

# **Patterns That Connect Patterns That Connect: A Thematic Foreword**

*Frederick Steier and Jane Jorgenson<sup>1</sup>*

In the film *Mindwalk*, Sonja Hoffman, a physicist played by Liv Ullmann, is asked by a politician (played by Sam Waterston) to name those thinkers whose work embodies this “new systems thinking” Hoffman is speaking so highly of. Three names come to her—with the connector among them being Gregory Bateson. Such is Bateson’s legacy that this film, made over a decade after his death, sees fit to put his name out there as a systems thinker that the world of film viewers ought to become familiar with. *Mindwalk* is an extended peripatetic conversation between a physicist, a politician and a poet, set in the inspiring natural and designed space of Mont St. Michel, with the haunting minimalist music of Philip Glass. It is fitting that Bateson’s name should be invoked, certainly as a systems thinker whose work we need to know, but also as someone whose passions connect those with such diverse backgrounds and ways of seeing, as a physicist, politician and poet.

This special double issue of *Cybernetics and Human Knowing* is dedicated to the work of Gregory Bateson on the occasion of his centennial celebration. How do we connect Bateson, the cybernetic epistemologist with Bateson, the poet concerned with metaphoric process? How do we connect Bateson the scientist interested in human and animal communication and behavior with Bateson the learning theorist? How do we connect Bateson interested in the ecology of cities, with Bateson interested in an ecology of mind? And how might we, following Bateson, make these connections while examining our own assumptions, including the relational contexts within which we make them. And how might we explore our assumptions in ways that allow us challenge deeply held obsolescent traditions—including diverse dualisms that have rendered such connections, such “in-betweenesses” as blindnesses in our ways of understanding.

The authors in this volume in many ways parallel the range of interests and areas of concern to Bateson. Included here are family therapists, communication scholars, anthropologists, psychologists, musicians, education theorists, as well as those whose work simply is self-described as cybernetics and systems practice. Yet, such traditional classificatory schema obscure the ways that each of them as individuals move fluidly across traditional disciplinary boundaries, and they also prevent our noticing the connections among all of them as a system of inquirers whose diverse interests are

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connected by the threads of systems thinking and cybernetics. Awareness of these connections creates the potential for a network of conversations among the authors, from which multiple perspectives and new knowledge can emerge.

Bateson consistently invites us to look to patterns that connect. “Break the pattern which connects the items of learning and you necessarily destroy all quality,” he tells his fellow regents at the University of California. “What pattern connects the crab to the lobster and the orchid to the primrose and all four of them to me? And me to you?” he asks us to consider at the outset in *Mind and Nature* (p. 8). His focus on both the content and relationship aspects of all messages invites us to think about pattern also in human relationships and how we create patterns that we live and that define us. And Bateson’s ideas of the relationship of content and process invite us to carefully consider patterns across time, and perhaps time as patterned occasion.

So in this introduction we bring together these essays not only as separate works, but as an interconnected web—or the beginning of a web, at least to the extent that a book whose pages unfold in numerical sequence might allow. We will introduce the essays individually, but also highlight some manner of connection of each with the succeeding piece.

Thus we try here to create a way of introducing the volume whose process itself mirrors Bateson’s very ideas that have meant so much to us.

In Julio Cortazar’s *Hopscotch*, the reader is offered, in addition to the regular ordered sequence of chapters, an alternative suggested sequence. This alternative sequence allows new ideas and images to unfold with different readings. We invite the reader to try this with this volume as well. We realize that the features unconcealed by the connections we make are just some of many, and we hope that creating patterns between essays allows new features emerge in the relationship, in the in-between.

These authors, clearly, share a passion for Bateson’s vision, and his concern for the relationship between our ways of knowing and our experienced worlds. They write from their personal engagement with his ideas and their awareness of how those ideas have informed their work. At the same time we see how their thinking, having been enriched by Bateson’s ideas, can, in turn, inform and extend Bateson’s work.

The kinds of connections discernible across essays are diverse. They include domains of content, cybernetic principles—even the manner in which the writers weave their own patterns that connect. What, then, are patterns that connect our patterns that connect?

Mary Catherine Bateson recasts the theory of the double bind in the context of Bateson’s ecological and environmental concerns. Her essay invites us to consider various forms of double bind inherent in the human situation. Rather than seeking to eliminate dissonances between logical levels, she invites us to think about preparing future generations to embrace them, and links this awareness to the design of educational systems.

*Together, Mary Catherine Bateson and Will McWhinney encourage us to explore movement across different levels of learning, and to think about ways of linking that movement process to possibilities for transforming our learning institutions.*

Will McWhinney draws on recent developments in neurophysiology to reconsider and extend the distinctions and relationships among Bateson's levels of learning. McWhinney uses a Chinese parable, "The White Horse," as a vehicle for rethinking third order learning, Learning III, as a "spiraling path of action, withdrawal and return, of increasing creativity, humility, and good will," a meta-praxis.

*Will McWhinney and Frederick Steier together encourage us to explore the linkage between communication and learning at multiple levels while considering what this linkage might mean in "designing for engagement."*

Frederick Steier explores the interplay between Bateson's ideas of "frame" and "flexibility" through the lens of understanding activities at a science center. In making these connections, he raises questions about frames for learning and play, while developing the importance of creating contexts for "exercising frame flexibility" in social systems.

