the limpness that Marion Stranahan identified, the place on the chest and its point in child development that Erik Erikson identified. I can go back over it, and show you what they got out of those films. They didn't get it out of your head, and they didn't get it out

of the way you were pointing the camera. They got it because it was a long enough run so they could see what was happening.

BRAND

What about something like that Navajo film, Intrepid Shadows?

MEAD

Well, that is a beautiful - an artistic production that tells you something about a Navajo artist.

BATESON

This is different, it's a native work of art.

MEAD

Yes, and a beautiful native work of art, but the only thing you can do more with that is analyze the film maker, which I did. I figured out how he got the animation into the trees.

BATESON

Oh yes? What do you get out of that one?

MEAD

He picked windy days, he walked as he photographed, and he moved the camera independently of the movement of his own body. And that gives you that effect. Well, are you going to say, following what all those other people have been able to get out of those films of yours, that you should have just been artistic?

BRAND

He's saying he was artistic.

MEAD

No, he wasn't. I mean, he's a good film maker, and Balinese can pose

very nicely, but his effort was to hold the camera steady enough long enough to get a sequence of behavior.

BATESON

To find out what's happening, yes.

MEAD

When you're jumping around taking pictures -

BATESON

Nobody's talking about that, Margaret, for God's sake.

MEAD

Well.

BATESON

I'm talking about having control of a camera. You're talking about putting a dead camera on top of a bloody tripod. It sees nothing.

MEAD

Well, I think it sees a great deal. I've worked with these pictures taken by artists, and really good ones -

BATESON

I'm sorry I said artists. All I meant was artists. I mean, artists is not a term of abuse in my vocabulary.

MEAD

It isn't in mine either, but I -

BATESON

Well, in this conversation, it's become one.

MEAD

Well, I'm sorry. It just produces something different. I've tried to use Dead Birds, for instance -

BATESON

I don't understand Dead Birds at all. I've looked at Dead Birds, and it makes no sense.

MEAD

I think it makes plenty of sense.

BATESON

But how it was made I have no idea at all.

MEAD

Well, there is never a long enough sequence of anything, and you said absolutely that what was needed was long, long sequences from one position in the direction of two people. You've said that in print. Are you going to take it back?

BATESON

Yes, well, a long sequence in my vocabulary is twenty seconds.

MEAD

Well, it wasn't when you were writing about the Balinese films. It was three minutes. It was the longest that you could wind the camera at that point.

BATESON

A very few sequences ran to the length of the winding of the camera.

MEAD

But if at that point you had had a camera that would run twelve hundred feet, you'd have run it.

BATESON

I would have and I'd have been wrong.

MEAD

I don't think so for one minute.

BATESON

The Balinese film wouldn't be worth one quarter.

MEAD

All right. That's a point where I totally disagree. It's not science.

BATESON

I don't know what science is, I don't know what art is.

MEAD

That's all right. If you don't, that's quite simple. I do.

(to Brand)

With the films that Gregory's now repudiating he took, we have had twenty-five years of re-examination of the material.

BATESON

It's pretty rich material.

MEAD

It is rich because they're long sequences, and that's what you need.

BATESON

There are no long sequences.

MEAD

Oh, compared with anything anybody else does, Gregory.

BATESON

But they're trained not to.

MEAD

There are sequences that are long enough to analyze -

BATESON

Taken from the right place!

MEAD

Taken from one place.

BATESON

Taken from the place that averaged better than other places.

MEAD

Well, you put your camera there.

BATESON

You can't do that with a tripod. You're stuck. The thing grinds for twelve hundred feet. It's a bore.

MEAD

Well, you prefer twenty seconds to twelve hundred feet.

BATESON

Indeed, I do.

MEAD

Which shows you get bored very easily.

BATESON

Yes, I do.

MEAD

Well, there are other people who don't. Take the films that Betty Thompson studied. That Karbo sequence - it's beautiful - she was willing to work on it for six months. You've never been willing to work on things for that length of time, but you shouldn't object to other people who can do it and giving them the material to do it. There were times in the field when I worked with people without filming, and therefore have not been able to subject the material to changing theory, as we were

able to do with the Balinese stuff. So when I went back to Bali I didn't see new things. When I went back to Manus, I did, where I had only still photographs. If you have film, as your own perception develops, you can re-examine it in the light of the material to some extent. One of the things, Gregory, that we examined in the stills, was the extent to which people, if they leaned against other people, let their mouths fall slack. We got that out of examining lots and lots of stills. It's the same principle. It's quite different if you have a thesis and have the camera in your hand, the chances of influencing the material are greater. When you don't have the camera in your hand, you can look at the things that happen in the background.

BATESON

There are three ends to this discussion. There's the sort of film that I want to make, there's the sort of film that they want to make in New Mexico - which is Dead Birds, substantially - and there's the sort of film that is made by leaving the camera on a tripod and not paying attention to it.

BRAND

Who does that?

