



*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world."*

# Notes from the Field



Newsletter of the Institute for Intercultural Studies

Fall 2005

## The Grannies are Coming...

During 2004, IIS contributed research support to a project on the changing roles of older adults and their participation in the political process. Over several years, Mary Catherine Bateson had been involved in a group of women age 60-70, calling themselves the "Next Step Women." During the 2004 election, the NSWs engaged in a non-partisan project called Granny Voter, to encourage older Americans to think of themselves as "trustee voters" – or, as the T-shirts and buttons said, to vote "for" their grandchildren's future. The website, still focused around the elections, can be found at [www.GrannyVoter.org](http://www.GrannyVoter.org).

The IIS became involved in an effort to determine whether grandparents (and other older Americans) already make political choices on the basis of the effect of policies on a future beyond their own lifetime. In collaboration with Casey Family Programs and the Communications Consortium Media Center in Washington DC, six questions were commissioned in an Ipsos (Reuters) poll in October 2004, seeking the relationship between concerns for self and for future generations. This was apparently the first time that grandparenthood has been treated as a variable in a political poll.

The US and other industrialized nations are going through a major demographic shift with more and more healthy, energetic citizens of ever older ages. Politicians of both parties, however, apparently assume that the way to attract senior voters is to focus on entitlements and self-interest. In fact we are at risk of seeing everyone over 55 or 60 as a problem rather than an asset. It's worth remembering that Margaret Mead once said that the most under-



Granny Voters Ruth Massinga, President of Casey Family Programs, and Mary Catherine Bateson in Washington last September to encourage trustee voting.

utilized resource in this country is women over 50. The polling supplied preliminary evidence that three out of four American grandparents strongly agree that they will vote their grandchildren's long-term interests, as well as the way issues affect them personally in the near term. Even on Social Security and Medicare, only 26% said they make up their mind mostly on the basis of the effect on themselves. In addition, the poll results showed concern for future generations increasing with age for non-grandparents.

Whether or not Granny Voter specifically will be revived for later elections, the changing cultural definition of different life stages will continue to be a focus for IIS, with a special emphasis on adolescents and older adults.

## Bateson Centennial Goes Bicoastal

A few weeks before last fall's American Anthropological Association 2004 annual meeting planned for San Francisco, a strike by hotel workers in that city caused a last-minute relocation and postponement. Many of those who had hoped to present in sessions on Bateson, however, were committed to coming to San Francisco for the *Bateson@100: Multiple Versions of the World* conference on November 20, 2004, at UC-Berkeley, which delved into reminiscences of the life of Gregory Bateson and a variety of ongoing themes and issues stemming from his work. This conference was already bicoastal in concept as a simultaneous conference organized on the east coast by Paul Ryan shared a partially simulcast program.

Skirting around the labor action, the dozen or so AAA Bateson organizers and participants devised a bicoastal set of meetings for those who were able to make both or either. Thus, on November 18, a west coast contingent presented papers at the Townsend Center at UC Berkeley. In the morning, about half the participants

scheduled for "Gregory Bateson and the Science of Mind and Pattern" (organized by Mary Catherine Bateson and Peter Harries-Jones), and "Once and Future Theory: Further Steps Toward Gregory Bateson's Ecology of Mind" (organized by Felice Wyndham and David Casagrande), presented their papers, joining up in the afternoon with "Bateson and Ecological Aesthetics: Challenging Postmodernism," a session organized by Katja Neves-Graca and Michael Nijhawan. In mid-December, those who could not be present in Berkeley came together for a Gregory Bateson Presidential Session at the reconstructed AAA meeting in Atlanta, followed by a reception hosted by the program committee. Agendas and abstracts on these sessions are available at the IIS website.

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## What's On My Mind - Mary Catherine Bateson

# Intelligent Design and Gregory Bateson

Here we are, at the beginning of a new century, caught up in a replay of old debates between religion and science, and the question of what children are to be taught about evolution is being rerun as a debate about "intelligent design" which President Bush has declared should be taught in schools.

Bateson and Mead both grew up in dogmatically atheistic households and might be said to have approached religion first through the arts. Margaret chose in adolescence to join the Episcopal church and remained a member throughout her life. Gregory never formally joined a religious community but he hung out with Buddhists at the San Francisco Zen community and at Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado, where he taught for several years. Both were willing to deal, with curiosity and courtesy, with a variety of other unorthodox belief systems: parapsychology, spiritual healing, UFOs, channeling...oh, my. Gregory referred to his interest in the sacred as breaking a taboo and going "where angels fear to tread."