*Frederick Steier and Thomas Hylland Eriksen invite us to extend Bateson's ideas about flexibility and its entailments to scenes of everyday life, giving particular attention to the patterns connecting different social systems we engage in.*

Thomas Hylland Eriksen focuses on Bateson's idea of flexibility as uncommitted potential for change. He raises questions about relationships between flexibilities across the domains of time and space and explores the consequences for "new work" in the knowledge-based economy. His investigation into emergent social forms with new information and communication technologies in turn allows for adding to what he feels is the untapped potential in the concept of flexibility itself.

*Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Peter Harries-Jones invite us to take Bateson's ideas seriously in our understanding of and enactment of "natural" and designed environments.*

Peter Harries-Jones develops an ecological aesthetics building on Bateson's epistemology of recursive systems. Drawing upon the fundamental recognition of our participation in our environment, Harries-Jones has us consider consequences of an ecological aesthetics for significant environmental issues, for our own ecological understanding, and for our conceptualization of the sacred and the beautiful.

*Peter Harries-Jones and Bradford Keeney invite us to consider questions of recursion and circular processes for how we develop and sustain an ecosystemic understanding in diverse domains and in different cultural settings.*

In “Circular Epistemology and the Bushman Shamans” Bradford Keeney draws on more than a decade of fieldwork among the Kalahari Bushman. He finds the embodiment of Bateson’s ecological understanding in the Shamans’ performance of sacred dances, which manifest the recursive relationship between stability and change and their sense of being in the world. This in turn offers new insight, realized through an imaginary dialogue between Bateson and a Bushman shaman, into the dynamic circularities at the heart of human encounters.

*Bradford Keeney and Douglas Flemons invite us into a world organized around the relationship between cybernetic thought and therapeutic transformation in diverse forms. The Kalahari Bushman shaman meets Obi-wan Kenobi. What do we learn?*

Anticipating Star Wars III, Douglas Flemons juxtaposes his engagement with Bateson’s ideas with the practices of Jedi Master Obi-wan Kenobi. Flemons links his experiences in family therapy, hypnosis and the teaching of composition together with the circularities of making and completing distinctions. For Flemons, these connections afford insights into the importance of relationship as an organizing principle while also encouraging us to think about how to balance integrity with invention.

*Douglas Flemons and Malloy, Bostic St. Clair, and Grinder encourage us to think seriously about the construction of cybernetic formalisms involving the circular processes of making and completing distinctions, and issues of emergence.*

Extending Warren McCulloch’s famous essay, “What is a Number that a Man May Know it and a Man that He May Know a Number,” Thomas Malloy, Carmen Bostic St. Clair, and John Grinder set out to extend this mutual approach to “number” to the world of formalisms. They do this by exploring emergence as a formalism while embedding our knowing of emergence in discrete dynamic systems. This allows insight into human judgement of perceptual similarity.

*Malloy, Bostic St. Clair, and Grinder, and Kenneth Cissna and Rob Anderson create opportunities for us to make connections between formalisms of processes of emergence, and the emergence of new ideas in dialogic moments, allowing us to rethink “emergence” in general.*

Kenneth Cissna and Rob Anderson bring their interest in dialogic processes to a particular occasion—a conversation that took place between Bateson and Carl Rogers, in 1975. Although Bateson and Rogers themselves dismissed the meeting as a failure at the time, Cissna and Anderson’s sensitive reading from a dialogic perspective allows us to see how significant new ideas did in fact emerge from the meeting, including Bateson’s conceptualization of context.

*Together, Kenneth Cissna and Rob Anderson, and Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz afford opportunities to explore processes of social interaction, whether in the moment or sustained over time.*

Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz explores the legacy of Bateson's methodological commitments to a "natural history" approach to understanding human communication. She describes how she and others have taken up Bateson's ideas of pattern, structure and process in detailed empirical studies of interaction. Such work demonstrates the formation of an "invisible college" grounded in the principles of a natural history approach.

*Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz and Alfonso Montuori invite us to consider the relationship between networks of conversation and issues of social creativity.*

In "Gregory Bateson and the Promise of Transdisciplinarity" Alfonso Montuori connects Bateson's ideas to his own experiences in transdisciplinary inquiry. Combining his own work as a professor and a musician, Montuori creates possibilities for an ecology of creativity. Such an understanding of creativity is itself used to inform a transdisciplinary approach rooted in the interplay between Bateson's rigor and imagination, which allows for a significant reconnection of a knower to knowing contexts.

*Alfonso Montuori and Mary Catherine Bateson invite us to take seriously what it means to see in new ways, and to invite others into those new ways of seeing - but also to link this very question to our learning institutions.*

And so on...

In addition to the essays, there are the regular featured columns and book review. In his column, Virtual Logic—The One and the Many, Louis Kauffman develops a sustained inquiry into the couplet, "how can multiplicity arise from a unity" and "how can a unity arise from a multiplicity" and in so doing allows for a recasting of ideas of emergence.

Peter Harries-Jones contributes this issue's ASC column in the spirit of the special issue. In "Gregory Bateson, Heterarchies and the Topology of Recursion," he elegantly complexifies our understanding of Bateson's appreciation of recursive logics. Harries-Jones connects Bateson's own logics of the "in-between" with Warren McCulloch's notion of heterarchical orderings in ways that afford recommendations for meaning emergent in the model of the topological form of a torus.

Ranulph Glanville offers this issue's book review, of *The International Encyclopaedia of Systems and Cybernetics, second edition*, which is edited by Charles Francois.

Photos and poems throughout the issue are contributed by Pille Bunnell.

The authors in this volume, then, celebrate the Bateson Centennial, with contributions rooted in Bateson's ideas and ideals. These essays, through offering personal stories of Bateson's influence, while at the same time demonstrating opportunities for its extension, can be read as a gift to a creative spirit on his 100th birthday.