BATESON

Oh, psychiatrists do that. Albert Scheflen leaves a video camera in somebody's house and goes home. It's stuck to the wall.

MEAD

Well, I thoroughly disapprove of the people that want video so they won't have to look. They hand it

over to an unfortunate student who then does the rest of the work and adds up the figures, and they write a book. We both object to this. But I do think if you look at your long sequences of stills - leave out the film for a minute - that those long, very rapid sequences, Koewat Raoeh, those stills, they're magnificent, and you can do a great deal with them. And if you hadn't stayed in the same place, you wouldn't have those sequences.

BRAND

Has anyone else done that since?

MEAD

Nobody has been as good a photographer as Gregory at this sort of thing. People are very unwilling to do it, very unwilling.

BRAND

I haven't seen any books that come even close to Balinese Character.

MEAD

That's right, they never have. And now Gregory is saying it was wrong to do what he did in Bali. Gregory was the only person who was ever successful at taking stills and film at the same time, which you did by putting one on a tripod and having both at the same focal length.

BATESON

It was having one in my hand and the other round my neck.

MEAD

Some of the time, and some not.

## BATESON

We used the tripod occasionally when we were using long telephoto lenses.

## MEAD

We used it for the bathing babies. I think the difference between art and science is that each artistic event is unique, whereas in science sooner or later, once you get some kind of theory going, somebody or other will make the same discovery. The principal point is access, so that other people can look at your material and come to understand it and share it. The only real information that Dead Birds gives anybody are things like the thing that my imagination had never really encompassed, and that's the effect of cutting off joints of fingers. You remember? The women cut off a joint for every death that they mourn for, and they start when they're little girls, so that by the time they're grown women, they have no fingers. All the fine work is done by the men in that society, the crocheting and what not, because the men have fingers to do it with, and the women have these stumps of hands. I knew about it, I had read about it, it had no meaning to me until I saw those pictures. There are lots of things that can be conveyed by this quasi-artistic film, but when we want to suggest to people that it's a good idea to know what goes on between people, which is what you've always stressed, we still have to show your films, because there aren't any others that are anything like as good.

BRAND

Isn't that a little shocking? It's been, what, years?

MEAD

Very shocking.

BATESON

It's because people are getting good at putting cameras on tripods. It isn't what happens between people.

MEAD

Nobody's put any cameras on tripods in those twenty-five years that looked at anything that mattered.

BATESON

They haven't looked at anything that mattered, anyway. All right.

Brand claps his hands together.

BRAND

All right. Would you be willing to answer a few questions from the audience?

MEAD

Yes, of course.

Brand springs out of his chair, moves to center stage, and addresses the audience.

BRAND

Okay, it's time for some group discussion. Are there any questions for our esteemed guests?

Brand serves as moderator, calling on people, facilitating discussion. Mead gladly responds. Bateson initially remains aloof, but warms to the attention of the audience.

Brand keeps track of the time.

BRAND

Well, this has been great, but sadly, we're out of time. Let's thank our guests, Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson.

MEAD

And let's thank our unflappable moderator, Stewart Brand.

BRAND

Thank you! Good night!

Mead, Bateson, and Brand walk off stage. The lights that were on them go out. Only Nora remains. As she packs up her things, Bateson appears.

BATESON

May I see what you have been working on?

Nora shows him her drawing.

NORA

Do you like it?

BATESON

It's wonderful.

NORA

Did you figure out the difference between humans and animals?

BATESON

Humans are two creatures in one. The first is animal. The second is something else. It is made up of intellect, language, tools - all the things we think of as human. And this second creature meddles incessantly with the first.

NORA

I don't understand.

BATESON

Perhaps it is explained better by a poet than a scientist.

Thought chang'd the infinite to a  
 serpent, that which pitieth  
 To a devouring flame; and man fled  
 from its face and hid  
 In forest of night: then all the  
 eternal forests were divided  
 Into earths rolling in circles of  
 space, that like an ocean rush'd  
 And overwhelmed all except this  
 finite wall of flesh.  
 Then was the serpent temple  
 form'd, image of infinite  
 Shut up in finite revolutions; and  
 man became an Angel,  
 Heaven a mighty circle turning,  
 God a tyrant crown'd.

NORA

It sounds terrible, but what does  
 it mean?

BATESON

Thought slices everything to bits.  
 It gives things purposes and  
 splits the world into "helpful"  
 and "hindering" things. These  
 things become Good and Evil, and  
 the world is split between God and  
 the Serpent.

NORA

It's as terrible as I thought.

BATESON

There is a solution though. It is  
 to remember that mind is immanent  
 not only in those pathways of  
 information which are located  
 inside the body but also in  
 external pathways. The individual  
 nexus of pathways which I call  
 "me" is no longer so precious  
 because that nexus is only part of  
 a larger mind. The ideas which  
 seemed to be me can also become  
 immanent in you.

NORA

I like that.

Nora and Bateson walk off stage. The lights go out.

THE END.