Gregory once said during an experimental LSD session, when he was shown a rose (and told to be less analytical about his experience), "Think of all the thought it took to make that rose." This reads like an endorsement of intelligent design, which argues that when we look carefully at the natural world we see an order of complexity that can only be explained by assuming the existence of a designer. But Gregory was precisely not arguing for an external designer. He spoke of learning (or thought) and evolution as the "two great stochastic processes," each of which occurs within

Both Margaret and Gregory would have viewed fundamentalism as a sad and dangerous error in understanding mythopoetic insight.

a mind capable of responding selectively to random inputs and of integrating these in an ongoing pattern. For him, an organism (like the rose bush) was a mind, but so was a forest or lake – living systems. Any relationship created a larger mind: the gardener, plants, insects, bacteria in the soil, and even the gardener's tools which also become parts of that larger mind. So for Gregory, equating evolution and thought, every organism could be expected to show the characteristics of intelligent design. And because, as Gregory argued, the unit of survival is always the organism in its environment, it is essential for human beings to see the mental characteristic of the larger systems that enfold our lives. For him, awe was the appropriate response to a walk in the woods. If the walkers needed to imagine pixies hiding under mushrooms in order to respond to the life around them, they might be better off with pixies than without, but design was a characteristic of the system.

**P.S.** When people ask me about Margaret's attitude toward religion, I describe her habit of promptly dozing off during sermons. She prayed and joined in the liturgy, but she largely set aside doctrinal and moralistic lectures. For her too, religious experience represented an essential way of knowing that should not be understood as literal fact. I think both Margaret and Gregory, therefore, would have viewed fundamentalism as a sad and dangerous error in understanding mythopoetic insight. Fundamentalists and materialists have this in common: both are unable to sustain a poetic wonder and humility in the living world.

Visit [www.marycatherinebateson.com](http://www.marycatherinebateson.com) to read what's on her mind ...

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## University of Copenhagen Hosts Bateson Conference

The crowning event of the 2004 Bateson centennial was a conference convened in August 2005 in Copenhagen by Jesper Hofmeyer, whose department is biological chemistry with a special interest in biosemiotics, coordinating with Peter Harries-Jones, an anthropologist who has focused for many years on Bateson's aesthetics. The University of Copenhagen had designated religion in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the research priority area for this year and Hofmeyer represented the science faculty in shaping the program. Thus the conference unfolded around a series of themes: Bateson and modern science, Bateson and faith, and Bateson and Pierce as theoreticians of meaning and communication.



Gathering of scholars at the University of Copenhagen Bateson conference, August 2005

The papers on Gregory as a scientist focused on his critique of habits of thought in science. Robert Ulanowicz, a theoretical ecologist, analyzed the "theoretical minimalism" of science as a causally closed, atomistic, and deterministic system, in which causation is

both universal and reversible. Together with Luis Bruni, he sketched a biological world in which information has a causal role and autocatalysis and emergence are possible – a world corresponding to Bateson's creatura. Terry Deacon characterized Bateson as asserting that "in the world of creatura something not materially present (like a letter not sent) could be the determinant of a material-energetic change." Toward the end of the conference, Deacon offered a computer generated molecular model of how "self-organization and selection arise from a special codependence between reciprocal self-organizing processes." Several ethnographic studies focused on the extent to which scientists in fact rely upon culturally constructed assumptions, and Gregory Mendel noted the occurrence of "fundamentalism" among scientists, particularly neo-Darwinism. Philip Guddemi examined current anthropological reliance on discussions of power in the light of Bateson's critique of this and other transfers of terminology from physical to biological systems. Guddemi proposed rephrasing discussions of "power" as asymmetrical relationships in which there is always a degree of interdependence but a difference in flexibility, with implications for the larger system.

A number of papers dealt with Bateson as a religious thinker. While Bateson rejected supernaturalism, he referred to aspects of life that remain unrecognized by extreme mechanistic and materialistic thought as the sacred and argued that religious metaphors and experiences (such as prayer and meditation) might preserve an order of truth otherwise lost.

## Anticipating the Future, Japanese Honor Mead Legacy

In a continuing tribute to Mead's legacy, a consortium of Japanese scholars and institutions convened an international symposium October 28-29, 2004 at the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka. The genesis for the event was the participation of Prof. Shinji Yamashita of Tokyo University, a pioneer in the anthropology of tourism, in the 2001 Margaret Mead Centennial Symposium, *The Interplay of Cultures: Whither the U.S. in the World?* held at the Library of Congress. Setting the scene, Prof. Yamashita, praised Mead as a public intellectual and a model for "anthropology in action." Makio Matsuzono, director-general of the museum, and a scholar of Kenyan cultures, welcomed the opportunity to increase social involvement of anthropologists in public affairs. Proceedings will be published by the museum in 2006.

