

## **HEXEN 2.0/Cybernetic Séance**

### **Video**

15:00 mins looped

2011

<http://www.suzannetreister.net/HEXEN2/Seance/cyberneticseance.html>

### **SCRIPT**

The video is edited using interwoven sections of quotations from Macy Conferences Attendees : Gregory Bateson, Heinz von Foerster, Margaret Mead and Kurt Lewin. The readings are by Susan Hiller, David Coxhead and Maximilian Treister.

#### **Gregory Bateson (1904-1980) - Anthropologist**

Cybernetics is the biggest bite out of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge that mankind has taken in the last 2000 years.

There is latent in Cybernetics the means of achieving a new and perhaps more human outlook, a means of changing our philosophy of control, and a means of seeing our own follies in wider perspective.

... With this knowledge of the conditions which obtain in homogeneous groups, we shall be in a position to examine the processes of fusion of two diverse groups into one. We may even be able to prescribe measures which will either promote or retard such fusion, and predict that a trait which fits the five aspects of unity can be added to a culture without other changes. If it does not fit, then we can search for appropriate modifications either of the culture or of the trait.

The major problems in the world are the result of the difference between how nature works and the way people think.

#### **Heinz von Foerster (1911-2002) - Electrical Engineer**

I would like to invite you now to join me in a land where it is not forbidden; rather, where one is encouraged to speak about oneself. What else can one do anyway? This turn from looking at things "out there" to looking at "looking itself," arose I think, from significant advances in neurophysiology and neuropsychiatry. It appeared that

one could now dare to ask the question of how the brain works. One could dare to write a theory of the brain.

It may be argued that over the centuries since Aristotle, physicians and philosophers again and again developed theories of the brain. So, what's new of today's cyberneticians? What is new is the profound insight that a brain is required to write a theory of a brain. From this follows that a theory of the brain, that has any aspirations for completeness, has to account for the writing of this theory. And even more fascinating, the writer of this theory has to account for her or himself. Translated into the domain of cybernetics; the cybernetician, by entering his own domain, has to account for his or her own activity. Cybernetics then becomes cybernetics of cybernetics, or second-order cybernetics.

### **MARGARET MEAD (1901–1978) - Anthropologist**

Well, I know that's what you always tell people, but I didn't sit at the same place at lunch, and I heard what was said at that conference. But at that conference, which is the one where Milton Erickson hypnotised that Yale psychologist, it was at the end of that conference that you really had the design of what needed to be done. And then you were caught up in war work and went overseas and there was that long period.

I think that you actually have to go back to that earlier meeting that was held in the basement of the old Psycho-Analytic building on the West Side the day of Pearl Harbor.

At first we called the thing 'feedback,' and the models that we were presented with at that point were the guided missile, targetseeking. Now there had been another event that's worth considering here. That is that Wiener had written an article in the Atlantic, or Harper's, refusing to give the war data on guided missiles. He'd worked on them all through the war, and of course they had the material if they had hunted for it, but they made the mistake of asking him for some, and at that point he said that he would not give it to them, the war was over, and this was data that could only be used for war-like purposes. He would not give it to them.

I'm inside the box. You see, Wiener named the thing, and of course the word 'cybernetics' comes from the Greek word for helmsman. .

And then he went to Russia, and was very well received. The Russians were crazy about this right away - it fit right to their lives. But one of the big difficulties in Russian psychology is that they have great difficulty learning that anything's irreversible.

Well, we had a period where I thought we could take cybernetics and use it as a language for communicating with the Russians, and then somebody in this country decided that the Russian cybernetics were very dangerous, and we had a big intelligence report on cybernetics. It ceased to be politics-free and was no longer useful.

When the Society for General Systems Research was formed, I proposed that we apply general systems to our society. Nobody knew who I was and I was feeling like the little old lady in tennis shoes. I went up at the end of it and talked to Ashby, and he said, 'You mean we should apply our principles to ourselves?'

So now, the Society for General Systems Research, which is proliferating, is proliferating by the standard methods that are used in this country - regional chapters. I said to Dick Erickson, 'I don't think we should be so conventional, we ought to think of something better.' We can't get anybody to use any kind of constructive thinking on the problems of organization. And, of course, there's no place where you can get a well rounded degree in General System Theory. Rand has a school that is almost entirely military.

I was asked to speak at a dinner of the Air Force celebrating their fifth decade of Air Force intelligence. I talked about the fact that they weren't paying attention to the whole; the Air Force was modeling the Soviet Union as a system, and the Army was modeling the United States as a system, using different units, and they were both ignoring the fact that China existed, and therefore were making hopeless mess when you knew you had a universe to deal with. What I was telling them was to use cybernetic thinking as it had developed into general systems theory. The next morning I was on a chartered plane bringing me back, and there was a man on it who said, 'You left me way behind. I couldn't understand a word you said.' I said, 'What are you?' He said, 'I'm an electronic specialist.' Americans are always solving problems piece-meal. They're always solving them de nouveau and artificially because they're all newcomers and they don't have decisions grounded in a culture.

## **Kurt Lewin (1890-1947) - Psychologist**

Action research is a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research leading to social action that uses a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action.

If you want truly to understand something, try to change it.

Our behavior is purposeful; we live in a psychological reality or life space that includes not only those parts of our physical and social environment to us but also imagined states that do not currently exist.

This means methodologically that the importance of a case, and its validity as proof, cannot be evaluated by the frequency of its occurrence. Finally, it means for psychology, as it did for physics, a transition from an abstract classificatory procedure to an essentially concrete constructive method.

It has been frequently misunderstood and interpreted to mean that field theorists are not interested in historical problems or in the effect of previous experience. Nothing can be more mistaken. In fact, field theorists are most interested in development and historical problems and have certainly done their share to enlarge the temporal scope of the psychological experiment from that of the classic reaction time experiment, which last only a few seconds, to experimental situations, which contain a systematically created history throughout hours or weeks.

### **Sources:**

#### **Gregory Bateson:**

From Part II and Part VI of Gregory Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Chandler Publishing Company, USA 1972. Second paragraph originally printed in *Man*, Article 199, Vol. XXXV, 1935

#### **Heinz von Foerster:**

Foerster, Heinz von, *Ethics and Second-order Cybernetics*, Opening address for the

International Conference, *Systems and Family Therapy: Ethics, Epistemology, New Methods*, Paris, France, October 4th, 1990

**Margaret Mead:**

From a conversation between Stewart Brand, Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead published in *CoEvolutionary Quarterly*, June 1976, Issue no. 10, pp. 32-44, USA.

**Kurt Lewin:**

Lewin, K. *Action research and minority problems*, *J Soc. Issues* 2(4): 34-46 1946

Lewin, K. *Frontiers in group dynamics 1*. *Human Relations* 1, 5-41. 1947

(In 1947 MIT and the new London based Tavistock Institute for Human Relations co-partnered the journal, *Human Relations*, founded with two papers by Lewin in which he described the 'change process', a three-stage process to bring about change.

This consisted firstly of "unfreezing" the existing "mind set", secondly, increasing forces of change or decreasing forces which hinder change, and thirdly, "freezing" to maintain the new status.)