The meat of the symposium was current work being done in Asia by anthropologists and other social scientists, but several invitees from the Institute for Intercultural Studies had been asked to connect current work with the Mead tradition. For instance, William O. Beeman, IIS advisor and professor of Anthropology at Brown University, described Mead's unfinished work, *Learning to Live in One World*, abandoned after the cataclysmic events of dropping nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. He reminded listeners that Mead asserted that "our enemies are the only guarantors of the safety of our children and that we are the only guarantors of the safety of our enemies' children."

IIS Advisor Wilton S. Dillon, in his paper on visual anthropology, "Margaret Mead's Uses of Imagery," explored Mead's childhood as a source of her inspiration in pioneering the use of film to document human behavior. "Pageantry, liturgy, poetry and rich descriptive prose found in her early life experience foreshadowed her use and advocacy of photographs and film." Dillon, who served three years on General MacArthur's Civil Information and Education staff during the Occupation, also reminded the symposium of Mead's long interest in the peaceful aspects of Japanese culture, including traditions of aesthetics, hospitality, reciprocity, and etiquette, as well as plasticity—a blending of the past with modernity. "Public servants interested in international security cannot ignore the human sciences in efforts to address conflict without war," Dillon emphasized.

Beyond such invited American contributions, the majority of papers reflected current research on the kinds of issues that Mead brought to public attention, such as the interaction of children with the media: "Youth, Internet and Temporary Autonomous Zone," by a Korean scholar; "TV Commercial and Appearance of Childhood in

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## Work continues on Bateson biopic

Nora Bateson continues to make headway on the film, *That Reminds Me of a Story*, about her father. This one-hour biographical documentary will weave together an array of elements: Bateson's film footage shot in Bali and New Guinea with Mead during the 1930s, photographs, lectures, interviews, and home movies. Her hope is to "inspire audiences to see our existence within a larger system that glistens with symmetry, play, and metaphor." "Remember," Gregory Bateson would say, "if you turn a stone over to study the creatures underneath, always, always put it back."

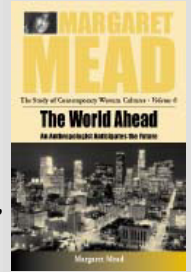


Nora is hosting a series of events in coming months to help raise awareness and funds for this project. The first of these fundraisers was an evening of dining, music and auction in late October in northern California. For more information and to be notified of future film-related events, contact Nora directly at [norabateson@aol.com](mailto:norabateson@aol.com).

If you wish to contribute, either for the documentary or for the conservation of Gregory Bateson's ethnographic footage, please send your contribution with the preferred use clearly marked to the IIS in New York.

## New Books, Films, Resources

The featured title at Berghahn Books this fall is the paperback edition of *The World Ahead: An Anthropologist Anticipates the Future*, edited and with an introduction and commentaries by Robert B. Textor, Professor Emeritus, Stanford University. This sixth volume of the series, *Margaret Mead: The Study of*



*Contemporary Western Culture*, collects for the first time her writings on the future of humanity and how humans can shape that future through purposeful action. Volume 5 in the series, *Studying Contemporary Western Society: Methods and Theory*, came out in late 2004. The final volume of this seven-book series edited by William O. Beeman, *The Study of Visual Culture*, is due out in 2007.

A distinguished list of scholars come together to explore the lives, works, and legacies of Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict in *Reading Benedict/Reading Mead: Feminism, Race, and Imperial Visions* (Johns Hopkins University Press). Edited by Dolores Janiewski and Lois W. Banner, the contributions in this volume reflect a wide range of topics and perspectives, including Benedict and Mead's personal and professional relationship; their activities as scholars and outspoken intellectuals; their efforts to promote feminism and combat racism; and the stories behind their best-known works, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* and *Coming of Age in Samoa*. Together, the essays provide a useful and provocative introduction to Benedict and Mead as well as to the ongoing debate about the legacy they left behind.

A special issue of *Cybernetics & Human Knowing*, Gregory Bateson - *Essays for an Ecology of Ideas* is now available from Imprint Academic. If you are not familiar with the journal, you will find that it deals frequently with matters relevant to Bateson. The journal issue (Vol. 12, no. 1-2, 2005) may be ordered direct from Imprint Academic. Further details are available at [www.imprint.co.uk/C&HK/](http://www.imprint.co.uk/C&HK/) or by emailing [sandra@imprint.co.uk](mailto:sandra@imprint.co.uk).

A DVD presentation of the *Bateson@100: Multiple Versions of Reality* conference is now available to IIS friends at a special price of \$85. The six-plus hours of footage from last November's gathering at UC Berkeley includes presentations by Jerry Brown, Mary Catherine Bateson, Carol Wilder and Peter Harries-Jones, and lively exchanges between presenters and participants. For information, contact [gordonf20@comcast.net](mailto:gordonf20@comcast.net).

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For more Bateson and Mead resources,  
visit the IIS website at  
[www.interculturalstudies.org](http://www.interculturalstudies.org)



## Remembering Mary Wolfskill (1947-2005)

Mary Wolfskill, head of the Reference and Reader Service section of the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress and the Library's specialist on Margaret Mead, died of ovarian cancer on May 23, 2005 at the age of 58.



Mary Wolfskill

Wolfskill worked tirelessly for more than two decades to make the Margaret Mead Collection, one of the largest and most complex collections owned by the Library, available to scholars. The challenge was enormous. First, the collection itself is vast, comprising thousands of pages of manuscripts, 30,000 still photographs, 35,000 feet of black-and-white film, sound recordings, original art, personal diaries and letters, field notes, and more. Second, in order to make the collection more accessible to the public, the archivists had to determine how to organize the material in a way that would preserve the intent as well as its physical aspects, and foster research on the multitude of Mead's areas of interest to continue. Individual anthropologists were designated to have first access to Mead's field materials on areas they researched, but these parts of the collection are now available to all scholars. At any time in the last two decades there have

been researchers in the manuscript division reading room working on Mead papers, ranging from a brief visit by Derek Freeman to research stretching over years. Researchers seeking information about the collection should now contact Ms. Janice Ruth.

Wolfskill led the planning group for the Library's Margaret Mead Centennial Exhibit in 2001, although she was already in failing health during the final months of preparation. (NB the online exhibit continues today at [www.loc.gov/exhibits/mead/](http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/mead/))

Mary Catherine Bateson remembers Mary Wolfskill as a dedicated and tireless professional, who increasingly became a member of the family. In December 2001, following the opening of the Margaret Mead Centennial Exhibit, Wolfskill was awarded IIS's Spirit of Margaret Mead award for "her skill and caring sensitivity in preserving and animating the Mead legacy for future generations." She preserved a delicate professional neutrality, enthusiastic about research and advocating for researchers of all kinds, while at the same time increasingly herself a member of the research community.

Wolfskill's career at the Library spanned 36 years, during which time she worked as reference librarian, archivist, archives specialist, and eventually head of the Reference and Reader Service section of the Manuscript Division. She fought a long battle with cancer, still coming in to work at the Library in the weeks before her death.

## Spirit of MM Award to Ken Heyman at 28th Annual Mead Film Festival

Ken Heyman, internationally recognized photographer and collaborator with Margaret Mead, received IIS's Spirit of Margaret Mead award at the November 3 opening ceremony of the 2005 Margaret Mead Film & Video Festival at the American Museum of Natural History, New York, (Nov 3-6 and 12-13). This award is in recognition of his contributions to using photography as a record of human behavior, as well as to promote human understanding.

Mead and Heyman co-authored two books, *Family and World Enough*, and were working on a third at the time of her death in 1978. During the Mead centennial observance in 2001, Heyman's collection of images of Mead doing field work over a 25-year period was exhibited at the American Anthropological Association meeting in Washington, and at the Smithsonian Institution.

Since 1992, the Festival has also presented the Margaret Mead Traveling Film & Video Festival in which a selection of titles from that year's Mead Festival travels to independent film and community centers, museums, and universities throughout the nation. More information is available at [www.amnh.org/mead](http://www.amnh.org/mead).



Ken Heyman's photograph of MM holding a Balinese baby that Mead used as one of her Christmas cards

## Japanese Honor Mead Legacy (Continued from page 3)

Contemporary Indonesia," and "Mobile Phones and Youth in Japan," by two Japanese scholars. A number of papers reflected the importance of studying other cultures as well as self-study, for instance one scholar's study of gender differences in Australian aboriginal culture; Japanese ethnographic film-maker Yasuhiro Omori's documentary on French gypsies; and a Japanese case study of economic development among Mayans in Guatemala.

Speaking on "An Anthropology for the Future," at the end of the symposium, Mary Catherine Bateson praised the rich diversity of work being done and urged participants to speak for the range of human possibility. She emphasized the role of Boas, Benedict, Mead and Kluckhohn in introducing the concept of "culture" into popular discourse. Though criticized as "too vague," the concept "is still indispensable in understanding and mediating human diversity."

Contributed by Wilton S. Dillon, Senior Scholar Emeritus, Smithsonian Institution

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For address changes, cancellations, and donations, please write to us at IIS, 67A East 77th Street, New York, NY 10021.

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